

**KEY FACTORS IN DEVELOPING AS A LEADER –
THE LIBRARY SCHOOL, SELF-AWARENESS,
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

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ABSTRACT

While library and information schools are generally fulfilling their function of producing graduates who have the competencies and understand the content areas of librarianship, in designing curriculum, schools are ignoring research that indicates content knowledge and intelligence are relatively unimportant factors in achieving career success. Other professions, e.g., medicine and engineering, have been updating their curricula to encompass the “soft skills” of leadership and emotional intelligence, but library and information science graduates, for the most part must seek other venues to attain leadership competencies. Recent emphasis in leadership training focuses on self awareness and reflection, and also on understanding one’s temperament and strengths. This approach is seen as providing the self confidence needed rather than expending effort and training on eliminating weaknesses as is often the present practice. With this as a basis, participants prepare an agenda and strategic plan, and move into study and practice of areas of emotional intelligence, such as being able to regulate one’s own emotions, read other people, empathize, practice tolerance, understand group dynamics, and conflict management. It is urgent that educators recognize that academic content is not enough. It is time to also focus on process.

THE LIBRARY SCHOOL FACTOR

The purpose of this section of the paper is to suggest that schools of library and information science (LIS) have focused quite strictly on the discipline of librarianship, that is, the way librarians approach their work, how they practice their craft and its competencies, and their role in society. Given that most library schools are in universities, are subject to various kinds of accreditation standards, and compete with other schools for students, it is relatively safe to say that they are fulfilling their mission of preparing new library professionals.

From 20 years of practice, and another 20 in library education, I have observed that graduates generally go to their first jobs prepared to practice, and to quickly assimilate and adapt to the distinctive customs, rules and policies of the agency that employs them. The overwhelming gap in their ability to do well, progress in

their jobs, and move into leadership positions lies in basic skills of dealing with difficult people, understanding and relating to supervisors, and motivating staff.

LIS graduates are extremely intelligent individuals but all along the way the assumption has been made by planners of LIS curricula that intelligence, of the kind measured by intelligence quotient (IQ) tests, equates with interpersonal skills. It does not. Library educators appear to have forgotten that no matter how technological the profession becomes, it is still a service profession and even those who do not interact much with the public still must maintain excellent relationships with their bosses and their staff. In my view, professional schools are missing the boat in their almost total neglect of interpersonal and leadership skills. Of course there are exceptions. Management is almost always a required course, and elements of this course frequently emphasize human relation skills. Then there is the occasional elective offered on leadership, interpersonal skills, group dynamics or human resources management, but since these courses are not required, they are not likely to attract the very persons who could most benefit.

Many LIS schools are ignoring research documenting that a high IQ in itself does not lead to strong professionals and leaders able to make a substantive contribution to a profession. For example, in a paper introducing the concept of emotional intelligence, Cherniss¹ refers to the Sommerville study, conducted over a 40-year span with 450 boys, which found that “IQ had little relation to how well they did at work or in the rest of their lives. What made the biggest difference was childhood abilities such as being able to handle frustration, control emotions, and get along with other people.^{1 (p5)}”

Cherniss cites another study initiated in the 1950s of 80 science Ph.D.’s at Berkeley which showed that social and emotional abilities were four times more important than IQ in determining professional success and prestige. The Berkeley graduates were assessed at graduation and again 40 years later when they were in their 70s. Their success was judged on the basis of their resumes, peer evaluation, and placement in such directories as *American Men and Women of Science*. Cherniss points out that if you are a Ph.D. scientist you probably need an IQ of about 120 to get a doctorate and a job in science, “but then it is more important ...to persist in the face of difficulty and to get along well with colleagues and subordinates than it is to have an extra 10 or 15 points of IQ.^{1 (p5)} In other words, IQ is a useful predictor of what vocations you can enter but once you are in a profession, the IQ is not so important.

While the research is readily available, and while many library schools have phrases comparable to “Our graduates will be prepared to assume proactive leadership roles in the profession” in their mission and goal statements, it is simply unacceptable that currently the LIS curriculum is so devoid of leadership/interpersonal skills elements.

The deans I have talked with readily concede that these skills are important, but then follow up with a statement something like the following: “Yes, it is important but as it is, we can barely squeeze all of the necessary courses into 18 months or

even two years, so how could we possibly add even one required course in these soft areas?" These deans are ignoring the indisputable fact that MLIS graduates, no matter how "qualified," no matter if they do not have strong aspirations for leadership, if they cannot communicate and get along with their colleagues, supervisors and staff, cannot communicate with their boards and city officials, cannot work effectively in teams, cannot listen, and provide responsive services for stakeholders, then they have a very limited future in the information professions.

