



Levelling Up or Levelling Out?

In Search of a New Vision for Library Leadership

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An Acknowledgement.



It seems some introductions are in order...

- Who are we?
 - Why are we here?
 - How dare we?
 - Disclaimers / statements of bias /
RTs do not necessarily equal endorsements
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“I’ll have the usual, please”: The (stereo)typical leadership trajectory

- “It all began in library school...”
 - Scholarships
 - Student committees
 - Work experience
 - Early projects receive support & recognition
 - Bespoke training opportunities (more on this later...)
 - Alternately, the Peter Principle & its corollaries.
 - Mere survival in the face of precarity and economic attrition may unwittingly privilege a person for later management. If you had to quit to make rent, you’re hard to promote.
 - Inobtrusiveness and/or talent for organisational politics can generate significant benefits.
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Decoupling leadership from management

- What is leadership?
 - What is management?
 - Are they the same thing? Do we act like they are?
 - Key distinctions and areas of overlap
 - According to whom, anyway?
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Existing opportunities

- Academic
 - Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians (Harvard)
 - ARL Leadership Fellows Program (ARL)
 - Senior Fellows Program (UCLA)
 - Leading Change Institute (CLIR/Educause)
 - Public
 - Public Library Leaders Fellowship Program (CULC)
 - Advanced Public Library Leadership (SOLS)
 - Archives
 - Archives Leadership Institute (NHPRC)
 - Law
 - AALL Leadership Academy (AALL)
 - Non-sector specific
 - Northern Exposure to Leadership Institute (NELI) (Private)
 - Aurora Institute for Emerging Leaders (Aurora Institute)
 - Emerging Leaders (ALA)
 - MPLA Leadership Institute (MPLA)
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Characteristics of leadership programs

- Residency, resort-like location (if you're lucky)
 - Expensive fees (tuition + travel / accommodation)
 - Highly selective
 - Application process, often driven by external nomination
 - Demonstrated, “exceptional” leadership
 - Minimal information available online
 - Creation of small, exclusive communities
 - Little or no assessment of impact or usefulness
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Barriers to participation

- Economic
 - Who pays? How?
 - Cultural
 - Ritual language / social capital
 - Performativity of values not necessarily tied to leadership aptitude
 - Logistical
 - Jurisdictional: Urban/Rural, Travel restrictions (explicit & implicit)
 - Professional: Coverage for responsibilities / freedom to take time
 - Personal: Family responsibilities, childcare, &c.
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Repercussions

- Replication and amplification of societal inequality
 - Prior access → continued access
 - Many opportunities privilege librarians over other staff
 - Is “leadership” somehow less important for other staff?
 - Doesn’t everyone want and deserve opportunities to be the best at what they do?
 - The perils of individualism
 - How can we meaningfully effect change in complex systems?
 - Is “effecting change” our purpose? Or maintaining current norms?
 - What do we genuinely bring home, besides lines on a CV?
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Participant Reflections¹ — Themes

- Management heavy
- Hyper-individual
- Echo chamber
- Useful, for a given value of “useful” — some workplace integration
- Focused introspection is useful
- Mentorship, building relationships was valuable

¹ names have been withheld to protect the guilty



Alternative models?

- Localised leadership institutes (USask)
 - Grassroots initiatives (E-Learning Symposium, NLS)
 - Dickinson College model (a more nuclear option)
 - Mentorship, especially in-workplace and/or free-to-play
 - Thinking differently about hierarchy and organisational structure
 - All-librarian meetings (HPL)
 - Parallel assessment
 - Meaningful fora for dialogue
 - Explicit commitments to diversity (MIT)
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Alternative models — individual efforts

NB! These represent our own observations & interpretations!

- Gillian Byrne: using evil for good (mentorship, connecting people)
 - Barb McDonald: making time for all, leadership audit
 - Monique Woroniak: groundwork for change, centering political and labour issues
 - John Dupuis: chronicling war on science (using individual expertise)
 - Jim Suderman: respecting people's time
 - Deb Thomas: working on-desk, personally participating in new staff hires
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Closing Thoughts / Q & A

Unlike a leadership institute, we don't secret knowledge.

What are your thoughts?
