

Leadership Role of the National Library and Documentation Centre of Sri Lanka

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1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 History

According to Bennis & Nanus (1985) leadership is like the Abominable Snowman, whose footprints are every where but who is nowhere to be seen. Leadership is a very complex concept in organizational behaviour. The nature of leadership changes from time to time as well as from situation to situation. The requirement of a leader was felt by the early inhabitants of the earth as they needed to defend themselves against other tribes and for that reason they chose a leader. This kind of leadership whose main aim was the defence of their tribes or society from strange communities could be traced even in early civilizations such as Babylonia, Nile, Indus Valley etc. "The study of leadership rivals in age emergence of civilization, which shaped its leaders as much as it was shaped by them. From its infancy, the study of history has been the study of leaders what they did not why they did it, over the centuries" (Bass, 1990; p.2).

1.1.2 Definitions

Scholars from numerous disciplines have studied leadership concept for hundred of years and have concluded leadership as a complex and ambiguous concept to define. Leadership is an important and popular topic of historians as well as philosophers from ancient time to modern era. According to McGregor who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1996 "leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (Burns, 1978). Leadership concept is the most favourite topic of social scientists as well as some psychologists to great extent.

Leadership is the process of directing the behaviour of others toward the accomplishment of some common objectives. Tichy (1997; pp. 18-20) has defined leader as 1) are avid learners, 2) have smart ideas and get them implemented, 3) help other to develop their own ideas, 4) hold strong values that everyone understands and is held accountable, 5) are energetic and work to create positive emotional energy in others, 6) make

tough decisions, encourage and reward others who do the same and 7) communication and teach in his book entitled, "The Leadership Engine. How winning companies Build Leaders at every level". He further pointed out that "leadership is influencing to get things done to a standard and quality above their norm and doing it willingly. According to Rost (1991) leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real change that reflect their shared purposes.

Leadership is a very wide concept and it differs with the leaders. Leaders like other people are all different. No leader can take over another's job and do it the same way. Leadership is a difficult quality to define and to assess. As General Patton exclaimed "I have it but I will be damned if I can define it"

A large number of books and articles have been written on leadership. According to Bass (1990) over 7000 books and articles have been published on leadership. Rost found that 331 different definitions on leadership. But nothing is perfect. Leadership has been traditionally defined, as the "leader is the provider of resources and guide to others". The concept of leadership is very difficult to define due to changing situation of organizational management. According to Riggs (2001, p 5) there are at least hundred definitions of leadership including leadership system such as, 1) functional leadership, 2) situational leadership, 3) bureaucratic leadership, 4) charismatic leadership, 5) servant leadership, 6) follower leadership, 7) group-centered leadership etc. The concept of leadership has its own specific characteristics. The most important six critical leadership traits have been given by Schreiber and Shannon. Schreiber and Shannon are highly reputed resources personnel in the field of leadership management in United State of America (USA). They have been conducting leadership programme and Institution especially in USA for more than 20 years. They are the founding members of reputed leadership institutions such as Maryland Library Leadership Institute, Aurora Leadership Institute, and New Jersey Leadership Training Centre etc.

1.2 Leadership Traits

Table 1:

Six critical leadership traits

Leadership traits	Definition
Self-Awareness	Leaders who know themselves are able to maximize their strengths, learn new skills, and know when to get out of the way of those who can do it better.
Embracing Change	Leaders must convince others that change is normal and recognizing that each person deals with change differently, must guide them through the chaos.
Customer Focus	Leaders know it is important for the organization to be strategic, not just reactive
Stand to take in the future.	Leaders put their stakes in the ground. Based on core personal and organizational values, they create a shared vision to pull the organization in to the future.
Collaborative Spirit	Leaders build relationship and coalitions; they commit themselves to support the success of others
Bias for Courageous Action	Leaders believe that individual acts of courage recreate organizations. Leaders act with passion and courage, and encourage others to take risks

Source: *Developing Library Leaders for 21st Century* (Schreiber and Shannon, 2001)

According to one of the greatest political leaders of the world in the 20th century Winston Churchill, leadership is a great motto of success. He had framed inscription on his desk during the Second World War "It is not enough to say we are doing our best, we must achieve success in doing what is necessary" Leadership is always motivational or it's stumbling in the dark. There should be a good motivation for perfect leadership. The most important three motivating factors for an employee are, 1) reward for performance, 2) punishments for non-performance and 3) technology. The best leaders never order people to do a job. The best leaders motivate people to do the job. Therefore, the leaders should have an ability of motivating people. According to Ajaja (2003) good leaders are those who make things happen rather than those who simply administer. A leader determines the fate of the organization.

