

Public Library Leaders' Perspectives on Followership: A Transnational Study

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This paper presents new findings on public library leadership from interviews with library leaders in Ireland, Britain, and the United States. The study takes as its unique focus the perceptions of currently serving library leaders on the topic of leadership and followership in public librarianship. The findings illustrate the importance of the library leaders' role to followers in their organizations. This paper highlights aspects of the leader-follower relationship including team leadership, leader as teacher/mentor, leader as emotional/psychological supporter, leader as role model, leader attitudes to in-house challenges, and the nurturing of new leaders. Varying leadership styles have been practiced by leaders, with no universal or common traits even within national boundaries, for developing successful leader-follower relationships.

This paper presents new findings on public library leadership based on empirical data from in-depth interviews with 30 senior library leaders in Ireland, Britain, and the United States. In particular, the paper focuses on these library leaders' perspectives of their followers and the impact they have both on their followers and on the broader society they serve. This study is exploratory because of the paucity of previous research specifically addressing the issue of leadership in the public library.

Library leaders have a wide ranging impact on society but have been largely overlooked as the subject of serious study. Prior to this study, only one small interview-based study and five survey-based studies have been undertaken on public library leaders/leadership, all in North America. No such study on the topic has been researched and published outside of North America.

Within the limited body of literature on leadership in librarianship, many scholars and practitioners have emphasized the centrality of leadership to librarianship. Knott (1997) suggested, "the practice of librarianship is fundamentally a process of leadership" (p. 30). Susan Goldberg Kent (1996), an American public library director, contended that one of the requisites for public libraries to "survive and prosper" is "solid and sound leadership" (p. 213). She

believes that the public library needs reasoned, outspoken, and well articulated leadership if it is to flourish in a digital future. Goldberg Kent, however, believes that true leadership is difficult “in an institutional culture that abhors change, which is not an uncommon situation in many public libraries today” (p. 213).

Spitzberg (as cited in Bass, 1990) observed that the meaning of leadership may depend on the kinds of institutions or services in which it is practiced. Bryson (1999) contended that leadership effectiveness in information services, for example, can be measured by the extent to which the work units and the information service can achieve their objectives. She perceives that effective leadership skills are needed to reconcile the goals of management and individuals with those of the information service and its parent organization. The public library service, the context of this study, is much broader than just an information service, however. As a public library leader, Goldberg Kent (1996) asserted that public libraries assist the transformation of society.

Wedgeworth (1989) similarly found that library leaders endeavor to make a difference rather than just be the head of something. Bechtel (1993) suggested that librarians tend to serve the professional needs of others rather than their own work-related needs. Berry (2002) asserted that what distinguishes true leaders among librarians is that not only do they have strong convictions, they pursue them on the job. “They hold passionately strong beliefs about libraries and library service. They are driven by their professional concern that no one should be denied information because of his or her point of view, age, or nature of the information” (Berry, p. 8). Illustrating such a commitment, the director of another American public library, Liz Stroup (as cited in Sheldon, 1991), for example, stated: “Client-centred service is my passion I want every client treated as if she were my mother” (p. 20). Sheldon suggested that librarians, along with other not-for-profit professionals, share an advantage over leaders of commercial organizations whose bottom line is commercial profit; “library leaders have a deep and intense belief that what they are doing is not only satisfying, but deeply significant” (p. 11).

Glogoff (2001) surmised that the path of librarianship over the first 2 decades of the 21st century does not guarantee that libraries will retain the esteem traditionally held for them by the public. He argued that it requires skillful leadership to pilot a course through the enormous challenges looming ahead. Similarly, Schreiber and Shannon (2001) suggested that libraries now require leadership which moves away from the bureaucratic paternal/maternal model of the past to a more fluid, engaging, and collaborative one. Needham (2001), likewise, contended that libraries need to engage in institutional change because they “need to make the leap into this new world, to continue to contribute to the intellectual growth of our communities” (p. 134).

This study of the perceptions of senior public library leaders, across national boundaries, makes a theoretical contribution not just to leadership in librarianship but also to the broader theory of library and information science and, in a limited way, to the broad corpus of literature on organizational leadership. The main aim of this work is to contribute to the existing body of literature on the topic of senior library leadership, addressing the acknowledged gap in that field, as the literature on librarianship traditionally has given very little attention to leadership within librarianship (Riggs, 2001; Winston & Neely, 2001).

