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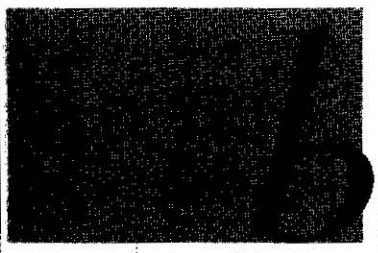
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Urban Public Library Directors: Who Are They? Where Did They Come From?

BY KEN HAYCOCK & LARRY MCCALLUM



uffeted by the pressures and turmoil of a downsizing corporate world, Canadian businesses and industries have seized on leadership as their Holy Grail. Consultants have emerged to cater to this 'leadership crisis', the underlying assumption being that leadership is one of the greatest challenges in implementing the change processes needed as corporations restructure. Add to that a familiar old saw: good leaders are hard to find.

Given the nature and scope of the pressures confronting libraries in the 1990s — pressures wrought by technological and fiscal changes, among others — library leadership, too, is arguably at a greater premium than at any time in the history of the profession. If libraries are to craft bold mission statements, reconceptualize services and embrace marketing, then the profession needs visionaries, entrepreneurs and leaders as never before. But what makes a strong leader? In an ideal world, every librarian would possess leadership qualities and the profession would ensure that its most promising protégés rose through the ranks in order to maximize their contributions. Indeed, if libraries as a whole need more leaders and entrepreneurs than in the past, then schools of library and information studies may need to re-evaluate whether they're attracting students with attributes and traits essential for leading libraries to the centre of the information marketplace.

Nearly a decade has passed since Jean Tague and Roma Harris, of the University of Western Ontario, studied the careers of 26 Canadian directors of academic, public and governmental libraries. Tague and Harris found that directors fall generally into two categories: 'evolutionaries', who tend to remain at single institutions and implement change gradually, sensitively and through consensus, and 'revolutionaries', who tend to move between institutions and favour rapid change, new ideas, and challenges to the system.

In order to shed more light on the state of library leadership in the field, the present study emerged out of a September 1995 presentation to CALUPL (Council of Administrators of Large Urban Public Libraries), whose director members agreed to participate in the survey. The potential number of participants was 39, and 28 responded to the questionnaire. The present investigation collected information on various aspects of the directors' backgrounds, personalities, activities and view in hopes of arriving at a profile that sheds light on how these leaders typically were promoted, where they came from, what values they hold, and whether they share a common vision as to the core roles of the public library and its director.

The relationship of public library directors and library roles has received scant attention in U.S. and Canadian studies, perhaps because studies thus far have tended to include directors of both public and academic libraries, whose mandates differ. For its part, the present study found no clear consensus on the primary role of the public library, with the CALUPL directors expressing quite specific, individual visions. Overall, three functions emerged as top priorities: a general information centre for community residents, a learning centre for adult independent learners, and a recreational reading centre of popular materials. The next most-favoured public library roles included educational support centre for students of all ages, and discovery and learning centre for preschool children. Bottom of the list was 'research centre for scholars and researchers', with 'community activities centre' the second lowest priority.

The directors were also quite divided as to how they spend their working hours. When asked to prioritize their various roles in terms of time spent, the roles of 'disseminator' (that is, sharing and distributing information within the library through staff meetings and personal contacts) and 'entrepreneur' (introducing change within the library by developing and implementing new systems and programs) emerged on top, with 'liaison' close behind. Then came a range of roles more or less tied for fourth place: figurehead, monitor,

spokesperson, negotiator, leader and disturbance handler. The role of resource allocator was deemed least time-consuming.

However, a clearer consensus emerged when the directors were asked to rank these roles in terms of personal job satisfaction. 'Entrepreneur' emerged clearly on top, with 'negotiator' a distant second. Evidently, CALUPL directors favour the one (entrepreneurial) role strongly, yet find themselves having to fulfill a spectrum of duties. One could surmise that the directors would give even more time and attention to developing new service if they could, but that they're caught up in the processes of managing their existing operations. As one director remarked, "care and feeding of the library board" would rank at or near the top in terms of time spent.

Yet, this is not to suggest that CALUPL directors are typically frustrated or disillusioned. Overall, those surveyed 'strongly agreed' they were both 'satisfied' and 'professionally fulfilled' in their present positions, and 'agreed' they were 'personally fulfilled'. Three, however — all females — strongly disagreed they were fulfilled or satisfied in their roles as directors.