1.3 Library Leadership

There is a leadership crisis in the field of Library and Information Science as it has become significant issue in this field. Although leadership is an indispensable factor of the library world as in the other organizations, there is no growing literature in this discipline. There is a dearth of research and literature in library leadership. Winston (2001) pointed out the scarcity of scholarly research regarding libraries and leadership. According to Riggs (1982) it was discovered that there was a noticeable scarcity of books and journal articles on leadership in librarianship. At the same time this research was being conducted, there were many articles and books written on and about leadership in other professions. Why do we librarians not like to talk or write about leadership? It is often assumed that if one is an excellent leader in one library setting that person will do a comparable job in another library setting. This assumption may be far from reality. In essence, leadership is situational. Even though library skills are transportable from one location to another, the various complexities of a given library situation will require a leader of a specific temperament, focus, and charisma. Too many times, search committees for a new library leader do not precisely know what kind of person is best for the future of their library. They normally believe that if a person is successful in one library that person will do well in another setting. New technology has brought with it many changes in the work life of library leaders. They are now doing things much differently compared with practices and procedures of a few years ago. The mission of libraries has not changed due to technology, but the way the mission is achieved has changed dramatically. Building a commitment to, overcoming resistance to, acceptance of, and sustenance of change in libraries require dynamic and caring leadership. Human nature appears to resist change and prefers to continue functioning in established patterns; however, it is especially important for the library leader to recognize, accept, and adjust to the constantly changing environment in order to perform at the maximum level in promoting successful change. Effective library leadership is characterized in part by the ability to break away from established structures. One practical way of breaking away from current practices/procedures is to create a "stop doing task force". Libraries are noted for maintaining specific practices/procedures forever. A library, like any other organization, should constantly engage in continuous improvement.

According to Hennon et al. (2003) some writers have suggested that we may be headed toward a leadership "crisis", regarding the shortage of new individuals entering the profession, and the substantial number of current library leaders that are expected to retire within the next decade. All types of libraries in the most developing as well as developed countries are running without proper leadership. This situation has been growing day by day since the middle of the last century. Library leadership has become an ever increasing topic of discussion within the library circles and professional associations. Context of librarianship has become more complex due to both inherently increasing intricacy of the institutions of librarianship and the framework of information access and organization. Therefore these two have to be re-examined (Gold, 2001).

The quality of leadership in an organization seldom exceeds that of the person at the top. As an example leadership role (LR) of the national library (NL) is based on the efficiency and effectiveness of the library staff also. Most countries have a national librarian, although his title may be Director or Director General responsible to the government body (Humphrys, 1987; p.71). He should be a good librarian with leadership qualities. He should be an all-rounder in this discipline. Top management of the Library of Congress and the British Library are best examples. Dr. James Hadley Billington who is the librarian of the Library of Congress at present and he had received 22 honorary degrees and, in 1992, the Woodrow Wilson Award from Princeton University. Lynne Brindley is the Chief Executive of The BL (BL) since 2000. Lynne came to the BL from the University of Leeds where she was Pro-Vice-Chancellor and University Librarian.

Library and Information Science educational institutions should also be responsible to leadership crisis in the field of Librarianship. They have neglected leadership topic in their curriculum. They have given priority to only aspect of library automation. As example in USA only 10 percent of American Library Association - accredited programmes offer leadership training and it is not sufficient. Therefore, the situation needs a quick change (ALA, 1998). The library is a collaborative enterprise like any other organization. There are groups and sub groups in every type of libraries. Therefore, every library needs a leader to lead the institute. The leaders of organizations have two roles as symbolic and substantive. The symbolic role involves providing explanations,

rationalizations and legitimizations of organizational activities and decisions both to the organization's members and to outside stakeholders. The substantive role involves strategic planning and decision making that leads to concrete outcomes.

Most of the NLs in developing world play a leadership role in their library communities. The National Library and Documentation Centre (NLDC) of Sri Lanka, the National Libraries of Malaysia and Indonesia are best examples for this category. The NLDC of Sri Lanka is playing leadership role in the field of Library and Information Services. It has provided a correct leadership to the programme of rebuilding of Tsunami devastated libraries in the country. One of leading steps of the NLDC is the establishment of Sri Lanka Disaster Management Committee for Libraries, Information Services and Archives.

