

**Deborah Hicks**  
**University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta**

# Leadership and the Development of the American Library Association's Core Competences of Librarianship

**Abstract:** Leadership is a topic of growing interest to librarians. Its importance is highlighted in its addition to the American Library Association's Core Competences of Librarianship. Using discourse analysis and insider interviews, this paper explores the discourse of leadership surrounding the development of the Core Competences and its impact on LIS education.

**Résumé :** Le leadership est un sujet d'intérêt croissant pour les bibliothécaires comme l'en témoigne son ajout aux compétences de bases en bibliothéconomie de l'American Library Association. Cette communication explore à l'aide d'une analyse du discours et d'entrevues internes comment s'articule la notion de leadership dans le développement des compétences de base et son impact sur dans les programmes d'enseignement dans le domaine.

## 1. Introduction

Leadership is a topic of growing interest to librarians. In 2005, *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries* (known as the 8Rs Study) identified leadership potential as the number-one most important, yet most difficult to fulfill, competency when hiring (Ingles, De Long, Humphrey, and Sivak, 2005). Management and leadership skills were identified as the two areas most in need of improvement in Library and Information Studies (LIS) programs and 88% of librarians reported that they felt the demand for leadership skills would increase in the profession (Ingles, De Long, Humphrey, and Sivak, 2005). Leadership has earned similar attention from American librarians. The American Library Association (ALA), tasked with accrediting both American and Canadian master programs in library and information studies, has an emerging leaders mentoring program that focuses on the leadership development of librarians with less than five years of professional practice, and past president Leslie Burger, as part of her presidential platform, cited leadership as a quality all librarians need to possess to move the profession into the future and meet patron demands.

## 2. Background

In 2006, Leslie Burger, then president of the ALA, appointed the Presidential Task on Library Education to create a set of core competences that addressed the perceived gap between the skills taught in schools of LIS and the skills needed by working professionals (Hayden, 2009). The recommended set of competences put forward by the Task Force included eight areas of knowledge: Foundations of the Profession; Information Resources; Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information; Technological Knowledge and Skills; Reference and User Services; Research; Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning; and Administration and Management (American Library Association, 2009a). Leadership, in any form, was not

put forward as a core competence. Instead, leadership was added as a competency by amendment to the main document at the ALA Council's midwinter meeting in January 2009. The minutes of the meeting simply read: "Councilors (sic) Charles Forrest and Sandra Barstow moved and Council [voted], [t]o add the following sentence to ALA CD#10: 8E. The concepts behind, issues relating to, and methods for, principled, transformational leadership" (American Library Association, 2009b, 20). Due to the attention leadership was receiving in reports like the 8Rs Study and through the ALA's own Emerging Leaders program, it is perhaps not surprising that this addendum was made. What perhaps is surprising is the choice to name a specific leadership style, "principled transformational leadership," instead of a broader competence that allowed for flexibility in the kind of leadership style librarians should follow.

Transformational leadership was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. This approach to leadership focuses on the relationship between the leader and his or her followers. The goal of this kind of leadership practice is social change that reflects the needs and demands of followers. Although Burns was originally writing about political leadership, his theories have made their way into organizational leadership and educational leadership studies. Recently, however, critiques of transformational leadership have emerged. Timperley, for example, argued that transformational leadership focused on the "heroic solo-leader construction of leadership" (Timperley, 2005, 399), and Allix (2000) argues that Burns's theory cannot be sustained over time because its conception of the leader/follower relationship is undemocratic. The recent LIS related inquiry into leadership is focused on developing future leaders, such as exploring ways to engage new professionals in leadership (De Long, 2009) or reviewing the impact of leadership development programs (Kalin, 2008; German, Owen, Parchuck, and Sandore, 2009). Research methodologies into leadership are functionalist in approach. Typical methods include surveys (Rooney, 2010) and interviews (Lakos, 2007).

### **3. Research Questions**

This study explores three questions: 1) Why was "principled transformational leadership" the kind of leadership added to the Core Competences?; 2) What was the discourse of leadership in the profession surrounding the development of the competences?; 3) And, since these competences will be incorporated into the standards of accreditation for Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS), how might this competence impact LIS education? Specifically, what measures, if any, have MLIS programs already taken to address it?

