Developing Library Leaders in Ghana

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This study explores various leadership approaches in the context of Ghanaian university libraries. Twenty-six senior librarians and faculty from the University of Ghana were interviewed to determine their views on leadership styles, skills, training and barriers to developing library leaders. Findings revealed that leaders can be developed through short courses, workshops, seminars and formal training. The biggest barrier to library leadership development in Ghana is attributed to shortage of funds for training. The study is limited to the University of Ghana librarians and faculty of the Department of Information Studies. Therefore, generalizing to other library staff may be overstretching the conclusions. Nevertheless, there are important lessons to be learnt by all. The study recommends the need for training to be taken seriously in Ghanaian libraries. Additionally, the Department of Information Studies which is the only training school for librarians and archivists was tasked to create specific leadership programmes in the curriculum.

Key words: Leaders, library, leadership, skills, Ghanaian.

INTRODUCTION

There is this popular view that leaders are born, not made. This is very popular among lay persons. They hold this view because the first systematic effort by psychologists and other researchers to understand leadership was the attempt they made to identify the personal characteristics of leaders (Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert, 1995).

They believed that leaders share certain inborn personality traits. It must however be stated that this is not the view of professional researchers who have viewed leadership in several contexts. Starting with the trait approach (Drucker, 1955), this approach assumes that leaders are born not made. Leadership consists of inherited characteristics or personality. Attention is given to the selection of leaders rather than training for leadership, then there is the functional approach or group approach (Kotter, 1990) which focuses attention not on the personality of the leader, but on the functions of leadership. Leadership is viewed in terms of how the leader’s behaviour affects and is affected by, the group of followers. Attention is given to training of leaders and to the means of improving the leaders’ performance by concentrating on the functions which will lead to effective performance by the work group. Sewell-Rutter (1999) suggests five common characteristics of functional leaders as; clarity of vision, conviction of inner self-belief, charisma, creating an ethos of trust, respect and understanding to marshal and motivate the followers, communication-leading effective communication per-
manager – Democratic - focus of power is more with the group. Laissez-Faire-where manager observes that members of the group are working well on their own, group members are given freedom to do what they thought as is best (Fleischman, 1974).

Situational leadership (Follet 1971) concentrates on importance of the situation in the study of leadership. Various people have emerged as effective leaders in different situations. The approach emphasizes the situation as the dominant feature in considering the characteristic of effective leadership.

Lastly, there are contingency theories of leadership. Contingency theories are based on the belief that there is no single style of leadership appropriate to all situations. Major contingency models of leadership include:

i. Favourability of leadership situation (Fielder, 1967).
ii. Quality and acceptance of leader’s decision (Vroom and Yetter 1973).
iii. Path-goal theory (House, 1971).
iv. Maturity of followers (Hersey and Blanchard, 1973).

Relating these theories to leadership in libraries some observations can therefore be made as follows:

i. Some people were born to be library leaders (trait approach).
ii. There is not one type of leadership style that fits all libraries (contingency approach).
iii. With the changes in library functions and the advent of IT, leadership style must be situational, changing as the library environment also changes. The dynamic, changing nature of managerial roles further complicate the situation that is why leadership development in libraries is necessary but the development must not be viewed as having a one best approach (situational approach).

These various leadership approaches needed to be explored in the context of Ghanaian librarians with the view to developing staff for leadership roles in Ghanaian libraries. This study therefore attempts to show how this can be accomplished to transform librarianship in Ghana.

Specifically, the paper sets out to investigate the views of librarians on various aspects of leadership styles needed for our libraries, leadership training opportunities for leadership grooming and challenges to leadership development in Ghana. This study is significant as it will contribute to the understanding of the extent to which leadership development of librarians has reached. It would serve as a wake-up call to employers who may not have leadership development high on their agenda to rethink their positions. Finally it will fill the gap in the literature as a search for literature on library leadership produced very little in terms of relevance in the context of Ghanaian libraries.

The lack of prior research and the desire and need to explore the opinions of key Senior Librarians indicated that an interpretative study had to be done.

**METHODOLOGY**

Using an open ended interview schedule the views of some senior librarians in University of Ghana were sought. Interviews were held with 26 senior librarians and faculty to determine their interests in local leadership development opportunities and to gather suggestions for how librarians might better support professional development needs in this area. Selection of the subjects for the study was based strictly on Creswell’s (2009) suggestion that in qualitative research, selection of subjects should be purposeful and informants should be subjects who will best answer the research questions but no attempt be made to randomly select informants.

Among the senior librarians and faculty at post, 26 were found to fulfill Creswell’s (2009) suggestion of providing a range of views relevant to achieving the objectives of this study. The major themes investigated were the respondents’ understanding of leadership as well as reasons for developing staff in the libraries. Training in leadership in Ghanaian libraries as well as activities for library leadership development were explored. Future leadership styles for librarians as well as the opportunities available for leadership training in the country were also explored.

