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Career Paths and Leadership Skills of Public Library CEOs

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Career Paths and Leadership Skills of Public Library
CEOs

MPA Research Report

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Career Paths and Leadership Skills of Public Library CEOs

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Abstract:

This research paper is an exploratory study of the career paths and leadership skills of public library CEOs in the province of Ontario. The purpose is to inform current library leaders as they develop succession plans, library boards when they recruit for a new CEO and those interested in advancing their careers and moving into senior leadership roles in public libraries. The findings are based on six interviews with successful public library CEOs from CULC (Canadian Urban Libraries Council) member libraries in Ontario. The career paths identified several trends the six participants have in common such as being an accidental librarian, having extensive public library experience, and time spent in a specialist role with half the respondents holding a children's librarian position at some point in their career. Some of the leadership skills and behaviours identified are: communication skills; relationship building and influence; change management; teamwork; professional involvement and mentorship; business skills; time management and successful work-life integration; humility; humor; courage; integrity; judgment; collaboration; accountability and political acuity. Several concepts were also explored in order to expand on the findings of the study: the requirement for an MLIS (Masters of Library and Information Science) for the role of a public library CEO; the link between public service motivation and the values of librarianship; the impact of library board and municipal relations on the effectiveness of a CEO; the parallel between the skills and behaviours exhibited by a CAO (Chief Administrative Officer) and those required of a public library CEO.

Acknowledgements

The study was prepared to fulfill the requirements for the Masters of Public Administration program at Western University. It also allowed me to bring together my deep passion for the role of public libraries in the community, the value of lifelong learning and my strong belief that growing the next generation of leaders is a responsibility all senior public library administrators need to share.

I would like to acknowledge the library CEOs who took the time to participate in this study and share their expertise and ideas with me. Your comments are of immense value to future library leaders.

My supervisor, Dr. Bill Irwin challenged me to think beyond the world of public libraries when I took his Strategic Planning course in the Masters of Library and Information Science program over ten years ago. I was fortunate enough to learn from him again in the MPA program and benefit from his vast research writing experience and understanding of public libraries as I worked my way through this study.

My inspiration remains with the many young librarians and other young professionals I had the opportunity to work with over the years. Your energy, new ideas and approaches energize and encourage me to work hard every day to bring about change to build an extraordinary customer experience in public libraries.

A special thank you goes to my former and current colleagues from whom I learned so much over the years, starting with my early days as a library page.

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Introduction and Research Study Goal

This research paper is an exploratory study of the career paths and leadership skills of public library CEOs in the province of Ontario. This role has not received much attention in either the academic or professional literature and the research available is relatively dated and mostly American. Public libraries have changed dramatically in the last decade. Much of that is due to significant changes in technology and the rapid growth of digital media and the use of the internet. Another significant impact has been the change in customer demand for libraries to evolve into community hubs, true public spaces where everyone is not only welcome, but where diversity is encouraged and people are provided with opportunities to connect and build relationships in a physical sense. With the growth of the internet, there has also been an increase in social isolation, in particular for groups such as seniors and newcomers. More recently, the maker culture movement has had an impact on public libraries, the perfect place to embrace creativity and innovation.

The shift in the role of the library from a depository of print material to an intensive public space has also had a significant impact in the kind of leadership the organization requires. Public libraries that are viewed as leaders in the industry are led by people who not only embrace change, but show resilience, a deep understanding of human behaviour and have a forward looking way of embracing challenges and turning them into opportunities.

As such, in the context of public service and what the public library means to a community, it is important to recognize that the skills of their leaders will have a tremendous impact on the success of community at large. It is a well-known fact that

libraries build and grow communities and they can only do so successfully if their leaders have the skills to do so. This research paper endeavors to uncover what it takes to be a successful public library leader in today's complex environment.

By first drawing conclusions on what are the most likely careers paths to be undertaken by those successful in the position and what kind of education is required, the overarching goal of this paper will be achieved: determining the desired leadership skills of a public library CEO. The study is exploratory in nature, as a result it will also discuss how the political context affects the effectiveness of a CEO, the tie between public service motivation and the value of librarianship as a profession and the parallel between the role of the CEO in a public library and that of a CAO in a municipality.