Methodology

The key research question in this study focuses on senior-level public library leaders in Ireland, Britain, and the east coast of the United States. Thirty top-level public librarians were selected for inclusion in this study. Initially, the idea of investigating the perceptions of most

(30) Irish city/county chief librarians was considered. In order to broaden the scope of the study, however, it was subsequently decided to include an investigation of library leaders outside Ireland. A decision was then taken to keep the same original total target number (30), but to broaden the geographic context by selecting 50% of the interviewees from outside Ireland. While the interviews were subsequently spread over three countries; half of them, rather than one third, were conducted in Ireland for the sake of convenience. The rationale for choosing leaders in Ireland, Britain, and the United States was threefold: (a) their institutions have a long established and historical culture of providing public libraries funded by public money; (b) they, along with their peer institutions in other countries, constitute an under-researched group; and (c) there was convenient access for the authors. The choice of librarians was influenced by factors such as (a) their relatively high profile nationally as reflected by their career experience, seniority, public networking profile, and organizational role; (b) geographic convenience to research itineraries undertaken by the authors; and (c) availability and cooperation of the library leaders.

Initial contacts for inclusion in the study were made via e-mail. A criterion of qualifying as a research interviewee was that the librarian had to be the top leader, or at least the equivalent of a deputy leader, serving in a public library service. The 30 interviews were conducted in the countries where the participating library leaders worked. Thirty structured questions, based on a review of the relevant research literature, were asked of each of the 30 participating leaders (Appendix A). Most interviews for this study approximated 1 hour; the shortest was 40 minutes and the longest 90 minutes. The 30 interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed to a word processor for subsequent analysis. For analyzing the responses, a grounded theory approach to categorizing the data was used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding in the current study included indexing the interview transcripts; reducing the data to taxonomic classes and categories; and, in some cases, expanding and teasing out the data in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation. Segmenting and coding the data enabled the authors to think about the data, to break the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to further scrutinize the data. This coding procedure assisted the authors to think creatively when using the data and generating theories and frameworks. The use of rubrics and color codes facilitated the subsequent task of data reduction. From this process, nine broad thematic areas emerged from the findings (Appendix B). This paper, in particular, focuses on one of these themes: the perspectives of the interviewed library leaders on followers.

Results

Leadership and Followership

Arguments underlining what are effectively symbiotic relationships between library leaders and their followers are at the core of the views expressed by the interviewees of the current study:

People lead only because other people are willing to be led. (British librarian)

Leadership is a very broad responsibility. Successful leadership is partly the achievements of the organization, generally, because people just saying, "I am your leader" does not motivate others to action. People down the line do not change behavior because you tell them to; they change because they want to. Followers, however, need the support of a leader to engage their enthusiasm. You do not achieve a service by telling people to do things; you achieve it by getting people to want to do it. (British librarian)

The respondents typically reported that leading by example was a core function of a leader, with one respondent asserting that “leadership *is* example.” The interviewees emphasized the importance of good leader-follower relationships and believed that followers increasingly put aside their self-concerns for the greater goals of the organization.

As well as the leader, followers too have a responsibility to the organization. It is not only the leader’s relationship with staff that matters; all staff must also cultivate positive working relationships with colleagues at all levels. Followers also need to use their initiative and understand that leaders too can have a bad day. (British librarian)

The empowering of followers was understood to bring many organizational advantages such as promoting a culture of self-leadership, effective self-regulation, and the establishing of learning oriented cultures. Respondents also suggested that leaders who are selfless towards followers should stand out as leaders:

Leaders will be good leaders if they don’t care who else gets the credit. If good leaders are not concerned about gathering personal plaudits, they should excel in leadership. (American librarian)

Another librarian suggested that followers are influenced by how they interpret their leader’s commitment and emphasized the importance of front-line followers/staff:

The service is front-line staff. When people walk into a service, the most important person they meet can be the caretaker, the floorwalker, or the library assistant on the front desk. It is important to realize that these are the people who deliver the service and, thus, the bread and butter of the service. (Irish librarian)

Another interviewee pithily expressed the same emphasis on front-line staff:

Our front-line people are our service. (Irish librarian)

While no specific question on the term *followers* was included in the interview guide, deliberately allowing respondents to introduce this axiomatic corollary to leadership whenever they felt it appropriate in their responses, all respondents spoke of leadership in the context of followership. Overall, the librarian leaders acknowledged that followers acquiesce or cooperate only because they want to and are thus willing to change behavior, but they emphasized that this drive has to come from the leader in order for people to want to do it.