"The DMC incorporated all major stakeholders of the library and archival fields, including the National Library and Documentation Services Board, the National Library, the National Archives, the Sri Lanka Library Association, the National Science Foundation, major library training institutes and the relevant ministries. The National Library assumed the chairing, coordinating and secretarial functions of the committee" (Amarasiri, 2005). The National Library of Malaysia plays a leadership role in the country. There are 947 Public libraries, 415 academic libraries and 325 Special Libraries in Malaysia. "The NLM provides in-service training and professional development of all librarians, assistant library officers and library assistants attached at NLM and federal government department libraries" (Mamat, 2006). The National Library of Indonesia also plays a leading role in the Library and Information Science sector in the country. "National Library of Indonesia is slightly different from other national libraries in the world among others is in the fact that NLI has to supervise and support the development of all kind of library in Indonesia. For this time being the National Library of Indonesia has reached last phase of the long process of the ratification of Library Act at national level" (Rachmananta, 2005). Besides these most subject national libraries around the world are playing a leadership role relevant to their specific discipline. One of best examples is National Library of Agriculture. "The NAL provides a leadership role In U.S. participation in International agricultural library and Information systems in efforts to promote worldwide availability of agricultural

Information. In addition, the NAL serves as the Nation's major source of agricultural information received from and relayed to other countries, as the agricultural Information liaison to International organizations and organizations outside of the United States, and as the U.S. agricultural representative in the settling of library and information standards internationally" (<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR1020-001.html>).

1.4 Leadership Role of the National Library and Documentation Centre of Sri Lanka

The NLDC is playing a leadership role in the LIS in the country due to absence of powerful library and information centres. As a developing country, library sector of Sri Lanka is totally financed by the government except few non governmental libraries. All libraries are struggling with, limited financial resources, high inflation, lack of trained manpower, unhealthy ICT infrastructure etc. Meanwhile one part of the country is still going on civil war. Under this background the library sector has become some sort of an isolated discipline. The NLDC is the major institution in the library discipline which has considerable resources and advisory power. One of the missions of the NLDC is "Plan and co-ordinate library services at national level". So it has to provide leadership to the library context in the country. Information society is an indispensable element of the development path. People of the developed world are with high literacy rate of information. Creation of an information society is another mission of the NLDC.

"Assist Sri Lanka to become a culturally enriched and intellectually advanced nation". To achieve missions of the NLDC it plays a leading role in following areas.

1.4.1 Bibliographic Control (BC)

The NLDC acts as the major body of the country regarding BC. It produces large number of publication in this discipline. One of the major products of the section is the SLNB. The SLNB is the only highly authority bibliographical publication in the country and there is no any other competitive bibliography with the NB. All librarians as well as publishers of the country use the NB as a leading book selection tool. Apart from the NB it publishes number of bibliographical publication including retrospective bibliographies. The NLDC is playing a leading role in the

BC in the country. The NLDSB is responsible for maintenance of library standard and cataloguing standard of the country.

1.4.2 Documentation Service

The NLDC acts as the National Centre for Documentation. It provides number of documentation services to all libraries in the country as a leading library. It produces number of bibliographical tools related to bibliographical control. One of the major leadership activities of the section is coordinating of national and international networks (See Annex. 2).

1.4.3 Reader Services

The NLDC is one of the largest reference libraries in Sri Lanka and it acts as a service bureau. One of missions of the centre is to "Develop a Sri Lanka Information Resource Excellence Centre at the National Library and to co-ordinate and assist other major Sri Lankan collections in the country". It is open to all levels of the readers in the country. The NLDC is the only library in the country which has updated reference collection related to the field of universal knowledge. As the largest Reference Library, the National Referral Centre and the National Documentation Centre, it plays a leading role in the country.

1.4.4 Advisory Service for the Library System

According to the NLDSBA (1998) the NLDC is responsible for providing expert services to rest of libraries in the country. In most occasions PLs and SLs approach to the NLDC regarding professional matters.

1.4.5 Leadership role of the NLDC regarding reconstruction of Tsunami devastated libraries in the country

The NLDC has been confronted with a new challenge consequent to Tsunami disaster in the December 2004. It faces the challenge of the reconstruction of library system of coastal areas of the island. The Tsunami disaster devastated more than 200 libraries in the country. The NLDC has been providing effective leadership to rebuild the library system.