Structure

The presentation of exploratory research can be a great challenge as it is not trying to prove a specific thesis. As a result, this paper will cover the following topics in this precise order: background information; literature review; research methodology and limitations; community profiles; political context; career paths and education; leadership skills and experiences; public service motivation; municipal and library board relations; parallel with the role of a CAO in a municipality. The order is important because understanding the puzzle pieces, one better understands how the skills are actually used by those in the position to effectively accomplish their goals.

Background Information

The need for this kind of research is directly related to changes in the labour market for the library sector. Retirements of the baby boomer generation and the fact

that anecdotally the average age of a public library CEO in Ontario is 55 years old¹ caused a renewed awareness across the industry to actively do more to prepare the new generation of leaders. According to statistics from SOLS (Southern Ontario Library Service), in 2017, 15 libraries had CEO vacancies, 7 of which were due to retirements. More importantly, 8 of those libraries, the new hire was a new CEO, not a transfer. Now more than ever, current library leaders need to find ways to actively engage in succession planning, particularly at the senior level in the organization. Library boards that need to recruit for the CEO position are also directly impacted by this as they are the ones responsible to select the best candidate that fit the needs of the organization. And lastly, considering those who aspire to such a role and what information is useful to them to prepare for such a challenge is also of value. These three reasons are the basis of this research study. By digging deep into what makes a library leader successful, means current leaders, human resources departments, library boards and future potential leaders can be better informed. The research will provide a framework that could serve the profession well in terms of creating career development opportunities or guiding individuals to take on experiences that would enhance their skills and put them in a better position to be considered for advancement.

Before going any further, the definition of "success" needs to be addressed. For the purpose of this study, to be successful is to be able to achieve a desired or successful outcome. In the context of a public library CEO, this can be expanded to say that those successful are able to achieve the strategic goals of the organization and furthermore do so in a way in which they build and inspire trust and have meaningful

¹ LearnHQ. (2018). *CEO Recruitment Guide*. Retrieved from: <http://resources.learnhq.ca/ceo-recruitment>.

relationships with staff, politicians and stakeholders. They are recognized and respected amongst their peers for the work they do and their success. While this definition does not come from a dictionary and while it is understood that defining a term such as "success" can be interpreted in many ways, it will be recognized that the definition itself is a limitation of the research study. According to Siegel (2015)², when he describes successful CAOs, he says that they are those "who left their organizations in considerably better shape than they found them", which is another way of looking at it.

Literature Review

The literature on the topic of leadership skills of public library CEOs shows gaps in terms of currency and geographical setting. While most of the research is based in the United States, some Canadian literature exists. That literature is however not recent and certainly not focused on the province of Ontario. When reviewing the literature, it is important to note that the terminology used for this topic differs slightly: in Canada, public library CEOs also go by the name "Chief Librarian" and in the literature might be referred to as "senior administrators". In the United States, the title of "director" is more commonly used to refer to a public library CEO, which often creates confusion because in Canada the title of "director" refers to a senior manager who reports to the CEO.

One of the first Canadian studies to address the skills required by those working in public libraries was *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries*³ which

² Siegel, David. 2015. *Leaders in the Shadows: The Leadership Qualities of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers*. Toronto: UTP.

³ The 8Rs Research Team. (2005). *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries*. Retrieved from <http://www.ls.ualberta.ca/8rs/8RsFutureofHRLibraries.pdf>

was a national research project focused on library human resources published in 2005. It was the result of a perception that libraries would be facing mass retirements within the next 5 to 15 years when there was no evidence to explain the extent of retirements and how libraries were planning to handle the replacement of senior staff. The study focused on: retirement, recruitment, retention, remuneration, repatriation, rejuvenation, reaccreditation, and restructuring, hence the name 8Rs and it is to date the most comprehensive human resources study of Canadian libraries.

*The Future is Now: Responses to the 8Rs Canadian Library Human Resources Study*⁴ followed in 2011 and it was the first of its kind and very significant in what data it presented. The 2011 document contains a chapter on the profile of senior administrators in Canadian libraries. This chapter has original data that paints the profile of senior library administrators in Canada. It speaks very clearly to the upcoming retirements by listing that 73% of public library administrators are over the age of 45 and addresses other factors such as education, time commitment and time spent performing various job functions. It does not however speak directly to competencies or leadership skills.