Finally, barriers to leadership development in libraries in Ghana were investigated. Some aspects of the grounded theory approach were used for the analysis. Analysis of data has not been carried out strictly according to all the rules of the grounded theory approach. The interview schedule was semi-structured and there was also no development of a theoretical sampling, an essential feature of grounded theory.

The major core categories of the data were not inductively developed from the interview data as it is the case with grounded theory. The data was rather structured under major themes which were already part of the interview schedule. These major themes are:

i. Leadership
ii. Leadership style
iii. Developing leadership skills
iv. Leadership training required
v. Barriers to developing library leadership

This is a prior structure given to the interview schedule focused the interviews towards set courses under the major themes listed above. What was done was to use some of the analytical tools from the grounded theory approach to analyse the data.

Coding techniques adopted from grounded theory approach that were used to analyse the data are: Open
Coding, Axial Coding and Selective Coding (Strauss, 1987).

With the Selective Coding, examples presented from the transcripts as illustrations are presented verbatim in this report. Findings are reported on the major themes presented to the respondents in the interview schedule.

FINDINGS

Leadership as understood by respondents

All respondents agreed and interpreted library leadership as both learning to lead in the traditional definition and as management. Generally, they defined library leadership as the ability of a person influencing and leading a group of diverse individuals to attain common goals and objectives. This point was expressed by one Senior Assistant Librarian as follows:

The ability of a person to guide and influence a group of different people, different backgrounds and different behaviours towards a required outcome of the library.

Defining leadership in line with the trait philosophy one respondent had this to say:

Library leadership is an art and in born skills of a person to lead people and create a result that would not have been achieved.

Leadership styles

Leadership style needed for future libraries were expressed in different ways by the respondents. All being a mix of the different aspects of the major theories in leadership – visionary leader, having a sense of direction, motivator, mentor and concerned with staff motivation, regard for all inclusive involvement. This is all indicative of the fact that the librarians recognise the many alternative forms of managerial leadership required to move the libraries forward though they did not express these appropriately at different stages in the libraries' development as documented in most management literature.

There were also those who expressed leadership in a negative light. They agreed that true leadership style does not exist. Leadership is difficult in an institutional culture that abhors change which is not an uncommon situation in most of our libraries. This is a comment made by one librarian:

In our institution, true leadership is hard to find, our culture is such that managers rather, the institution for example doesn’t allow leaders. A leader should have authority to change things but that is not the case in this institution. They are managers.

Leadership training required for the library

All respondents agreed that effective leadership required training. They believe in the importance of leadership training as a major influence on the success of a leader and the organisation. They believed if a leader is trained he will be able to improve his knowledge and skills and have a behavioural change in order to be able to influence others. They also believe it is a motivation for a leader and that could lead to many possible benefits for both the leader and the organisation. The leadership training that they found relevant for library development were short courses, workshops, seminars and also formal training in college.

One Assistant Librarian commented as follows:

There are opportunities available for leadership training in the country. One can attend conferences, workshops, seminars and go to GIMPA.

Digging a little more deeply into the issue of training, one respondent argued that there are recognized training institutions in the country but it has not occurred to libraries that they need leadership training. The Leaders are usually appointed by University authorities regardless of any leadership qualities they might have.

Some respondents’ comments indicate that the Department of Information Studies lacked the tools and activities to train library leaders. One such comment was:

Management courses are limited in the Department of Information Studies. The programme in management is not adequately equipped with the right activities and skills.

Developing leadership skills

Respondents commented on developing their individual leadership skills given their positions and career development goals. Most librarians mentioned that they would like to see opportunities in mentorship, and continuous learning to boost their confidence. They emphasized conscious effort on the part of employees to breed leaders from among the crop of current staff.

A librarian explained this as:

Employer and employee should agree in developing insiders to become leaders.

About one-third of the respondents also expressed that there ought to be a library leadership program either set up by an organisation or introduced by a university. They
call for an investment in developing and implementing library leadership development programs. This is an illustration of this revelation:

We need to have an institution that is purposely built to develop library leadership. This can be done by a university or any formal unit sponsored to do so.

Barriers to developing library leadership

A wide variety of answers were given when respondents were requested to identify the barriers to developing library leadership.

Majority of the respondents stated the shortage of funds to pursue any meaningful leadership development. A respondent simply stated:

Lack of funds to train staff especially for post-graduate courses outside the country.

About one third expressed the view that leadership training in the Department of Information Studies is completely non-existent and had never been part of curriculum design.

One respondent expressed it as:

Library Leadership is completely absent in our career planning as well as curricular.

A faculty member admitted that library training by the school was geared towards library practices and that very little or practically nothing is taught on leadership. This the Senior Lecturer expressed as:

We do not really have training in library leadership. Training has been geared towards library practices. To be a leader, one needs more than these training. A leader needs Human Resources skills, financial management skills, project management skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, critical thinking skills.

