



LEADERSHIP: IT'S PERSONAL.

The Australian Library Journal has just published a special issue focusing on research and learnings in leadership. Here, Heather Davis and Peter Macauley sum up for inCite readers from their research in the field. Their in-depth article is in Australian Library Journal Volume 60 No 1, February 2011.

Leadership is personal. We all have the ability to influence our environment and we all stand within the circle of leadership responsibility.

In the book *Life Based Learning* (2006), Staron describes the 'knowledge era' in which we find ourselves as "characterised by impermanence, turbulence, multiple competing agendas and priorities, diversity in ideologies, ambiguity, multiple roles, irritations, uncertainty and contradictions and a great amount of energy and creativity. It is also the 'intangible era', where instead of goods and services the growing economic commodity is knowledge itself".

As far as library professionals are concerned, the concept of knowledge is not new and the knowledge era is, realistically, a godsend to a profession struggling to sustain its existence. Furthermore, the factors Staron raises such as turbulence, multiple competing agendas and priorities, ambiguity, multiple roles, irritations, uncertainty and contradictions are well known to information professionals. We deal with them every day.

There are key concepts in leadership that resonate with knowledge-intensive enterprises such as libraries. Kets de Vries' essay, *Leaders, Fools and Imposters* (2003) notes that "leaders are in the business of energy management", pointing to the quintessential recognition that leadership is deeply tied to the sustainable use of our creative energies. Integral to this definition is that it positions our own personal energy, the energy of those around us and that of the environment as just as important as financial governance.

Therefore the essential leadership skills or literacies are both personal and collective, in that everyone in the organisation is encapsulated within that organisation's circle of leadership.

The effective leader will have an awareness of the underlying values, assumptions and ideologies of the organisation and a sound understanding of how leadership and followership practices work together to produce value in an economy in which knowledge is power.

Leadership is a process and not something apart from the everyday, it is a component of the human and environmental systems that we serve. Leaders also understand that these living systems are dynamic and unpredictable. If there is one thing we know about the knowledge era, it is that it is an era of constant change and challenge.

What all this means is that leadership is no longer just about one – or a small group of – leader(s), as it may have been in the industrial era when we first began to research and quantify the concept. While it is true that designated leaders have certain rights, responsibilities and difficult decisions to make which cannot be transferred or delegated, they cannot do this work in a vacuum.

To be an effective knowledge enterprise leader it is necessary to harness the energy, resourcefulness and creativity of everyone in the enterprise. It is also important to acknowledge the significance of our more detailed and sophisticated post-industrial understanding of the leadership/followership relationship and how this process of working together benefits everyone and the organisation. This is because the speed of change, volatility and complexity of working in a knowledge-intensive enterprise requires everyone's creative input.

Contemporary leadership is also closely connected to the notion of learning and expands it to include other concepts such as deep impact learning, re-learning and un-learning. John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), the 6th US President understood the value of taking leadership personally when he declared, "if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader". Wise words from someone who lived through the industrial revolution and died more than a century before the knowledge era began.

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Recommended Reading

Davis, H. 2010. *The sustainability zeitgeist as a GPS for Worldly Leadership within the discourse of globalisation, European Academy of Management 10th Annual Conference: Back to the future*. Rome, EURAM.

Davis, H. & Macauley, P. 2011. Taking library leadership personally. Australian Library Journal: *Library leadership: Creating and sustaining a performance development culture Special Issue*, 60(1), pp. 41-53.

Greenleaf, R. K. 1977. *Servant leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. New York, Paulist Press.

Kets de Vries, M. F. R. 2003. *Leaders, fools and imposters: essays on the psychology of leadership*. (Rev ed.) New York, iUniverse Inc.

Macauley, P., Evans, T., & Pearson, M. 2010. Australian PhDs by LIS educators, researchers and practitioners: depicting diversity and demise. *Library & Information Science Research*, 32(4), pp. 258-64.

Staron, M., Jasinksi, M., & Weatherley, R. 2006. *Life based learning: a strength based approach for capability development in vocational and technical education: a report on the research project "Designing professional development for the knowledge era"*. Sydney, TAFE NSW ICVET.