Team Leadership: Sharing Authority with Followers

Eight of the participants in this study proffered ideas on devolving authority to their more senior and qualified staff. This formed an integral part of their leadership philosophy:

I don’t think I get paid for my opinions. I get paid to ensure that I get the maximum contribution from the team, so it is not just I who is providing the library service. I have a team to do that, and the service is enhanced because I get them to contribute to the ongoing delivery of service. (British librarian)

I believe in teamwork, and I believe that the staff is the best resource an organization can have. (Irish librarian).

The leader and the leader’s team are important. If a good leader does not have the team working with him or her, the leadership will fail. Both leader and team complement each other. A good leader is essential for any successful organization. Good leadership depends on motivation too; and, of course, if you are a good leader, you are a good motivator as well. It is a two-pronged operation. A good leader has to work the organization well but needs to have good staff as well. (Irish librarian)

The librarians insisted that leadership is more than just one person at the top, since organizational culture is not so much determined by the leader as much as by the leadership. The theme of leadership as layered throughout the organization was espoused by the respondents; as they believed that unless leadership applies in other areas of the organization, it is not going to work. A leader of a section can determine the success of that section. This strong emphasis on the team approach ensures maximum contribution from the team so that it is not just the single apex who is providing the library service.

While the librarians believed it was important for them to set the tone and set the style, it was also seen as important that there was a team-based approach to leadership throughout the organization and at all levels. This meant devolving authority to the appropriate level which in turn requires people to actively manage and apply leadership to their own teams. As pragmatists, the interviewees acknowledged that the leader cannot be everything and that it is very important that there are different people in the organization contributing their own specialities. The respondents also argued that excellence on each side depends on persons on both sides, and they added that a good team without a good leader will not succeed.

Sometimes, the team approach can be overlooked, however, due to situational circumstances:

I do admit that, due to time pressure, sometimes, it is easy to overlook the inclusion of input from departmental heads when drawing up policy. The time has long passed when you can draft the policy and circulate it as the policy for everyone to implement. That will not work. (Irish librarian)

As the public library service has a layer of professionally qualified staff, respondents articulated that it is important for all professionally qualified people in the organization to have their contributions respected and taken on board and to have a say in the running of the organization. The following quotation does not refer to formal teams but suggests that, to be effective, a collegial approach has to be founded on genuine devolution of power, particularly to professional library staff:

Collegiality is the most important aspect of organizational culture. Whether we like it or not, there is a two-tier structure in libraries between professionally qualified people and the rest. But, if you make it a necessity that people in positions of authority within the library have to have a professional qualification, they in turn have to be respected for their professionalism, and they have to have a say in running the organization. (Irish librarian)

The Leader as Teacher/Mentor for Followers

All 30 respondents concurred that teaching was one of their leadership functions. While 7 respondents who interpreted teaching as a formalized process said they did not teach; on closer examination of their replies, however, a difference in semantics was evident rather than a difference in views when compared with the views of the other 23 interviewees. The 7 librarians qualified their initial "no" responses when they indicated that they were all involved in informal teaching such as providing support for staff learning and training, delegating training to another party, motivating, encouraging, establishing learning centers, or simply leading by example.

The 23 leaders who affirmed that they have a teaching role; whether through example, mentoring, guiding, informing, coaching, or motivating; described their teaching methods as informal. Their views on their teaching role ranged from vital to quite laissez-faire approaches

such as facilitating learning through conversation, allowing individuals to make mistakes, providing resources for apprenticeship, passing on experience, or allowing space for personal development.