An American research study from 2013 titled *The Ideal Qualities and Tasks of Library Leaders*⁵ focuses on finding out if the qualities leaders in the field have match those taught to library school students. The bigger goal of the study was to basically inform one of the authors who was teaching in library school programs on the selection of materials / content to be shared with the students. The best part of this study is that it

⁴ DeLong, K., Sivak, A. (2011). *The Future is Now: Responses to the 8Rs Canadian Library Human Resources Study*. Retrieved from <http://www.ls.ualberta.ca/8rs/8rs-future-is%20now.pdf>.

⁵ Chow, A., Rich M. (2013, February). *The Ideal Qualities and Tasks of Library Leaders: Perspectives of Academic, Public, School and Special Library Administrators*. Retrieved from <https://journals.tdl.org/llm/index.php/llm/article/viewFile/6380/6220>

focused on questions such as: what are the ideal qualities a library CEO should have? The findings list a number of qualities such as: empathy, vision, communication, flexibility, delegation, creativity, integrity and passion. It also looked at tasks such as budgeting, facilities and then tried to figure out how the two fit.

A book published in 2003 in the United States is likely the most in depth piece of research on the topic: *The Next Library Leadership: Attributes of Academic and Public Library Directors*⁶. In the *Qualities for Public Library Directors* chapter, the authors present the results of a study that analyzes the desirable attributes of public library directors of large and medium size libraries in the United States. This research identifies both managerial attributes such as communication and time management skills, as well as personal attributes such as integrity. It also provides brief interviews with library directors which are identified by name and concludes with a comprehensive list separating attributes into categories such as leadership, business skills, personal and self-awareness. This chapter provides a good starting point on the topic.

A 2014 article titled *Desired Characteristics of Management and Leadership for Public Library Directors as Expressed in Job Advertisements*⁷ is another relevant piece of research. This study reviewed job postings available in a variety of US sources from 2000 to 2011 and surprisingly concluded that the skills advertised were more closely aligned to management, rather than leadership traits and omitted characteristics such

⁶ Hemon, P., Powell, R. R., & Young, A. P. (2003). *The next library leadership: attributes of academic and public library directors*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

⁷ Henricks, S. A., & Henricks-Lepp, G. M. (2014). *Desired characteristics of management and leadership for public library directors as expressed in job advertisements*. *Journal of Library Administration*, 54(4), 277-290.

as advocacy, fundraising, being politically savvy and having the vision needed to position the library as an essential resource to stakeholders.

A PhD thesis⁸ published in 2012 in the US is likely the closest match in scope to this study: the purpose of it was to develop a list of competencies for library directors that can help them successfully lead their libraries. The result is a list of 19 competencies that have been researched in the literature and backed up by consultations with current library directors in successful libraries. They include things such as integrity, accountability, credibility, flexibility and vision.

Two other studies touch very briefly on issues related to this research but are not a close match: Reed Osborne's MPA research paper⁹ from 1995 looks at how the Ontario public library CEOs' performance appraisal ratings are influenced by gender and reveals that female CEOs carry an additional burden in the form of ongoing gender role tensions. This study however is over 20 years old and during this time there have been significant developments in this area. Also, a 2008 study¹⁰ evaluating the *Leading Modern Public Libraries* development programme in England with reference to the management versus leadership dynamic is somehow related. The results of this study will inform the considerations taken to transition from effective management to leadership and will be of use to current library leaders and those working in human resources in libraries.

⁸ Wilkins Jordan, M. (2012). *Competency development for public library directors*.

⁹ Osborne, R. *Evaluation of leadership in Ontario public libraries* Scholarship@Western.

¹⁰ Wilson, K., & Corral, S. (2008). *Developing public library managers as leaders*. *Library Management*, 29(6/7), 473-488.

A very comprehensive list of leadership traits¹¹ for librarians is available on the American Library Association website. This list is based on an extensive literature review and responses received from a survey. What is most valuable about the information provided is how accessible it is for anyone interested in the topic and how rich the bibliography is, including an annotated bibliography and a self-assessment.

Given the limited sources listed above, a new, Ontario based study of public library CEOs and the leadership skills required to successfully lead in today's environment is needed to fill the gap in the literature.

Research Methodology and Limitations

This research study is based on interviews with six public library CEOs in the province of Ontario. The reason for staying within one province was strictly related to political and legal considerations: public libraries are provincially governed by the Public Libraries Act. The CEOs were selected to match the following criteria in order to ensure relevance and consistency:

- they had to be currently employed as CEOs (as of June 2018) and had to be in the position for at least 3 years.
- the library had to be a CULC¹² member (Canadian Urban Libraries Council) in Ontario. CULC libraries are those that serve a population of over 100,000 people. The total number of Ontario CULC libraries is 24. Six out of those 24 is a reasonable representation.

