The position of library director in the information society: expanding on the theme

Arja Mäntykangas
School of Library and Information Science
University of Borås, Sweden
E-mail: arja.mantykangas@hb.se

Arja Mäntykangas is lecturer in Library and Information Science at the University of Borås, Sweden and an elected member in the institutional board of the Library and Information Science School. She teaches mainly in the Bachelor Programme in leadership and marketing. She is a doctoral candidate in management at the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu. Her current research interest is library leaders in different information societies.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to briefly discuss the requirements of the position of library director in the information society, using Sweden in 2012 as an example. Three recruitment ads in Sweden for the position of library director were studied. Emerging terms are discussed briefly and concluding remarks made.

Keywords: information, libraries, leadership styles, Sweden

Introduction

Sweden is one of the so-called information societies – that is, societies in which to information is rapidly accelerating. Such societies could be also conceived of as mobile societies: information is at your fingertips at any time, in any place. However, information alone cannot supply an entire country with its livelihood, of course. The value of information lies more in the use to which it is put. (1) "Knowledge" is often construed as a more refined asset derived from information. Libraries are

50

important institutions for the sharing of information and knowledge in a society. In fact, one could say that the idea of sharing is a modern way of looking of information.

Public libraries are highly regarded in Sweden. They represent an established value in society: 85 percent of Swedes consider that libraries are key elements of a properly functioning society. (2) At the same time, library use is on the decline. (3) These are contradictory results. People's respect for libraries' capabilities is not reflected in their actual behavior, according to these studies.

The challenge facing the library is obvious, but how exactly are library directors positioned in this modern information landscape? What types of requirements are attached to this position? And what types of requirements *should* be attached to the position? Finding the answer to the latter question would require that a survey be conducted. That is not the aim of this brief introductory paper. This paper takes an exploratory approach to the subject in the light of three position vacancy announcements published in Sweden in 2012.

The method employed here will be to examine the recruitment ads from the perspective of a general frame of understanding. The frame of understanding, which is based on Hernon (4) and Helgesson (5), and on the Bolman and Deals model of leadership (6), will be presented first. Next, the position vacancy announcements advertisements will be quoted in full text (in English translation). Finally, these various elements will discussed and integrated in a summary of the discussion.

Frames of understanding

Leadership/management

The concept of leadership differs from the concept of management.

Bryson defines the difference between leadership, as opposed to management, as follows:

> "…the process by which a person or a group tries to influence the tasks or behaviors of others towards a final and required outcome. It is a social influence process within organizations in that it motivates others to do something that is required to achieve corporate goals. Leadership differs from management in that management directs both human and non-human resources towards a goal, whereas leadership is concerned with creating a vision that people can aspire to."

Based on this definition one could argue that library directors are both leaders and managers, since they are expected to engage both the human and the non-human resources in creating value. They are responsible for the library's human, technical and financial resources, and also for the social capital that libraries handle – that is, the social dimension of library activities in terms of equal access, inclusion and community-building, as discussed by Hillenbrand. (7) In addition, the library director is expected to create a vision for the library on higher level, often in collaboration with politicians or an executive board.

Four frames of leadership

Hernon (8) has studied the process of becoming a university library director. The perspective he applies is that of successful candidates who have recently accepted a directorship. While this is not the main focus of this paper, Hernon's work places the position vacancy announcements in a wider context and clarifies their meaning from the point of view of acting directors. One of the questions Hernon posed was what kind of leadership did the successful candidates think the organization needed, in terms of a four-framework model.

Hernon (9) applied the theoretical framework of the four leadership styles defined by Bolman and Deal (10). The Bolman-Deal model provides a tool by which to approach leadership through four different frameworks. Each of these frameworks is also associated with a general metaphorical role.

The four frameworks are the structural framework, the human resource framework, the political framework and the symbolic framework:

Structural Framework (the bureaucrat)

The structural framework emphasizes efficiency and effectiveness. Structural leaders make the rational decisions over employees, and strive to achieve organizational goals and objectives through coordination and control. They value accountability and critical analyses.

Specialization and division of labor are used to increase performance levels. Problems in performance may result in restructuring.

Human Resource Framework (the democrat)

The human resource framework emphasizes the individual. Human resource leaders value camaraderie and harmony in the work environment, and strive to achieve organizational goals through meaningful and satisfying work. They recognize human needs and the importance of congruence between the individual and the organization.

Political Framework (the politician)

The political framework emphasizes competition. Political leaders value practicality and authenticity, and strive to achieve organizational goals through negotiation and compromise.