Of course, of course, leaders must teach. Leaders must teach everyday, every minute; that is what training is about. I am using teaching in the broadest context; that is, creating an environment where people exercise good judgement and exercising good judgement relies on a good knowledge base. It is important for us as leaders to know when we do not have the capacity or knowledge base and to know when we have to look for expertise somewhere else. Formal teaching is appropriate if the leader is good at it, but not every leader is. Where they are not good at teaching, leaders should not do it but should delegate it. (American librarian)

A leader is a teacher; that is what makes a leader good. That's why I believe that telling stories is important. My stories tend to entertain, but they also endeavour to teach. (American librarian)

We have teaching on the job, definitely. We have that and need that. The day a leader stops being a teacher is the day he or she better get out of the business. (American librarian)

Another cohort of 7 participants specifically referred to mentoring as part of a leader's teaching role. All participants affirmed that, at the minimum, they are all engaged in informal teaching of staff. The following quotation is a sample view from those who saw mentoring as an aspect of their teaching:

The role that I have is a mentoring role, wherein I provide support and encouragement. I know mentoring is a formal process often done externally to the organization; but I do try to use that mentoring approach for senior staff, particularly with management skills where it is about helping them to develop their expertise as managers. (British librarian)

Leaders as Emotional/Psychological Support for Followers

Among the 30 leaders interviewed for this study, 20 gave an unqualified reply that leaders should act as emotional/psychological supporters of followers. Another 6 articulated qualified approval for such support, while 4 believed that leaders should not become involved in providing emotional/psychological support to followers. These 4 librarians focused on the negative side of the emotional health of staff and indicated that they would refer any staff experiencing emotional or psychological difficulties to external counselors.

The two-thirds majority who believe that leaders should support the emotional/psychological needs of staff argued that such support is also in the interest of the organization.

In order to inspire, one needs to take into account both emotional and psychological factors. Everyday issues, like how people relate to an organization, are very much based on emotions. (British librarian)

If you do not nurture the emotional well-being of followers, you cannot expect staff to work well. (American librarian)

Yes, leaders certainly should provide emotional or psychological support to staff. I have no doubt about that. If you are going to give people support psychologically, you are primarily doing it from the humane point of view. Secondly, however, you are doing it for the good of the organization also. (Irish librarian)

Yes, I have given emotional and psychological support at times, and it is part of having an open relationship and a participative style of management. I don't think leaders have much choice at times. Staff support goes with leadership. I believe that if a member of staff has any problem, they should be able to come in and talk about it without in any way feeling that it can have negative repercussions for them. (Irish librarian)

The Leader as Role Model to Followers

Twenty-seven of the interviewed leaders believe they are role models for their followers. Most of those were confident that their own behavior influences the behavior of staff.

As a leader, one does need to be a role model. People will observe and then justify their actions by the way you behave. You have to be honest with staff. You need to be consistent and fair. If you are being fair to people, that means that rules apply to senior staff as much as to anybody else. People justify their own actions by emulating the behavior of senior staff. (American librarian)

I am a role model. There are aspects of a person's personality, not necessarily the total personality, that can be modelled by others. I hope that what I consider to be the most important qualities for a leader are the qualities that someone might follow from me as a role model. (American librarian)

An interesting twist on role modelling is where associated pressures on library leaders, such as working and attending functions after normal working hours, can act as disincentives to potential library leaders. One of the interviewed leaders spoke of a talented member of her staff who enjoys a better work-life balance than she does and who, like other followers, can "see the toll pressure takes on their leader" such as stress and other health problems. That participant concluded that such followers are "too smart to want a leader's job."

Role Modeling Modifying the Leader's Own Behavior

Twenty-six of the respondents believed that their role-modeling function had an effect on their own behavior. Typical responses referred to the leader being aware of his or her own behavior and speech, being more considerate of the effect of one's own behavior, being conscious of giving example, curbing one's own negative behavior (i.e., impatience or frustration), being aware of influence on followers, and exercising openness.

Yes, role modeling does change a role model's behavior to the extent that one always tries to lead by example. I should not expect people to do what I would not do myself. (British librarian)

If you are aware that you are a role model, you have to set your own standards higher and consistently live by them. Otherwise, you are trying to get away with things that you don't think are appropriate for other people to do. Because people are all the time observing you as a role model, you should always be aware of the role you are playing. (British librarian)

Because of work, you can't be yourself. You are not entirely free. You have to be conscious that what you do and say impacts on other people. You are playing a role. You are not self-employed or a farmer in his own field. You have responsibilities. (Irish librarian)

Overall, the study findings show that most leaders consider themselves to be role models, and they generally acknowledge that their own behavior is influenced by playing the part of a role model to their followers. In summary, because of heightened consideration for and awareness of their followers and their perceived influence on their followers, leaders generally modify their behaviors to act as role models within their organizations.