### **4. Methodology**

A discourse analysis of documents relating to the creation and decision-making process of the competences was completed. These documents included, but were not limited to, reports submitted to and the minutes of ALA's Council and Executive Board, presidential speeches and other documentation addressing the issue of leadership in librarianship, the contents of listservs that may have had an interest in the development

of the competences or in leadership, and any related literature from both the professional and academic journals.

Discourse analysis allows researchers to study how language is used to create or build the world around us. Gee (2011) calls this process language-in-action. By studying language-in-action we can see how language makes certain events and ideas more significant than others, how language is used to get others to recognize the importance of certain activities, that certain identities are being enacted, that certain relationships between people exists, that certain perspectives are being taken, that some ideas and events are connected or relevant, and that some knowledge is privileged over other kinds of knowledge. This study used Potter's (1996) definition of rhetoric to analyze these elements of the discourse. Potter argues that knowing the rhetorical use of language is important to understanding the overall nature of a discourse. According to Potter, rhetoric is a "pervasive feature of the way people interact and arrive at understanding" (Potter, 1996, 106). By paying attention to the use of rhetoric in language, attention is paid to the "alternative claims or arguments being undermined" (Potter, 1996, 106). Therefore, attention was paid to how certain claims or arguments were being presented in the literature, on the listservs, and in mission statements. Throughout the leadership discourse certain claims were always being undermined in favour of other claims.

In addition to analyzing the discourse of leadership in the documents, insiders were interviewed regarding their memories and experiences in relation to discussions and debates about the inclusion of leadership as a core competence. These interviews provided insider information about the decision-making process that surrounded the development of the competences. Questions explored included how the Core Competences were developed, why leadership was not included in the initial draft presented to ALA Council, and why, from the perspectives of the insiders, was "principled, transformational leadership" identified as the type of leadership with which librarians should be competent.

## 5. Discussion

Leadership, in the ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship (2009a), is only explicitly mentioned in the section devoted to "Administration and Management." The placement of the competence within the document indicates that leadership is considered to be a component of the administration and management of libraries as organizations. By implication, although all librarians need to be familiar with leadership, its enactment will only occur when a librarian is in a management role. According to insiders, the initial amendment moved to place the leadership competence in the "Foundations of the Profession" section of the Core Competences; however, the final placement of leadership reflects the discourse of leadership within the LIS professional literature and how leadership is most often taught in LIS programs. Rhetorically, however, these two concepts are often separated into discrete sets of activities and characteristics. Management is related to the negative and non-people oriented qualities of day-to-day organizational tasks, control, and systems. Leadership, in contrast, is people-focused, motivating, and future-directed. The positive qualities associated with leadership undermine the so-called negative qualities of management.

Transformational leadership was closely linked to the changes the profession is currently experiencing as a result of technology, user demands, and larger societal changes and to the potential of younger librarians to enact necessary change in response to these external pressures. Even the addition of the leadership competence itself to the Core Competences is an indication of this generational aspect of the leadership discourse, for they were intended to define “the basic knowledge to be possessed by *all persons graduating* from an ALA-accredited master’s program in library and information studies” (emphasis added, 2009a , p. 1).

## 6. Conclusion

This study provides insight into how leadership broadly, and transformational leadership more specifically, is understood within the LIS community. Transformational leadership is linked to management both in the Core Competences, in the LIS literature, and how it is taught in LIS programs. The word “leadership” was observed to be replacing the word “management” in the literature. The linking of leadership to management means that the transformational change sought by the profession can only be enacted at a managerial level. Yet, leadership possibilities are rhetorically limited to the young and new; however, these are exactly the people who are probably least likely to hold management positions. Understanding the reasons behind selecting “principled, transformative leadership” will help LIS faculty members develop curriculum that best suits the needs of their students and the profession, as well as shed light on the librarians inhabiting and working within ever-transforming libraries and other information organizations.

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