They recognize the diversity of individuals and interests, and compete for scarce resources regardless of conflict. Power is an important resource.

Symbolic Framework (the visionary)

The symbolic framework emphasizes meaning. Symbolic leaders value the subjective, and strive to achieve organizational goals through interpretative rituals and ceremonies. They recognize that symbols give individuals meaning, and provide direction toward achieving organizational purpose. They recognize unity and a strong culture and mission.

The Hernon study found that the directors mention human resource aspects most, followed by structural aspects. Symbolic and political aspects were mentioned infrequently. The directors must play disparate roles simultaneously: in Hernon's words, "a library director is both a leader and a follower at the institutional level". That is one of the reasons that the position is often referred to here with a slash – "leader/manager."

As Hernon also stresses, an exploratory study has limitations, naturally. One limitation is that the hiring process, or the job-application process, is quite complicated in that several interests are involved. This paper aims to expand on the theme, rather than to explain it, which would require larger amounts of data.

The vacancy position announcements

The focal point of this paper is the recruitment ads. Helgesson (11) recently studied the development of recruitment ads in a historical

perspective in Sweden. She argues that they constitute a special genre. The factors that influence the recruitment ad are the persons who create the announcement (the client, the writers, the designers) and the readers (job-seekers, employed persons, customers). A relationship of mutual courtesy exists between these two groups, which also affects the ad. Conventions, laws, media and technical aspects are other critical factors. All of these factors are part of the fabric of society, and of course there are trends in organizations as well. Helgesson observed that certain changes have occurred in the genre:

– Information about the employer has become an almost compulsory element of the ad.

– Throughout the period, the most common way of describing the employer is as "large, leading and expansive."

– The aspect that is changing the most is the view of the ideal candidate and of the "good employer."

The conclusions are also interesting to keep in mind when reading the ads reproduced here – not only in terms of the types of leaders sought, but also in terms of the way in which the employer presents itself and the context in which the desired leader is placed.

Three job ads for Library Director in Sweden

Three position vacancy announcements were selected. All three are or have been in process during the writing of this paper. They provide insight into the expectations on library directors in a modern information society.

Position 1: Unit director/manager (published October 2012)

"The Culture and Recreation sector includes about 240 employees. The sector comprises three main areas: Meals, Building Maintenance Service, and Culture and Recreation. The Culture and Recreation sector is responsible for providing open-access meeting facilities for all ages in the form of libraries, a neighborhood citizens' office, afterschool activity centers, subsidies for sports associations, special-focus cultural schools, etc.

East Gothenburg is seeking a Sector Manager to be responsible for the sector's libraries and neighborhood citizens' offices. The libraries, which are in Bergsjön, Gamlestaden and Kortedala, have a wide selection of books, newspapers, magazines, and other media, in many languages. The libraries prioritize IT access, reading promotion initiatives in collaboration with the schools, and library services

54

for adult students. The libraries will play a key role in upcoming dialogues with residents in conjunction with the projected new cultural center being built by the City of Gothenburg in the Bergsjön district. The neighborhood citizens' office, in Bergsjön, helps the residents of all of the districts by providing information, advice, and general guidance in navigating public issues.

As Sector Manager for the libraries and the neighborhood citizens' office you will be responsible for developing and leading the operations of the sector, on the basis of established political aims, with a major emphasis on collaboration with residents and employees. You will have a particular responsibility for ensuring, together with your colleagues, that a comprehensive outlook permeates the sector. You will also be responsible for initiating and driving development issues within the district, in cooperation with internal and external collaborators. You will cooperate closely with the City Library and Culture Administration, and participate in citywide networks to develop and streamline key shared issues.

You will lead and coach your staff, and promote the development of their skills and abilities. You will be responsible for the quality assurance of operations and results. Your duties will also include follow-up, analysis, and long-term planning.

We are looking for a Sector Manager for the libraries and the neighborhood citizens' office to lead and develop the operations in a goal-oriented manner. You have an ability to cooperate, are a good communicator and have a feeling for what motivates and engages your co-workers. You are interested in and have the ability to promote your operations. You have a relevant higher education in library science and the culture sector or in some other suitable field."

Position II: Chief Librarian and Director of IT Services (published in November 2012)

The institution, a university college, has approximately 25,000 students. Its academic and research culture is multidisciplinary, problem-oriented and focused on socially relevant areas of study and research. The institution comprises the following five faculties and academic areas: Health and Society, Culture and Society, Learning and Society, the Faculty of Dentistry, and Technology and Society.