The pattern by which they rose into their positions seems to indicate a more single-minded sense of career direction than in the past. Previous studies — including Tague and Harris — have shown that directors, like other librarians, have tended to migrate into librarianship from other occupations (most often teaching) and that they typically never considered librarianship as a career option as students.

Among those surveyed in the present study, however, librarianship typically was a first career choice. Seven had no experience working in libraries prior to professional experience. But most worked in libraries before becoming a professional, and their greatest influ-

Profiling the Director of the Large Urban Public Library

Personal Background
Female
Caucasian
Born in Ontario in 1946
Canadian citizen

Education
BA in History (Toronto, 1969)
MLS (Toronto, 1973)

Family Status
Married
No children

Career Choice
Librarianship first professional career choice
Decided in university
Influenced by another person
Worked as a library assistant for two years
Emphasized public libraries and management in library school

Career
Made five changes of position
Made three geographic moves
Assisted in career through mentor and continuing education courses in management
Belongs to Ontario and Canadian library associations
Was previously a deputy director
Became director after 15 years as a professional librarian
Has been director for six years

Current Position as Director
Most time-consuming roles are as disseminator of information within the library, and as entrepreneur, that is, introducing change and new systems and programs
Greatest satisfaction is as entrepreneur
Very satisfied professionally
Satisfied personally
Income of $95,000

Priorities for Public Library Roles
General information centre for residents
Learning centre for adult independent learners
Recreational reading centre of popular materials

— Haycock and McCallum, 1996

ence in pursuing library studies was a friend or other person — no particular type of person predominated, although seven mentioned public librarians, two mentioned their wives, and two mentioned "using public libraries" as their greatest influence. Once they were in the profession, mentorship played a role — some 60 per cent of those surveyed reported having had a mentor who helped significantly in career advancement, which is consistent with findings in previous surveys that mentorship helps upward mobility.

The CALUPL directors were evenly divided on whether having articles published in journals had helped their careers, although on the whole they hadn't published very extensively; only seven of the 28 had published in both provincial and national journals, while another four had published in either provincial or national journals.

Continuing education, on the other hand, drew a stronger response. Although eight directors had pursued no continuing education at all, of the 20 who had taken some courses, 16 felt it had helped their careers. And they showed a clear emphasis in subject matter: 15 of them mentioned administrative or management courses. Indeed, two had completed MBAs and four had completed diplomas or degrees in public administration.

As to their immediately previous positions, 12 had been deputy directors (five of them in the same library), while nine had been directors in other libraries. But their prior professional experience is varied. Seven (one-quarter of the sample) had no reference desk experience at all, spending their formative years in technical services, collection development or children's services. Mobility ranges from a variety of management experience, both in and out of libraries, to no career or geographic moves since graduation.

Tague and Harris found slightly more BLS than MLS degrees among their 26 academic, public and special librarians, no doubt reflecting the earlier date of their study. In the present study, 18 had an MLS, four had a BLS, five held both, and one held a professional certificate from overseas. When asked which studies they'd focused on during library school, only eight mentioned some aspect specific to public libraries; seven said management, while four stipulated special libraries, and one said technical services.

Their undergraduate studies, meanwhile, showed remarkable consistency. None of the directors had a science background, and nearly all had completed Bachelor of Arts degrees. Fully 16 of them — 57 per cent of the sample — had majored in English or History. As well, nearly one-third did their undergraduate studies at either the University of Toronto of the University of Western Ontario.

The same two universities figured even more prominently when it came to the directors' library degrees. Sixty-four per cent of the directors completed their library studies at one of two universities: 43 per cent at the University of Toronto, 21 per cent at the University of Western Ontario. Of the rest, four completed their library studies at UBC, two at the University of Alberta, and one each at McGill, Dalhousie, Université de Montréal and the University of Sydney (Australia). Most of the 82 per cent who had MLS degrees completed them during the 1970s, while a majority of those with BLS degrees completed them during the 1960s.

