

Beyond shared leadership

The importance of learning in a shared leadership model

by Brinley Franklin

Once a college or research library makes a commitment to adapt a shared leadership model, leadership roles at all levels of the organization begin to change.

As Peter Senge writes in *The Fifth Discipline*: "The new view of leadership in learning organizations centers on subtler and more important tasks. In a learning organization, leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers. They are responsible for *building organizations* where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models—that is, they are responsible for learning."¹

Shared leadership models typically demonstrate at least three characteristics: empowerment, accountability, and a decision-making partnership. There are compelling reasons for today's libraries and research organizations to adapt this leadership model.

Empowering others

Generally speaking, today's college and research library staff are highly educated, self-motivated, and possess specialized skills. These are all characteristics that support a shared leadership model. The complex world of library and information services requires real-time decisions and answers in an increasingly electronic and information-driven academic and research environment.

Traditional managers cannot be everywhere in time to make the required impor-

tant decisions, nor do they often understand the technical work currently being performed by subject specialists or information technology professionals.

More specifically, empowering individuals or teams who perform work allows library and research staff closest to the task to independently improve work processes and make decisions. This can achieve both economic savings and service improvements. Accountability ensures that empowered staff use resources at their discretion wisely and learn from their decisions. A decision-making partnership gives library staff more ownership in the critical decisions being made and allows appropriate decisions to be made at all levels of the organization.

There are, however, many things to be learned in a shared leadership model. The various types of decision-making, such as directive, consultative, majority, consensus, and unanimity, need to be learned or relearned. As leadership roles are distributed throughout the organization, traditional leaders and their staff need to learn about group process and facilitation skills, role-playing, and leadership styles, including coaching and mentoring. Communication skills and interpersonal skills become increasingly important and may also need to be nurtured or improved.

While many library and research staff members are expert in their subject or technical areas, they also need to develop social skills to successfully promote and deliver

About the author

Brinley Franklin is associate director at the University of Connecticut Libraries and a special consultant for KPMG Peat Marwick, e-mail: brinleyf@uconnvm.uconn.edu

quality services. We all need to recognize and reinforce through our actions that every staff member has certain leadership qualities that will be needed by our organizations at some time, and we need to respect and appreciate diversity in all its forms.

Learning to work more productively and improve services while sharing leadership roles and making group decisions with colleagues leads us to appreciate that various personality traits are necessary for a shared leadership model to be successful. David Barry identifies these behaviors as: envisioning, organizing, spanning (to outside groups and individuals), and social.²

Learn about users' needs

Library and research staff also have much to learn about our users and their needs. In the traditional hierarchical leadership model, managers often made the major collection and service decisions. In this era of knowledge management, and in a shared leadership model, library and research staff are ideally positioned to directly offer the knowledge resources, social capital, and information infrastructure we have available to our users,

but we need to learn to personalize those services and tailor them to our users' needs.

In short, in a shared leadership model, there is much to learn. Traditional leaders are learning facilitation, coaching, and mentoring skills. Staff are learning social, interpersonal, and group process skills. We are all learning more about our users to better serve them.

As Peter Senge so aptly states: "Systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning—these might just as well be called the *leadership disciplines* as the learning disciplines. Those who excel in these areas will be the natural leaders of learning organizations. . . . Or, to put it another way, who are the natural leaders of learning organizations? They are the learners."³

Notes

1. Peter M. Senge. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990): 340.
2. David Barry. "Managing the Bossless Team: Lessons in Distributed Leadership," *Organizational Dynamics* 20:1 (Summer 1991): 36.
3. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 359–360. ■



HARVEY MILLER PUBLISHERS

The Imprint of Authority and Quality for books on the History of Art

Publishers of Elizabeth McGrath's 'Corpus Rubenianum' volume

RUBENS: SUBJECTS FROM HISTORY

Winner of the 1998 Mitchell Prize for the History of Art

and of

Kathleen Scott's volumes in the series

'Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles'

LATER GOTHIC MANUSCRIPTS

Winner of the first Modern Language Association Prize

for a Distinguished Bibliography

For our complete catalogue or further information please contact

Kim Hunter at G+B Arts International, PO Box 200029, Riverfront Station, Newark, NJ 07102

Tel: (973) 643-7500 Fax: (973) 643-7676

CRITICAL COMPANIONS TO POPULAR CONTEMPORARY WRITERS—*Now on CD-ROM!*



IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO OVER 250 TITLES BY 25 OF THE MOST WIDELY READ CONTEMPORARY WRITERS—UPDATED ANNUALLY!



Stop by Greenwood Publishing Group Booth #2213, at ALA for a product demo!

And best of all, you can order your copy of this invaluable research tool from Greenwood Electronic Media with no risk! Simply return the disc within 30 days if you're not completely satisfied.

Call 1-800-793-2154 to review for 30 days with NO OBLIGATION!

Two options for ordering Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers CD-ROM (ISBN: 0-313-30963-9)

Option1: STANDING ORDER (with annual updates for \$195/each)	\$395*
Option2: ONE-TIME ORDER (with no annual updates)	\$495
Network License fee: for up to 10 simultaneous users, add	\$100
for up to 20 simultaneous users, add	\$200
for up to 30 simultaneous users, add**	\$300
Print Discount: subtract \$100 if you own all 25 volumes in print or 5% if you own more than 10 volumes in print	

* annual update discs will be shipped and billed automatically at \$195.

**for network license for more than 30 users, contact sales manager at 203-226-3571, ext.383

For more detailed product information, check out our web page www.greenwood.com/gem



GREENWOOD PUBLISHING GROUP, INC.
88 Post Road West • P.O. Box 5007 • Westport, CT 06881-5007
Telephone (203) 226-3571 • Office FAX (203) 222-1502