¹¹ American Library Association. (2006). *Leadership traits*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/rt/nmrt/initiatives/ladders/traits/traits>.

¹² Canadian Urban Libraries Council. *2018 Library Members*. Retrieved from <http://www.culc.ca/about/librarymembers/>

- they had to be individuals who had a positive professional reputation and who led organizations that are seen as leaders in the public library community.

An effort was made to select a representative sample of CEOs who did not have an MLIS (Masters of Library and Information Science) and who were male.

Traditionally, the largest number of library CEOs hold an MLIS and are female.

After the list of potential participants was compiled, a total of nine potential participants were contacted and interviews were conducted with six respondents. The phone interviews were approximately 1 hour in length and 16 open ended questions were asked (*Appendix A*). The questions covered topics such as: brief career history including academic achievements; relationship with the library board and the municipality; professional involvement and work life integration; skills of successful library leaders; opinions on teams, change management, community relations, the need to have an MLIS to lead a public library and advice for future leaders. The interview was developed to allow for an informal conversation on the topic and the questions provided some structure without taking away from the impromptu flow of ideas.

The notes from the interviews are the main source for this research study. While references will be made to other sources, the intent is to provide a fresh perspective on what it means to successfully lead a public library in Ontario today.

As with any research, there are limitations: most importantly, the opinions presented here might not be reflective of the opinions of all Ontario CULC member CEOs. By expanding the research to more individuals, it is possible that the information gathered would become more representative and richer in the value it brings. While this was meant to be an exploratory study, it might have provided more structure if

participants were allowed to first rank a list of leadership skills and attributes. It would have been possible to determine the sample by breaking down the entire group by gender, age, time in the position and academic background. Lastly, the study represents only the opinions of the CEOs themselves and does not include those of staff, board members or other stakeholders.

While most of the questions asked were likely to be truthfully answered as they did not represent controversial issues, it is important to note that questions related to politics could pose difficulty and might not reflect the full extent of the situations. It is generally recognized with this type of research that the respondents would choose a socially favourable approach to answering questions.

Community Profiles

In order to better understand the context of the work the six individuals do, it is important to understand the communities their libraries serve. While we know that they are all medium to large size public libraries in Ontario, communities vary much in the issues they face, and the relationships present. The chart below is meant to provide a profile of the communities in a very broad sense. For each of the six communities, some relevant facts are listed without taking away from the confidentiality of the process. Issues that are of particular relevance have been identified with a checkmark, although of course that is subject to personal interpretation.

Municipality	A	B	C	D	E	F
Government structure	Lower tier	Single tier	Single tier	Lower tier	Single tier	Lower tier
Population	100,000 to 500,000	Over 500,000	100,000 to 500,000	100,000 to 500,000	Over 500,000	Over 500,000
Significant population growth				✓	✓	✓
Positive Relationships with Library Board & Council	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Health & Homelessness Issues			✓		✓	
Newcomers				✓	✓	✓

Political Context

As with any municipal entity, to understand how public libraries function from a legal, political and financial perspective in Ontario, one starts with the Municipal Act¹³ where the governance of special purpose bodies such as local boards (conservation authorities, library boards) is addressed. The public library is governed by the Public Libraries Act¹⁴ in Ontario. The ministry responsible for libraries is the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. According to Act, a library has a board made up of at least five members appointed by council. Generally speaking two of those members are city councilors and the rest citizen volunteers. The board is responsible for governance - setting the direction, while the staff is responsible for operations. Most public libraries

¹³ Government of Ontario. *Municipal Act, 2001*, S.O. 2001, c. 25. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25#BK214>

¹⁴ Government of Ontario. *Public Libraries Act*. R.S.O. 1990, c. p. 44. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p44>

function under the Carver model of board governance¹⁵. The CEO is for the most part the sole employee of the library board, although there are some cases where the board also has hiring and firing authority over the next level - senior managers or directors.

The largest source of funding comes from the municipality, supplemented by provincial or federal grants, one of which is an Ontario annual grant for general operations and of course, donations. Public libraries are able to apply for charitable status which sets them apart from the municipality in that they are able to fundraise. This is especially significant in the context of capital projects.