Leaders' Attitudes to Challenges from Followers

While 28 of the 30 interviewed librarians said they tolerate in-house dissent, most respondents qualified their answers. Some emphasized the difference in connotations of the word *dissent*, ranging from ongoing negative behavior to the mere expression of a different point of view. While the latter behavior among followers was generally seen as positive, more negative behavior might require asking a member of staff to seek employment elsewhere.

We encourage independent thinking, we encourage negotiation, but I don't believe we tolerate dissent. If there is dissent that gets in the way, we resolve the dissent. The organization does what is in the best interest of the organization. If an individual is dissenting from that, we invite the individual to either buy into what the organization is doing or to find another job. (American librarian)

Overall, the interviewed librarians expressed that while they tolerated dissent, they might not encourage it. Some suggested that dissent cannot be avoided but can be useful in moving to new positions.

I do tolerate dissent. . . . There are people who can and do change my mind.
(British librarian)

You have to have a healthy dose of disagreement and dissent in an organization. If dissent was stifled, the organization would be less creative. (British librarian)

I have no problem with people venting opinions that are different to mine. People are human beings and, therefore, react differently at different times. You must allow for contradictory views, even if held by the same person at different times. An organization is healthier if opposing views are aired. (Irish librarian)

Dissent and challenges to one's views are important. You can expect to have to argue your case, and you can expect to be challenged, and that is a good thing. In a humbling way, one can start off with very fixed ideas; and it is only with experience that you find there are solutions out there that possibly were better than the ones you thought initially. Good management practice and experience show that it is better to encourage challenges. (Irish librarian)

Nurturing New Leaders among Followers

In the current study, only 2 interviewees did not believe in nurturing new leaders. The majority expressed views in support of training potential leaders. Eighteen said that elements of training and related opportunities were required for nurturing leaders. Such factors would include formal leadership training programmes, mentoring and shadowing, providing experiential opportunities in leadership roles, providing space for experimentation, advising, facilitating job mobility, delegating within parameters, and placement in project teams.

In everybody there is ambition. If somebody is committed to what they are doing, I would see the leader's role to encourage them and to facilitate them and to broaden their

experience in all aspects of service. Potential library leaders need to have experience in dealing with personnel, finance, and people services as well as spending a while in library administrative headquarters, because that is where a lot of those services are coordinated. (Irish librarian)

We have done interesting things in the area of nurturing new leadership. A few years after I arrived here, we started to build our change process; and the change process was designed to change the organization, to turn it on its head, and to rearticulate what the library was about; and, with that, to impose a better understanding of what interactive leadership was and how people could get involved. We created what we call the change team. The team had 18 people on it selected from all parts of the organization; and, for the most part, people were selected because we believed they had leadership potential. That has become an interesting nurturing exercise, as many of those people have gone on and have been promoted. And so, the process of nurturing the next generation is ongoing. (American librarian)

Five leaders mentioned the importance of tolerating mistakes by followers:

Quite often in organizations, people are afraid to take risks because they work in a blame culture. If you can get rid of that and say, "Come on, we will give it a go," and if it goes wrong, nobody is roasted over the coals, because they did their best. And, if 90% of it goes wrong, but 10% of it is right, that is a result. It is about having that entrepreneurial spirit in the organization, especially when it is not for profit. (British librarian)

You make opportunities available for people to develop and that means that you allow people to make mistakes. Making mistakes is not a hanging offense around here. If people are not given room to develop and try things out, they will never develop. (British librarian)

Interestingly, another library leader emphasized that the driving force for an individual's leadership must come from the potential leader rather than from the existing leader, even in an environment that encourages new leaders:

There is no need to spoon-feed future leaders, as it is essential that leaders should be self-driven. It is their responsibility to develop and push themselves if they are to be worthy leaders. Yet, for future leaders, bringing people along is a leader's responsibility. Professional training and facilitating participation in workgroups and in research should form part of this. (Irish librarian)

The encouragement of potential leaders was also articulated by another leader: "When you have a staff member whom you believe has potential to move on; and, if you don't nurture them or steer them in a better direction, then you are a bad leader" (Irish librarian)

One librarian cautioned that leaders must guard against nurturing only clones of themselves:

It is important to ensure that you are not just encouraging people who are like you, deciding you want that person in order to replicate yourself. It is also important to have people who are not like yourself as well and to be aware of that. You have to stop and ask yourself, "Why am I promoting this person?" You need to be careful as a leader that you are not excluding people because they are different to you. (British librarian)

Two respondents, however, admitted that they would not encourage talented staff to progress their careers if it meant losing them from their current organization.