The Library and IT Services unit (in Swedish, "BIT"), is an integrated whole that actively participates in the development of the institution's learning environment and operates as a central hub for information provision and IT service. Its operations have grown substantially over the past few years and demand for its services continues to increase. As an innovative and boundary-transcending part of the institution's academic and research environment, Library and IT Services is required to provide students and faculty with ample resources with which to meet to society's demands and development potential. The role of Library and IT Services involves developing and operating scientific information provision, providing tools for utilizing information and communications technology, and promoting the development of students', teachers', researchers' and other employees' information competence. Library and IT Services is a well-established

organization whose staff take responsibility for results and participate in the development of the operations. The organization currently has about 90 employees.

The role of the Chief Librarian and Director of IT Services is to manage and drive the development of the organization in accordance with institution-wide strategies and visions. The overall aim is to drive strategic development in sensitive dialogue with the academic establishment and shared support functions, while simultaneously managing day-to-day operations. Most of the development areas are in the field of learning and research support. You will be part of the chancellor's executive team and will therefore contribute to the development of the entire university college. The Chief Librarian and Director of IT Services will represent the university college nationally on library and information provision issues. A key aspect of the job is to lead, to inspire, and to promote the development of the skills and abilities of library and IT staff. You will be responsible for budget and for recruitment to the unit. You will be actively involved in systematic work environment initiatives, cooperation with unions, and issues of equal treatment and equal opportunity.

You hold a university degree and have a broad understanding of and interest in library and IT issues. Experience of research or development work in IT or information provision is a merit. You should have personal experience of managing a large organization, ideally from a knowledge-based organization, and of national-level collaboration. You should also have experience of strategic work in digital information provision and of driving organizational development.

To assure your success in meeting the demands of this position, we expect you to be visionary in your strategic work, driving in your management style, and clear, communicative and empathic in your leadership style.

Position III: Faculty Librarian (published in November 2012)
Faculty Librarian

The Faculties of the Humanities and Theology have an integrated library organization, the Humanities and Theology Libraries ("HT-Biblioteken"), which currently comprises six physical units. Planning is under way to amalgamate and relocate five of these units when the Humanities and Theology faculties are brought together in two new complexes in 2014—the existing Language and Literature Centre, which contains a library unit, and the partly new-built and partly renovated LUX in the adjacent block, where the faculties' other library unit will be housed. The Humanities and Theology Libraries cooperate closely with the other libraries of Lund University (the LUB network). The Humanities and Theology Libraries have 18 employees and a balance-sheet total of approximately SEK 28 million.

Duties

The Faculty Librarian, who reports directly to the Dean of the Humanities and Theology Faculties, is the Head of the Humanities and Theology Libraries and

has budget and personnel responsibility. The position involves day-to-day management as well as long-term operational development. There is currently a particular emphasis on the planning for the relocation to LUX. This will entail a new set of conditions for the operations, which demand both innovative thinking and respect for employees' and users' views and needs. The Faculty Librarian must have an interest in personnel issues, as well as an ability to manage change, coupled with strong initiative, innovative thinking, and sensitivity.

The Humanities and Theology Libraries were created to assure a high, consistent library standard with an efficient and professional level of service and appropriate environmental analysis for the Humanities and Theology faculties, and this continues to be the guiding principle of the operations. The operations of the Humanities and Theology Libraries have both an internal focus – the libraries' primary user groups (students, teachers and researchers in the Humanities and Theology faculties) – and an external focus – other parts of the university (primarily the LUB network), other library organizations, and, to a certain extent, the general public. The Faculty Librarian must be able to weigh and balance competing interests and integrate different operations in a strategically well-planned and financially responsible manner, to achieve the required standard. For the Humanities and Theology faculties, it is particularly important that the needs for traditional print media, for adaptation to digital development, and for access to completely new media resources be balanced in a manner both realistic and suitable for the operations.

Desirable qualifications
- University education in library and information science or the equivalent.
- Experience of and thorough understanding of practical library work, including teaching, collections development, and scientific communication.
- Thorough familiarity with the operations of Swedish universities. Knowledge of the subject areas subsumed by the Humanistic and Theological faculties would be a merit.