Up to this point, most public libraries function more or less in the same way. The biggest difference is the relationship with the municipality. To be more precise, according to the legislation, there is no direct reporting relationship between the library CEO and city staff or councillors, with the exception of course of the councilor who might be a member of the board. In practical terms however, this is one area where the way the relationships work can be confusing and a source of either great results or significant challenges. This is often caused by often the unwritten rule of how a library CEO works with the municipal Commissioner of Community services or equivalent. There are municipalities where in addition to reporting to the board, the CEO also reports to a certain extent to the Commissioner of Community Services and the library is viewed as a department of the municipality. The most recent example to support this, is the posting¹⁶ for CEO / Director of Library Services at the Mississauga Library System where it was very clearly specified that the CEO reports to the Commissioner of

¹⁵ Southern Ontario Library Service. (2010). *Library Board Development Kit*. Retrieved from http://www.sols.org/files/docs/develop/publications/boarddevkit/section10_library_community.pdf

¹⁶ Summit Research Group. (2018). *CEO/Director Library Services, Mississauga Public Library*. Retrieved from <https://www.summitsearchgroup.com/job/ceo-director-library-services-mississauga-public-library/>

Community Services. This can pose challenges as the CEO reports to both a library board (this is always the case as it is mandated through legislation), as well as a director / Commissioner who reports to the CAO who in turn reports to council. When there are competing priorities particularly in terms of funding, instead of having the CEO and library board support an initiative and ask for funds from council, it is possible that the municipality's projects will take precedence as identified by the municipal administration and the CEO and board will be directed not to present the request. The challenge is also how many individuals with different priorities the CEO reports to. While it is already not easy to report to a board made up of politicians and citizens, adding a senior municipal leader to the mix, complicates things further. It is very possible that this relationship works well for the parties involved, but it is one that encourages or discourages CEOs from taking or staying in a position. Informal reporting relationships can be challenging but are sometimes at least as important if not more important than the formal ones. Those informal relationships with municipal staff have significant implications when it comes to budgetary issues and can support or impede the progress of many initiatives such as capital projects or partnerships.

While this reporting relationship to a senior municipal administrator may or may not exist in all libraries, the actual working relationship with the municipality from an operational perspective is almost always present in one form or another. This is partly dictated by the size of the library, the history of the relationships and the strategic direction. For example, many libraries share to a certain extent with the municipality functions such as human resources, information technology, finance and facilities. It often makes good business sense to do so and has historically worked well. Working

with municipal staff is part of daily operations for a library CEO regardless of the how close those relationships are. Anywhere from budgets to planning a new facility, library staff will connect with city staff.

The importance of all of these relationships as it relates to this study is based on the fact that the success of a CEO and of the library is dependent upon how well they are able to work with everyone (the board, the city staff, politicians) to accomplish the strategic goals. Similar to the relationship between a CAO and council, knowing how to separate politics from administration and how to communicate effectively with all parties is much of what determines success.

Career Paths

All of the participants have been in the role of a CEO in their current organization for anywhere between four to ten years. Only one has been a CEO in another organization prior to the current position.

Anecdotally people often fall into jobs which many times don't reflect closely their choice of initial schooling. This is no different than what happened to the study's participants.

Fifty percent of those interviewed used the word "accidental librarian" to describe themselves, while the other fifty percent presented scenarios which clearly demonstrated that their current role is directly linked to circumstances that allowed them to experience working in a public library before they made a decision to take on this position.

Half the participants started working in a public library in entry level positions, often as teenagers. That experience prompted them to want to move up within the

organization and they embarked on library studies. The other half is represented by a participant who had the opportunity to work with the library in a senior capacity, but without a librarianship background, one that enrolled in graduate library education by mistake and decided to stay and one who was exposed to libraries through family connections and understood their value.

In Canada, library specific education comes in two forms: a library technician college diploma and a Masters of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree. While over the last 10 years there has been a change in the academic requirements for a library CEO, for the most part an MLIS is required. Some postings now indicate that while an MLIS is preferred, another graduate degree in business or public administration is sometimes considered. This move in terms of educational requirements is a significant one and speaks to the skills required: are they transferable or specific to librarians? This will be further discussed in the *Skills* section.

People who take an MLIS come with a variety of undergraduate degrees. Participants in this study identified fields of study such as drama, English, history, general arts degrees and urban geography. All but one study participant who has a graduate degree in one of the preferred areas listed above have an MLIS. This is in line with the current unwritten norm in public libraries.