Librarianship is after all not the only profession that is having difficulty accommodating the vastly expanding body of knowledge in the discipline into a specific number of credit hours. Medical schools are a case in point. As early as 1993, a study found that virtually all medical schools offer courses encompassing interpersonal skills, and medical interviewing.² A 2008 Mayo Medical School report notes that:

Mayo's revised curriculum addresses the need to develop these attributes in part through its five overarching themes: basic science foundations, clinical experiences, leadership, physician and society, and principles of pharmacology and therapeutics. Three of these – clinical experiences, leadership, and physician and society – provide students opportunities to develop the interpersonal skills that are crucial to excellent patient care.³

Earlier, the University of Rochester School of Medicine set out to create a new educational model, as reported in the January 2002 Science Blog:

to instill in physicians the kinds of qualities patients want: trustworthiness, good judgment, good communication, and the ability to keep up-to-date with changes in the field.... changes to ensure physician competence in typically overlooked areas such as teamwork, interpersonal skills...and managing ambiguous clinical situations...." For patients, it's not enough to know that their doctor scored well on a multiple choice test" says...Ronald M. Epstein, M.D. [He] points out that sometimes, student doctors who perform especially well on standardized tests are especially lacking in such traits as empathy, responsibility, and tolerance...Last year, educators who visited Rochester as part of an accreditation inspection...found "no areas of concern – an unprecedented finding in American medical education." The team gave the curriculum a perfect score and praised the university's reforms as "innovative, bold, and highly successful."⁴

Rochester was awarded a half million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Foundation for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education for the development of an assessment methodology to evaluate the new curriculum, in the belief that Rochester might become a national model, not only for medical schools, but also "for other professional schools such as law or architecture."⁴

Similarly, last year the engineering profession in the U.S. and Canada, led by Iowa State University, embarked on a very ambitious research project that would produce an integrated curriculum to improve engineering graduates' skills in

communication, leadership, and practical problem solving. Included is a consortium to provide face to face and distance workshops for faculty, and longitudinal research to assess the new curricula's impact on graduates' performance.⁵

As the Science Blog sums up the reform at Rochester, "the work...is an attempt to remind the healthcare industry that medicine is more than knowing the facts and demonstrating skill. 'Medicine, no matter how technological it is, is always a human enterprise'."⁴ This is true for engineering, law and other professions, but it is especially true for the library and information profession.

With a few notable exceptions, the art of leadership and the practice of interpersonal skills/emotional intelligence are far from mainstream in the curricula of library and information schools. The various leadership institutes, workshops, and conference programs that are available do not fill this void. We need to move quickly to modernize curricula so that every LIS graduate will have the skills needed to move into the leadership roles demanded of professionals now and in the future.

THE SELF-AWARENESS FACTOR

When leadership workshops and institutes for librarians began to proliferate in the eighties, and from then until now, the major emphasis has been on the traits of a leader (intelligence, vision, self confidence, consistency, etc). Other topics include leadership styles, major theories of leadership, and communication. Workshops and courses tend to focus on the process of communication: listening skills, building positive relationships, negotiating skills, dealing with conflict, and making presentations. A more recent topic is "working in teams" which evolved from changes in the way organizations manage their work.

The latest major change in emphasis deals with self knowledge and assessment. It has become well recognized that the first step in becoming a leader is not only acquiring a good understanding of one's preferences in dealing with people and in organizing work, but also a strong grasp of one's strengths. Leadership, the theorists say, is not just a matter of learning better presentation or listening skills, or being a visionary, although these skills are extremely important. To really change and develop our leadership potential we must first understand who we are, and begin an ongoing process of honestly examining our reactions to life situations, learning from mistakes, and practicing behaviors that are congruent with our natural preferences.

One test that has been used from the beginning in library leadership institutes is the Meyers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).⁶ This is a very reliable test that measures one's inclination towards introversion and extroversion and is based on the work of Carl Jung.

The terms extrovert and introvert are used in a special sense when referring to the MBTI.

That is, people whose preference is extroversion draw their energy from action. They tend to act first, then reflect, then act further. If they are inactive, their level of motivation tends to decline. Conversely, those who prefer introversion become less energized as they act. They prefer to reflect, then act, then reflect again. They need time out to reflect in order to build energy. The extrovert's flow is directed outward toward people and objects; the introvert's is directed inward towards concepts and ideas. The MBTI sorts for preference, not actual ability, and individuals are considered the best judge of their own type. No type is considered better or worse than another.

The MBTI profile is very useful for understanding not only why one behaves and reacts in certain ways, but especially for understanding why colleagues behave as they do. This understanding can be a very powerful tool in improving relationships, and in accomplishing tasks. The work of David Keirsey, who has mapped four 'temperaments' to Myers-Briggs types, is also helpful. His book *Please Understand Me II* contains a simple questionnaire that is easy to take, and offers an in depth analysis of the various temperaments.⁷

Both the MBTI and the Keirsey temperament sorter are very useful for self knowledge, but even more compelling is a newer approach that advocates building on natural strengths rather than putting great energy into attempting to overcome perceived weaknesses. Buckingham⁸ has reported on studies conducted by the Gallup Research Center over twenty-five years. This research has produced a program that helps people to identify their strengths and learn how to focus and perfect them. This approach was somewhat of a breakthrough in its assertion that corporations and non-profit organizations make two flawed assumptions about people. The first is that people can learn to be competent in almost anything, and the second is that each person's greatest room for growth is in his or her areas of greatest weakness. Buckingham maintains that these assumptions should be turned around and that organizations should assume that people have unique talents, and each person's greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or hers greatest strengths. How liberating this is for all of us! Why spend thousands trying to become a fiscal guru and when you really have not the talent nor the interest in that area?