Discussion

Frames based on positions I, II and III

Position I:
Structural framework: responsibility, prioritizing IT access, reading promotion, cooperation, information, advice and guidance on general public issues, quality assurance, goal-directed

Human resource framework: co-contributing citizens and staff, dialogue with citizens, leading and coaching

Political framework: to drive development and lead operations towards achievement of political goals; co-contributing residents and staff

Symbolic framework: a holistic view, participation in networks in order to develop and streamline key shared concerns; and interest in marketing and possession of marketing skills

The first position includes all the frameworks. In certain cases, the placement could reasonable involve several frameworks as do the below positions. The selection made here is mainly to point out some key expectations. The surrounding context describes the position, of course. This position is in the public cultural sector, and the aim is to serve all residents generally. Still, the clearly articulated political goals remain relevant: IT access and reading promotion.

Position II:

Structural framework: pursuit of development and a driving force on the operational level; an integrated unit; provision of tools for information access

Human resource framework: to lead, to inspire, and to promote the development of the skills and abilities of library and IT staff, information competence for students, teachers, researchers and other staff, empathic, clear, communicative

Political framework: to drive strategic development in sensitive dialogue with stakeholders

Symbolic framework: innovative and boundary-transcending, ample resources with which to meet needs, visionary, national representation on library and information provision issues

Position III:

Structural framework: responsibility for staff and budget, long-term planning, efficacy, business intelligence

Human resource framework: innovative thinking, respect for library users and staff

Political framework: balancing competing interests, achieving balance between traditional media and digital media

Symbolic framework: to be able to lead change process

Positions II and III are from the context of higher education. While the frameworks can be identified, the narratives differ. Position II focuses more on the political and symbolic frameworks for leadership. IT also is emphasized, even as part of the position itself. Position III focuses on

leading a change process (relocation, resources). While the structural framework is emphasized, so is the need for political skills and for striking a balance between traditional and digital media.

Conclusions

The four leadership frameworks constitute a theoretical model for understanding different leadership roles and functions. In the three positions discussed, IT is a prominent factor – one that can be considered as a goal in itself (IT access), as a desirable skill for everyone to have, and as an adaptation process from print to digital media, reflecting a need for balanced and realistic leadership. In this light, there is an ongoing process in which leadership/management is expected to add value in terms of IT use in libraries. Additionally, the capacity to generate innovative and adaptive solutions is also considered desirable.

As put forth by Helgesson (12), the ads constitute a separate genre, and a link in a chain. From the point of the client/ad writer, however, the three positions described in this paper also suggest a political and symbolic framework. As Hernon (13) found, these frameworks are not frequent. This could be understood in several ways – for example, that the client is also the employer that wants to attract leaders (managers) with a broader vision and sense of mission. It could also can be a sign that in Sweden the symbolic and political frameworks for libraries as institutions are firmly established, as shown by Höglund and Wahlström (14). In the information society, however, the concept of information competence is not yet well-established, because the transition from print to digital media is ongoing. Perhaps that is also reflected in the declining trend of library visitors. In that sense the need for innovative directors is logical: the services and the need for them exists, but nowadays there are more ways to access information. The profile of the ideal library director appears to be not only that of the bureaucrat and democrat, but also that of the politician and the visionary. One explanation could be that IT has transformed the position of a library director in this direction.

References

(1) The term is used by Christian Grönroos: See, for example: *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNE6wNEeTJk*

(2) HÖGLUND, Lars; WAHLSTRÖM, Eva. Biblioteken – kontinuitet eller nya trender? In: HOLMBERG, Sören; WEIBULL, Lennart (eds.). *Skilda världar*. SOM-undersökningen 2007, SOM-institutet 2008, p. 277.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 329

(4) HERNON, Peter. Becoming a university library director. In: Library and Information Science Research, 33 (2011), pp. 276–283.

(5) HELGESSON, Karin. *Platsannonsen i tiden: den orubricerade platsannonsen 1955–2005*. Thesis. Gothenburg: Universitatea din Gothenburg, 2011.

(6) BOLMAN, Lee G.; DEAL, Terrence E. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, c1997.

(7) HILLANBRAND, Candy. Public libraries as developers of social capital. In: Aplis, 18(1) March 2005, pp. 4–12.

(8) HERNON, Peter. *Op. cit.*

(9) *Ibidem.*

(10) BOLMAN, Lee G.; DEAL, Terrence E. *Op. cit.*

(11) HELGESSON, Karin. *Op. cit.*

(12) *Ibidem.*

(13) HERNON, Peter. *Op. cit.*

(14) HÖGLUND, Lars; WAHLSTRÖM, Eva. *Op. cit.*