The career journeys of study participants are varied, but they share some similarities: the majority spent most or all of their careers in public libraries and had been in many positions that allowed them to be a specialist in a certain area for a period of time and a generalist for most of the time. Most importantly, half the participants

have been children's librarians for part of their careers. This shows a trend in their career paths that can be deemed as a success indicator.

Specialist vs. generalist: this topic was discussed in some depth during the interviews. Respondents felt that they each had the opportunity to be a specialist for a period of time. This ranged from children's librarianship to technology and during those times they felt they followed their passion. While these specialist roles can often be seen as running the risk of becoming siloed, they can also open doors by presenting those individuals as experts in the field. Everyone recognized that being a generalist is where things are heading in today's environment and certainly where the role of a CEO is. In the early stages of one's career, it is their knowledge and expertise that helps them get ahead, while later on, the ability to hire the right people and lead them to achieve the vision is key. Through the generalist viewpoint, one can effectively affect change by understanding all the moving parts of the organization.

This research supports the idea that children's librarians make great CEOs, but that could be based on historical context and not necessarily relevant in the future. In a recent podcast episode¹⁷ that featured an interview with Maureen Barry, retired CEO of the Burlington Public Library effective June 8, 2018, she speaks to this. Study participants identified that a good CEO is one that can tell the library story effectively to an audience, of being able to confidently stand in a room and say that they believe in the power of public libraries, of being passionate, enthusiastic and confident. One also remarked on their own experience with successful performers: a large percentage of those in senior leadership in public libraries have at one point in their careers been

¹⁷ Library Land Loves. (2018). *Maureen Barry's Top Five Career Moments*. Retrieved from <http://librarylandloves.libsyn.com/0112-maureen-barrys-top-five-career-moments>

children's librarians. This forms the argument that children's librarians make great CEOs, partly based on their natural ability to engage with people and tell a good story. This could of course be challenged in the sense that those successful CEOs who were children's librarians will see those qualities in others like them and automatically like them and support them.

The concept can be further extrapolated to the current context of the library profession: the children's librarian title might not be used as much today as it used to be in the past, being replaced with the title of "community librarian". A community librarian essentially expands the children's focus to include other population groups and is centered on engaging with the community and meeting people where they are. Some libraries such as the Hamilton Public Library even have community youth librarians that focus specifically on the delivery of service with a community-based approach to children and youth. Overall, the titles might be changing, what remains is the kind of individual that is attracted to the position and the elements that position has in common with the CEO role: being outgoing and able to tell a good story; being comfortable around people and having the emotional intelligence to engage with them and build long lasting relationships.

Some participants also have a wide range of experience in administrative roles prior to becoming a CEO. Those individuals have either taken on jobs in different libraries across North America, more often than not in senior management positions, or have worked in different departments in the municipal sector and had a broad exposure to administration.

In addition to formal training in library science or another graduate degree, most participants identified other academic pursuits that influenced their ability to be successful in their role. At the moment, there are several library specific education programs run by associations or universities. Below is a brief description of the most relevant:

- APPL¹⁸ (Advancing Public Library Leadership): " two-year certificate program designed to expand and advance the leadership capacity of public library CEOs and managers"
- PLL¹⁹ (Public Library Leaders): "18-month program designed to engage seasoned library managers who have the desire and potential for the highest levels of leadership in public libraries."
- NELI²⁰ (Northern Exposure to Leadership Institute): " unique opportunity for professional librarians to share with peers and library leaders a seven-day experiential and theoretical learning situation in Canada."

In addition to these, participants identified programs in management or municipal leadership as being key sources of information and inspiration for them. The common theme was that they mostly enjoyed programs where they were able to connect with people from other backgrounds or from other fields. They spoke highly of hands on learning and sharing with others, which provided them with the ability to better understand the big picture. Those non-MLIS participants identified the ability to ask

¹⁸ Southern Ontario Library Service. (2016). *Advancing Public Library Leadership*. Retrieved from <https://www.sols.org/index.php/develop-your-library-staff/training-programs/apll-institute-2>

¹⁹ Public Library Leaders. (2018). *About PLLeaders*. Retrieved from <http://plleaders.ca/>

²⁰ Northern Exposure to Leadership Institute. (2011). *Northern Exposure to Leadership*. Retrieved from <http://northernexposuretoleadership.ca/>

questions, probe, be analytical, know how to understand and write policy as another key skill learned in an academic setting.