Demographically, the directors showed some clear characteristics: Caucasian, with nearly 80 per cent both within Canada. Of those, more than half were Ontario-born, while the rest were born in Manitoba, British Columbia, and Quebec (in that order of prevalence). Of the 20 per cent who weren't Canadian-born, three were born in Germany and one each in Ireland, Australia and the United States. All the directors are Canadian citizens, with three holding dual citizenship.

Twenty-two of the 28 directors (nearly 79 per cent of the respondents) were in the 45 to 54 age bracket, with three above and three below that bracket. While most are married without children, the male directors were more likely to have children than the female directors.

Several U.S. studies of library directors have made the link between career success on the one hand, and geographic and professional mobility and professional activity on the other. The present survey is far less conclusive: nearly half the directors had changed communities only once or not at all during their careers. In fact, their geographic mobility varied greatly: anywhere from none to eight changes of community, with more than 80 per cent changing communities three times or fewer during their library careers.

Climbing the career ladder, nearly 60 per cent of the directors made between five or more position-to-position moves prior to their current jobs, while 18 per cent made seven or more such moves.

The female directors, who changed communities an average of 2.1 times, were more geographically mobile than the men, who moved an average 1.7 times. There was a wide range of salaries for directors, with 25 per cent earning from $60,000 to $79,999, and 21 per cent earning more than $100,000. The average was $95,000.

As for their professional activity, more than 80 per cent belonged to provincial library associations, and nearly 80 per cent belonged to the Canadian Library Association, with

the length of membership varying widely, from four to 30 years. And 46.5 per cent have been members of the American Library Association for anywhere from one to 20 years.

On the question of gender, the survey documented a significant shift. Previous surveys, consistently have revealed a preponderance of men. Yet, in the present survey, 57 per cent of the directors were women (among CALUPL directors as a whole, the proportion is actually 55 per cent). While this ratio slightly exceeds the overall Canadian population, however, it still lags far behind the overall public librarian population. Thus, while indicating what might be considered progress on the gender front, the present survey also confirms that men have continued to enjoy favourable career advancement compared with women.

Moreover, the men required significantly fewer years to become library directors: 10.45 years on average, compared with 16.55 for women. This roughly corresponds to the Tague-Harris study, which found men served an average 11.29 years before being appointed directors, compared with 18.64 years for women.

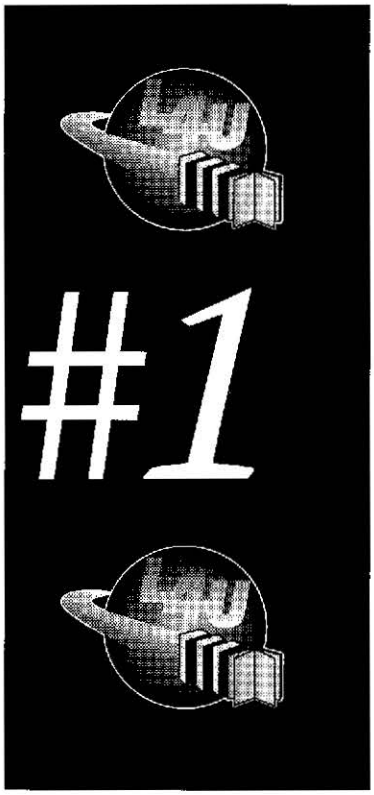
Education may account for some of the disparity. While Tague and Harris found gender was not a factor in the number of degrees held, among the current crop of directors it was: the men, on the whole, have more education. Four men had additional master's degrees, compared with two women; three men had undertaken no continuing education, compared with five women; and three of the four directors with BLS degrees were women. And, while the women exhibited more geographic mobility, as noted above, it's worth bearing in mind than women more often change communities in deference to their husbands' careers than vice versa, thus compromising their own careers.

The directors in this study demonstrate similarities and differences from previous studies. They are better educated, engage in continuing education and enjoy an entrepreneurial approach to library leadership. Directors generally recognize the need to improve the image of the library and make it more responsive to the community, but tend to concentrate on roles within the library. They are active in their professional associations, though don't see this as essential for career advancement. Gender still plays a role, regrettably, particularly in the number of years to the directorship.

Libraries currently need creativity, innovation and strategic planning, and the directors' tendency in this study toward independent thinking and problem-solving would seem not misplaced. Nor would their generally populist, community-oriented sense of their libraries' mission, and their entrepreneurial sense of their own roles. ◆

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