Discussion

In the late 20th century, many researchers viewed leadership as an act or behavior executed by leaders in order to effect change in a group. Such behavior may involve praising or criticizing group members and showing consideration for their welfare and feelings. Other researchers (Burns, 1978; Stark, 1970) conceptualized leadership from a personality perspective, contending that leadership is a combination of special traits or characteristics possessed by individuals which enable them to influence followers to accomplish tasks. Scholtes (1998) suggested a broader view: "There is no formula for leadership. Leadership consists of more than the approaches, capabilities, and attributes talked about in books" (p. 372). He added, "Leadership is an art, an inner journal, a network of relationships, a mastery of methods, and much, much more" (p. 372).

The respondents in the current study saw no universal traits or absolutes in the skill or talent of leadership. They shared the view that leadership is about influence and typically described leadership as "bringing people with you." They equated leadership (phenomenon) with motivation, just as they described the leader (agent) as a motivator. The interviewees also suggested that leadership can be viewed as an instrument of goal achievement in helping colleagues to achieve shared goals. They proposed that leadership is about transforming followers, creating visions for targeting collective energies, and articulating for followers the methods for achieving goals. The librarians asserted that an essential element in getting people to change is to offer them attractive goals or missions. Leaders who are successful in motivating employees provide an organizational environment in which appropriate goals or incentives are available to satisfy many personal needs such as desire of appreciation or desire to make a useful contribution which coincide with organizational needs.

In the current study, leadership was also seen to involve influence, as leadership is concerned with how leaders affect followers. The librarians saw leadership as the exercise of noncoercive influence to coordinate the members of an organized group to accomplish group objectives. They proposed that leadership occurs in groups or a social context where individuals are moving towards a shared goal. Leaders provide direction, guidance, and activity structuring for a collective; in turn, members of a collective grant permission to the leader to influence them, thus conferring legitimacy on the leader. They presented that leaders are not above followers or better than followers. Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (1993) argued that leadership is a reciprocal relationship and that being a leader means being a part of, not apart from, followers. Olsson (1996) also declared, "The good leader has an absolute recognition of his dependence on his staff and vice versa" (p. 32).

In relation to team leadership, the librarians argued that a leader alone cannot create and communicate an organizational vision. They asserted that visions emerge from interactions between the leader and the top management team. Ireland and Hitt (1999) also contended that members of an organization's top management team must be empowered to formulate and put into effect strategies and courses of action to accomplish organizational purpose and goals. These sentiments reflect many views promoted in recent literature, for example, on distributed leadership (Euster, 1990), on participative and consensus-building leadership (Broughton, 1993), in particular where teamwork and partnerships (May & Kruger, 1990) are emphasized. Interestingly, the leaders' views on involving followers in shared management were espoused by all 30 participants.

When discussing the provision of emotional/psychological support, 26 among 30 respondents espoused a holistic approach to supporting followers, in varying degrees, including personal support, since “People do not leave their private lives outside the door when they come to work, they bring them with them.” They advocated that leaders should offer psychological support to followers. This reflects Olsson’s (1996) research which contended that rich psychological support competencies in a leader are required to nurture full commitment from followers to organizational vision. Strebel (1996) also emphasized senior management’s obligations to psychological and other personal support for followers. He suggested that the lack of proactive personal compacts, starting from the top of organizations, is sufficient to prevent the implementation of any strategic initiative. Strebel described a psychological dimension of implicit relationships and mutual expectation and reciprocal commitment that arise from feelings like trust and dependence between junior and senior. He suggested that an unwritten psychological dimension underpins an employee’s personal commitment to individual and company objectives. While Strebel underscored that managers expect employees to be loyal and willing, employees determine their commitment to the organization along psychological dimensions of their personal compact and through their perceptions of what recognition, financial reward, or other personal satisfaction they will receive for their efforts.