Leadership Skills and Experiences

The main goal of this project is to identify the key skills required for a CEO to successfully lead a public library. That is an ambitious goal and the interviews did not result in a cookie cutter list of skills one can check off. That is frustrating for the researcher, yet it provides an opportunity to create dialogue between those interested in the topic. As such, what follows is a list of skills, concepts and ideas that will challenge the reader to think.

Communication skills

Everyone who participated in the study brought up effective communication skills as being at the top of the list. But that on its own seems to be taken right out of any job posting or management book. However, what is interesting to see is how participants relate that to their own experience and put it in context. For example, people really want to have their voice heard and are not disgruntled if the leader makes a different decision. Starting to listen more intently and asking for input from the senior team was a turning point for one CEO. The ability to understand different personality types is key as it affects the way one supervises them. Reference was made to types such as analyzers, drivers and storytellers and how an analyzer will always need to look at all the data before giving an answer.

Relationship building and influence

In his book, *Leaders in the Shadows*²¹, David Siegel points out that most of the CAOs profiled suggested that "they relied more on influence than on authority". He further goes on to define influence as "the ability to persuade people to do certain things through expertise, peer pressure, and so forth". Through the interviews, it was clear that so much of what a CEO does is based on relationships and using influence not power to move agendas forward. Understanding how to build currency with people, gain respect and create a culture of trust is the long-term solution to moving forward. The concept of authenticity was also brought forward as a key element of building trust. But most importantly, it is influence and not authority that will get people to follow a leader. As one participant points out, it is crucial to be able to articulate a positive vision and then not micromanage. Strategically influencing people is the key to success.

Change management

As a profession, librarians tend to be risk adverse and sometimes managers might be more focused on protecting the status quo rather than challenging it.

In today's environment, everyone talks about change and in public libraries in particular, it seems to be a word used on a regular basis, yet after a while it loses its depth and morphs into another keyword on a list. But not surprisingly, the vast majority of participants brought it up. Some talked about the need for a CEO to come in with significant change management experience and used examples of the impact RFID implementations had on public libraries and the possible negative implications of not managing change effectively. Others talked about restructuring and how their goal is to

²¹ Siegel, David. 2015. *Leaders in the Shadows: The Leadership Qualities of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers*. Toronto: UTP.

never have to embark on a major restructure by regularly making adjustments to operations. This is a preferred strategy for some as it is believed that small incremental change is the best way to manage the impact it has on people. It was suggested that a major restructuring can sometimes be a sign of failure: what have you not dealt with for many years and why? It is the role of the senior leadership team to ask questions, set a positive view and move the organizations forward. The way to do that though is to be aware of what's going on not only in the library world, but in the broader community. This takes courage which is something one participant explored in more depth: talking about their own changes in careers and how looking for something new and having the courage to make the change allowed them to model change-management. Another participant talked about staying in the same organization for a long time and how that impacts one's ability to better understand how things work. The advice given was straight forward: move around and get experiences in other places. The debate over what is best: incremental change vs. transformative change will continue. While there is no right or wrong answer, public libraries will continue to grapple with the implications of change in the external environment and find the best way to manage it.

Teamwork

Famous conductor, author and TED speaker, Benjamin Zander talks about the leader's responsibility: "to awaken possibility in other people"²². He believes that a true leader never doubts the capacity of the people he is leading to realize whatever he is dreaming. This is such a powerful expression and a great way to look at teams, leading teams and teamwork. Some of those interviewed were more vocal about strong team

²² Harten, M., Rabold, J., Zander, B. (2010). An interview with Benjamin Zander. *The Journal of Education*, 190(1/2), 55-58.)

leadership partly because of their experiences with rebuilding teams. Overwhelmingly, hiring for attitude was discussed as the trend and the ability for anyone in the organization to be a leader. As one participant put it, when there are issues and a high performer is hired to turn a team around, even if not in a formal leadership role, slowly those negative performers will start feeling insecure and will leave the organization. To be successful, teams need follow-up, they need to have clear goals and there need to be controls in place to ensure effectiveness. This often translates into performance reviews, the key being for people to know where they are going and how they are doing. Having alignment not only in the direction they are going in, but also how one is going about it, is also important.

Participants listed a number of ways to build great teams beyond formal activities: get to know staff, walk around the library, ask them about their families. If there are broken relationships, those take time to resolve. Particularly challenging are situations where a new CEO comes in and tries to rebuild previously fragile relationships. It is always better to deal with the real issues and address the conflict, otherwise it can create an invisible energy.