The book, *Now Discover Your Strengths*, has a code that is the password to an online questionnaire called the "Strengths Finder Profile." This provides the participant with his/her five signature "themes" and the rest of the book gives suggestions on how to leverage your themes in improving your leadership skills.⁸

The self-analysis approaches described above are just three of the many instruments available to gain greater insight into one's temperament and strengths. Most leadership training currently goes a step further and engages the participant in profound self-reflection to gain understanding of his/her "authentic self". The next step is creating a personal leadership agenda with a strategic plan to accomplish it.

Warren Bennis⁹ and Bill George¹⁰ have authored two of the best "workbooks" to help would-be leaders through this process. In *Learning to Lead*, Bennis says

“Leaders know themselves; they know what they can do well. Part of their secret is that they have positive self regard. They know their talents, build on their strengths, and are able to discern how they can contribute to their organizations, their communities and the quality of life of those around them.”⁹ (p27) He goes on to advise the would-be leader to first understand him/herself, be open to new experiences, solicit feedback, information, and ideas from others about successes and failures, and continually self-reflect.

Thus it is possible for anyone through reading and study to develop leadership skills, but a course in graduate/professional school would be most beneficial because it could combine with and relate to the practice of librarianship. Second best would be a week long immersion institute, or some ongoing version of this where participants have a chance to interact with mentors and peers. (Couldn't LIS schools do this?) If the current pundits are correct, lack of access to a formal training program need not be a major barrier to attaining leadership status. One begins with self-knowledge and reflection. There are hundreds of books and articles on every aspect of the subject.

THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FACTOR

As discussed in part 1 of this paper, research tells us that intelligence is somewhat of a minor factor in achieving leadership status. Of course a certain level of intelligence is needed to obtain professional credentials, but once in a profession, factors other than cognitive skills are more important. These factors most definitely include technical or professional competencies practiced over a period of years, but the most important characteristic is emotional intelligence (EI), which in fact is a big part of almost every leadership theory.

Whether we are talking about leadership traits, various theories such as leadership styles, situational approaches, contingency theories, the path-goal theory, or transformational leadership, all contain some elements of EI. Emotional Intelligence can be defined as follows: *The capacity to perceive and regulate emotions in oneself as well as others or building relationships and using emotions wisely, reading people, and being aware of one's own emotions.*

In a recent research study conducted with 265 executives, directors, business owners and consultants, it was found that these leaders consider the following attributes most essential for success: vision, relationship building, people development, self awareness, empathy, and adaptability. These traits were rated more important than traditional leadership qualities such as financial acumen, external market orientation, and planning.¹¹

In his best selling book *Primal Leadership*, Goleman¹² outlines four domains of emotional intelligence: self awareness; self management; social awareness; and relationship management. All four domains, says Goleman, are learned abilities, not innate talents

Self awareness includes accurate self assessment and self confidence. The path to self awareness has been described in the second section of this paper, and the tools are readily available. If one takes the advice of Buckingham and focuses on strengths, not weaknesses, the self confidence is bound to emerge.

The second domain, self management, is also all about you. It includes emotional self control, transparency (trustworthiness), adaptability, achievement orientation, initiative and optimism. In this area, the concept of adaptability seems particularly important. Adaptability also embraces tolerance. Whether it is tolerance for those with ideas that conflict with your ideas, or simply tolerance of those who do not know how to empathize with others, especially you!

It is extremely important that with all of this self reflection, setting one's leadership agenda and strategic plan, that we do not forget that all success in leadership is dependent on how we are viewed by others, and how we are able to relate to and empower our staffs, our colleagues, and yes, our supervisors.

The third domain, social awareness, follows the second very closely and includes empathy, organizational awareness, and a service orientation. The key concept here could be a strong commitment to the mission/goals of the library you work for so that it is apparent that your loyalties are focused on the organization and not on your own career plans.

The final domain, relationship management, includes inspirational leadership, influence, developing others, being a change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, teamwork, and collaboration. As you move into this fourth realm, your self confidence will allow you to become a force in the organization at any level you happen to be. In the Sheldon annals of leadership, there are many (true) stories of how would-be library leaders have passed through these four domains. In the past, describing these paths to power did not have the benefit of the conceptual framework provided by Daniel Goleman and others, but his framework is a useful one for anyone who wants to systematically pursue a leadership role in the LIS or any other profession.

CONCLUSION

At a time when library and information organizations are eagerly seeking new and strong leadership to assume the thousands of positions being vacated by retirees, it is perplexing that so many library/information educators still view leadership and emotional intelligence skills as "soft skills" that have at best a marginal place in an LIS graduate curriculum. Until LIS educators awake to their role in providing graduates who are self confident and eager to assume leadership roles, LIS professionals will have to seek out other venues to receive this training or develop their own programs of leadership study.

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