The librarians also saw openness as part of people-centered leadership, and being receptive to challenge was seen as part of this openness. This has parallels in double-loop learning which accepts and reacts positively to conflicting requirements (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Schreiber and Shannon (2001) reported that in the field of librarianship, interpersonal confrontation is often experienced as an opportunity for courageous action but that learning confrontive diplomacy is a challenge many want to avoid. They suggested that library administrators can support leadership in their libraries by taking a personal stand based on principle, encouraging others to do the same, then listening well and working toward resolution.

Despite varying views on attitudes towards organizational dissent, all 30 librarians confirmed the existence of follower dissent as part of organizational behavior. The findings in the study largely reflect the literature, supporting the organizational practice of accommodating productive dissent. Useem (2001) attributed much of leadership and organizational failure to situations where staff are too intimidated or otherwise reluctant to challenge their leader. Bennis (2000) also surmised that “in the 21st century, the laurel will go to the leader who encourages healthy dissent and values those followers courageous enough to say no” (p. 175).

Implications for Practice

From the current study, a number of findings highlight the need for better practice in the field of library leadership and management:

1. Nurturing new leaders should begin at the recruitment stage.
2. Risks should be taken to appoint applicants who show flair, vision, and dynamism rather than those who continue the status quo.
3. Career paths of middle-management followers who show aptitude for leadership should be supported and allowed to flourish and develop.
4. Followers should be developed who are original, innovative, people-focused, and not centred in maintaining the status quo.
5. Leadership apprenticeship opportunities lessen the need for new leaders to engage in gratuitously steep learning curves.

6. A transformational approach to leadership should be adopted rather than a transactional approach.
7. People-centred leadership should be participative, encouraging, supportive, empowering, democratic, consultative, proactive, approachable, and communicative.

Ideally, career paths of middle-management followers, who show aptitudes for leadership, should be supported and allowed to flourish and develop. For staff and organizational development purposes, chief librarians should ensure that sufficient attention is given to developing followers who are original, innovative, and people-focused and who are not centered on maintaining the status quo among other leadership attributes. Potential leaders should also be involved in ongoing strategic discussions and decision making to counteract the frequency of cases where new leaders are thrown in at the deep end without adequate training. Lack of apprenticeship opportunities was reported by a number of respondents, forcing them to face gratuitously steep learning curves after their appointment, which also undermined their self-belief as leaders especially in their first year after appointment.

Nurturing new leaders should begin at the recruitment stage. Selection panels should take risks to appoint applicants at the management level who show flair, vision, and dynamism rather than those who proclaim status quo approaches. Public libraries should not be seen as refuges for the promotion of followers who are merely tried and trusted or because they have spent a lot of time on the library payroll. Recruitment should allow for views that are at variance with prevailing views. Nurturing leaders also requires sharing public events with potential leaders. Other management or qualified staff should also be involved with external contacts as part of ongoing training.

Finally, library leaders might usefully adopt a transformational leadership approach, thus supporting and developing staff through genuine consideration of individuals' needs then aligning individual and organizational needs as followers are inspired to transcend self-interest motives to achieve high standards in all activities. As transformational methods challenge leader-centric traditions, modern-day educated professionals, who now see themselves as colleagues rather than subordinates, should thus be encouraged to become more autonomous to manage growing organizational uncertainties resulting from the accelerating pace of environmental change to produce a new generation of effective library leaders.

Conclusions

Interestingly, the interviewed Irish librarians appeared to share more leadership traits with their American counterparts than with their British counterparts. One example of this was where all the Irish and American respondents reported that they allowed their followers to communicate directly with news media about niche library activities. Contrasting with this, the British respondents reported that they would not allow their followers to communicate directly with the media.

A contrast between the three nationalities was also evident in relation to the input of followers in determining the prevailing cultures in their libraries. American respondents said that the head librarian and followers collectively determined the culture of their libraries. The Irish librarians expressed that it was the chief librarian and not the followers that determined the culture. In contrast, British librarians reported that local authority officials determined library culture, rather than the head librarian or his or her followers.

Another distinction based on nationalities was the articulation or nonarticulation of humor as a catalyst of optimum leader-follower relationships. One in three of the Irish respondents, all male, spoke of the benefits of having humor and happiness as part of the culture of their organizations. Contrasting with the Irish examples, none among the 15 American or British respondents raised the issue of humor.