The NLDC has identified, **either as destroyed or damaged, 177 SLs, 53 PLs and 68 libraries** attached to religious institutions due to this natural disaster (IFLANET.2005). After this devastation the NLDC

requested the world public emergency assistance to rebuild the library system and explained to the world the disaster caused due to the Tsunami waves.

As a first stage the NLDSB made a survey in coastal areas of Sri Lanka and asserted the total damages to library sectors.

Thereafter it established the Sri Lanka Disaster Management Committee for Library Information Services and Archives (SLDMC for LISA) at the NLDC. This committee comprised of library experts in the country representing various field of library affairs in the country. The NLDSB assumed the chairing, coordinating and secretarial functions of the committee.

This is a new leadership role of the NL. Not only the NLDC of Sri Lanka, the NL of Indonesia as well plays the same role.

1.5 Obstacles of the Leadership role of the National Library and Documentation Centre

1.5.1 Lack of legal power

According to the Act of NLDSB (1998), the NLDC has only advisory power. It has power to provide advice to the government relating to issues in library and information services. "4. (c) to advise the Minister regarding plans, programmes and activities for the development of library and documentation services in Sri Lanka." (NLDSB Act, 1998).

Above clauses explain only about advisory power of the NLDC. The NL expects executive power to implement its rules and regulation properly. To play a perfect leadership role in the country it should acquire more legal power. Some libraries in the country have neglected activities of the NLDC. The UC is one example for this. Although the NL compiles the NUC some libraries are not sending their bibliographical details to the UC. So it has been an uncompleted record.

1.5.2 Lack of Funds

As a NL of a developing country it has faced severe budget cut. Due to lack of funds most activities of the NLDC have collapsed. According to the NLDSBA of the country it has to perform large number of responsibilities related to the development of library and information context in the country. But the government authorities do not still consider

the NL service as an essential component of development planning in the country. So the NLDC is struggling first to survive than providing services.

1.5.3 Shortage of trained manpower.

Due to the inflation of the economy of Sri Lanka, the government has taken step to stop recruitment of new personnel for existing vacant posts. So some sections of the NLDC are running without adequate manpower. On other hand, there is no attractive salary scheme for the NL personnel in the country with comparison with other professions. As a result of this environment most skilful employee in the NLDC have moved to other types of libraries due to attractive economical advantages. This situation leads to collapse of leading role of the NLDC.

1.5.4 Incomplete Recruitment Procedure

The LIS is a professional discipline. So the priority should be given to professional qualified persons when the recruitment of personnel for existing vacancies in the NLDC is done. But there is no any priority for the LIS personnel who have achieved the LIS qualifications from library schools. This is another obstacle for development of the NL services in the country.

1.5.5 Political Influence

This is the worst factor in developing countries as well as even in some developed countries. The Board of Directors and the Chairmen are appointed by the Minister. Only factor behind of these appointments is political influence. According to the NLDSB Act (1998) of the country the DG should essentially have professional qualifications. But the Chairman of the Board is an appointment of the Minister. So when the Chairman works for political agenda the DG works for professional agenda. Under this situation there are two groups in the Board as professional and non-professional. Although the Chairman is the chief executive officer in the Board he is not essentially a professional in the field of LIS. As a result there are lots of conflicts between the Chairman and Directors. This situation hampered the development of library services in the country and it was also instrumental in delaying establishment of the NLDC. To settle this worst situation eminent librarians in the profession have made a proposal to the NLDSB, to amend the NLDSB Act immediately.

1.5.6 Lack of awareness on Leadership role

Although the concept of the leadership is an essential topic in the LIS it is not widely discussed in the library context in the country. There was no any symposium, conference, workshop or any other programmes organized in the country on the topic library leadership and no growing literature also. No any personnel of the NLDC has participated in leadership programme within the last 10 years. This situation has contributed for negative progress of the leadership role of the NLDC.

Conclusion

The National Library and Documentation Centre of the country was setup in 1990 as a result of long dialogue among scholars in the country. It is playing leadership role in some areas of the field of Library and Information Science since its inception. As a developing country there are no more developed libraries and information centres such as national library. The national library is the only library which receives considerable resources annually, comparatively other libraries. So it should play a leadership role in some extend to provide guidance to libraries and information centers in the country. However the National Library and Documentation Centre is playing considerable role for the development of the country under pertaining socio economic environment. But it can be played more powerful role if it identify the concept of collaboration at the right time.

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