A few also listed a number of weaknesses within the Ghanaian library environment that worked against developing library leaders:

i. Lack of internal communication throughout the libraries
ii. No middle management positions
iii. Lack of mentoring
iv. Employers not interested in library affairs

DISCUSSION

This study has revealed the opinions of University of Ghana’s Senior Librarians and some faculty on aspects of developing library leadership.

Most of them analysed leadership in various ways as discussed in most management literature which go to confirm the different approaches to leadership. Many alternative forms of leadership have emerged over the years, (eg. Fiedler, 1967; Likert, 1961 etc) that is why most of the respondents defined and interpreted leadership in many different ways. Essentially, leadership is a relationship through which a person influences the behaviour or actions of people (Mullins, 2002).

In a similar vein leadership styles were expressed in a number of ways in conformity with what prevails in management literature, (e.g., Drucker, 1955; Cooley, 1965; Fiedler, 1967). Within a library, leadership influence will be dependent upon the type of power which the leader can exercise over the people. Leadership may be examined in terms of the quality or traits approach, (Cooley, 1965). Also in terms of the functional or group approach (Freud, 1975) or the contingency model, these models dictate the leadership style which respondents have recognised as essential to the development of libraries.

Contrary to the trait approach, almost all respondents argued that library leadership training was necessary despite Drucker’s (1955) point that:

Leadership is of utmost importance. Indeed there is no substitute for it. But leadership cannot be created or promoted. It cannot be taught or learned.

This study has however, revealed that in the context of libraries, leaders can be developed through short courses, workshops, seminars and formal training as this type of training would help librarians to hone their leadership skills.

It became evident from the comments that the biggest barrier to library leadership development in Ghana has been the shortage of funds for training. Re-occurring themes in the comments were problems with the only library training school in the country that does not have leadership programmes as well as an organizational culture not being supportive of leadership development: Non-librarians do not appear to have a budget for leadership training. The question that comes to mind is that is leadership training not considered an essential aspect of developing faculty and department heads?

Recommendations

Based on findings from this qualitative study and available literature, library leadership training ought to be taken seriously in Ghanaian libraries. Development opportunities must cut across libraries, faculty and all practising librarians ought to increase the number of seminars held in a year. There should be a cross-training programme between the Department of Information Studies and the Academic and Research libraries.

Generally the country needs leadership institutes that
could create leaders by building confidence in leadership skills. Library leaders ought to enroll in such institutes as this will afford them the opportunity to develop skills in an environment free of distractions (away from their library), allowing them to return to work with a new sense of confidence in their abilities. Leadership institutes can also provide opportunities by bringing people together. There is also the potential of students of leadership institutes meeting colleagues with similar workplace issues, concerns about leadership and common goals. Meeting with other professionals in these settings will give librarians a network of colleagues who know the joys and frustrations of the profession and can give encouragement and advice. Library leadership institutes exist in USA, Canada and many developed countries.

A list of skills taught at some of the various leadership institutes according to Winston and Neely, (2001) are:

i. Advocacy
ii. Collaboration
iii. Communication
iv. Curiosity
v. Persistence
vi. Socialisation
vii. Values
viii. Professional priorities
ix. Passion
x. Organisational transformation
xi. Motivation
xii. Innovation Management

Some of these skills could be introduced into academic curricular in Ghana.

The role of mentoring in creating library leaders is worth noting. Formal and informal mentoring will influence the careers of leadership institute graduates. Job-shadowing could also be looked at.

The Department of Information Studies would have to create specific leadership programs which respondents say is non-existent. Guest lecturers may be brought in to contribute valuable insights to the program.

Arnold, Nickel and Williams (2008) writing on the next generation of library leaders discovered that some practical skills in the following topics have been useful for developing library leadership. These are:

i. Budgeting and financial management
ii. Conflict resolution
iii. Effective meetings
iv. Human resources
v. Strategic planning
vi. Communication
vii. Team building
viii. Change management
ix. Goal setting
x. Fund raising

Some of these topics could be added to the Management Courses taught at the Library Studies Institutions.

Libraries in Ghana ought to develop as learning organizations – a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the result they truly deserve, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are natured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn, (Senge, 1990).

Many of these library leadership institutes around the world seem to have a common theme of teaching skills necessary for visioning, risk taking and motivation through seminars with guest speakers, small group discussions and one-on-one interaction with mentors (Gjelten and Fishel, 2006).

Conclusion

With environmental dynamism and the use of new technologies as well as the need for libraries to improve the quality of services, department heads all over the developed countries are taking more leadership training courses.

We in the developing world will have to emphasis the centrality of leadership to librarianship. The practice of librarianship ought to be considered fundamentally as a process of leadership. For our librarians to survive and prosper we need a solid and sound leadership. We need reasoned, outspoken, and well articulated leadership if they are to flourish in a digital future.

We therefore need to continue to pursue formal leadership training in order to keep up with future changes.

REFERENCES