All leaders acknowledged the importance of followers. The participants discussed leader-follower interdependence, admitting that leaders exist only because other people are willing to be led and that their own effectiveness is only as good as the support they receive. The library service was seen by the respondents as dependent on front-line followers, making a partnership with staff central to library leadership since it is followers who deliver the service. More than one quarter of the respondents said they deliberately shared leadership functions with their experienced staff, insisting that leadership is more than just one person at the top, since organizational culture is not so much determined by the leader as much as by the leadership which is layered throughout the organization. They also believe that unless leadership applies in other areas of the organization, it is not going to work, as a leader of a particular section can determine the success of that section. This did not mean that they did not set the tone and set the style but wanted a team-based approach to leadership throughout the organization and at all levels since the leader cannot do everything, and it was very important to have different people in the organization contributing their own specialities.

Finally, all 30 respondents espoused people-centered leadership for dealing with followers. Describing this style, interviewees used terms such as participative, encouraging, supportive, empowering, democratic, consultative, proactively approachable, communicative, open, collegiate, or team-leader. Almost all believed that integrity was an essential part of people-centered leadership; some because it was good in itself, others because it produced results by motivating staff, because “people are not going to follow somebody they question.” In summary, all interviewees underscored the centrality of effective followership for effective organizational leadership.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. “Leadership takes precedence over all other factors in determining organizational success” (Tichy & Cohen, 1997). Do you agree?
2. Do you believe that the organizational *culture* of your overall library service is largely determined by the leader?
3. What aspects of the organizational culture of your organization do you regard as most important?
4. What contribution are *you* most proud to have made to your organization?
5. How would you describe your style of leadership?
6. What qualities are most required by leaders in the field of public librarianship in general?
7. In your opinion, what are the worst traits/practices of a bad leader in public librarianship?
8. (i) Do you consider yourself to be a role model for your staff?
(ii) If yes, how does playing a role model influence your own behaviour?
9. Do you think a leader’s *personal* integrity (as a role model) is important for leading staff?
10. What links do you see between leadership and trust?
11. Should leaders act as emotional/psychological supporters of staff? If yes, why?
12. Do you regard Teaching as one of the responsibilities of a leader? If yes, to what extent?
13. Do you tolerate/encourage dissent?
14. Do you hold formal meetings with staff? If yes, how frequently?
15. Does a leader’s power, isolationism, and autonomy prevent him/her from receiving direct feedback or positive criticism from staff? (Kaplan et al.)
16. What are the major constraints on your ambitions to develop the service?

17. How might future public library leaders be nurtured in the organization?
18. What are your general views on communication within an organization?
Should a leader involve himself/herself with direct communication with frontline staff?
19. Do you think chief librarians should have a high profile in news media?
20. Would you authorize heads of departments to speak to the news media?
21. Do you encourage all heads of departments to participate in the formulation of policy?
22. What major effect has automation made on leadership?
23. Do you believe leaders should endeavour to occasionally meet staff on *social* occasions?
If yes, what hierarchical levels should leaders socialize with?
24. In your view, what influence (if any) has a leader's gender on role of leadership?
25. Did you have a mentor in your earlier career? If yes, what was the gender of the mentor, and what influence had the mentor on you?
26. Briefly, what is your vision for improving public library services within the next five years?
27. What prompted you to take up a career in librarianship?
28. Why do you remain in the career of librarianship?
29. Have you any additional comments on leadership that you would like to add?
30. Finally, stepping into the area of informed speculation, to the mid-21st century: How would you speculate that library services might best be made available to citizens in 2050?

Appendix B

Thematic Summary of Interview Findings

Themes	Illustrative finding
Followership is an axiomatic element of leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A good team without a good leader will not succeed”
Leading by example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Leadership is example”
Team leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The leader cannot be everything”
The leader as teacher/mentor for followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching seen as a leadership function by all interviewees
Leaders as emotional/psychological support for followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Staff support goes with leadership”
Leader as role model to followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most believe leaders are role models
Role modelling modifying the leader’s own behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You are playing a role”
Leaders’ attitudes to challenges from followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We encourage independent thinking”
Nurturing new leaders among followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Leaders must not nurture only clones of themselves”