Professional involvement and mentorship

Overwhelmingly, all participants are actively involved in either professional associations such as CULC (Canadian Urban Libraries Council), CELUPL (Chief Executives of Large Urban Public Libraries), OLA (Ontario Library Association), CFLA (Canadian Federation of Library Associations) and SOLS (Southern Ontario Library Service) or community organizations. In addition, many are regularly asked to speak at conferences, conduct webinars or workshops or lead other learning programs. The

common theme is their sense of responsibility to the profession, their colleagues and the future generation of leaders. A direct benefit of this involvement is the ability to build a network and leverage those connections, as well as identifying a broader perspective on the role of libraries. Some explicitly identify their positions as being "lonely at the top", a feeling shared by recently retired CEO Maureen Barry in the earlier mentioned podcast. Similar to the participants, she openly speaks about a colleague who reached out to her when she took on the CEO job to let her know that there are groups that meet regularly and are there for one another. Other speak passionately about mentorship and the way they see their role in staff development. One CEO offers one on one coaching with the librarians working in the organization particularly when they are not successful in job competitions. Furthermore, managers in that organization are encouraged to do the same for more junior staff.

Some participants identified their involvement in their local communities as great value. For some, it provides a great venue to be seen and build connections, others speak about the advantage of being on a non-profit board in the context of their own work with the library board. By having the opportunity to be a board member and in some situations work not only with community agencies, but other levels of government, provided a strong basis for their understanding of CEO - board relationships and responsibilities. Encouraging others to take on such roles as they plan to move into senior administrative roles is something mentioned as well.

Business skills

It is no surprise that while many participants touched on a number of business skills, the most comprehensive response came from the non-MLIS. While traditionally

librarians have difficulty thinking of running a library like a business, that mentality has been slowly shifting over the last decade, primarily due to funding constraints, technology advances and a greater sense of accountability in government. To quote a participant "We are a business: we are running a service business". Skills such as financial management, project management, how to develop and analyze policy, and data driven decision making are all mentioned. And while many admit to having to learn those over the years - they are not taught in library school, building a strong portfolio of those experiences will position a CEO well.

Time management and work-life integration

Much has been written on the topic of work-life balance or what is mostly referred to as work-life integration. A recent article²³ in the Harvard Business Review sheds much light on this topic. It is truthfully relevant, timely and closely tied to this research. Through a time diary study, the researchers looked at how successful CEOs spend their time and what are the best strategies they engage in. The article lists several, such as: making time for personal well-being; working face-to-face; being agenda driven; relying heavily on direct reports and making time for their directors; developing people and relationships; making meetings shorter and effective and carving out alone time.

In line with this recent article, half the participants in the study identified that they regularly exercised and/or spend time in nature. They all recounted how they set aside time to re-energize, listing activities such as spending time with friends and family, listening to music on the way to work to set the tone for the day, or not working long days. Some discussed their strategies in terms of starting the work day early, but not

²³ Porter, M., Nohria, N. (2018). *How CEOs manage their time*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2018/07/the-leaders-calendar#how-ceos-manage-time>.

working evenings; having access to their phones while on vacation just to keep abreast of what is going on at the library vs. compulsively checking their emails and taking advantage of quieter times to slow down a bit and enjoy a short break. Keeping themselves centered, paying attention to the inner clock and being authentic is something participants identified. To be able to react calmly in a crisis situation and make sound decisions, one needs focus and working very long hours is not the solution. An example was provided to support this: through one participant's previous experience, the most difficult people to work for are those who think they are the only ones working and play the martyr card.

Much of the work a CEO has to do requires deep concentration and the reality is that today's environment is not supportive of this. Constant interruptions, meetings and information overload, all make it hard to engage in deep work. As Cal Newport defines it in his book²⁴, deep work is "the ability to focus without distraction on a cognitively demanding task. It's a skill that allows you to quickly master complicated information and produce better results in less time." As one participant in this study put it, sometimes "you sweep pebbles, other times you push boulders". Pushing boulders is the equivalent to deep work. The way to be able to do this has been identified by some as putting a time limit on a task that requires concentration and simply closing the door and focusing on it for a dedicated period of time. Others have described longer time periods where a project takes all their focus and energy and for that period of time, they need to ignore other things. This of course can result in things slipping by, such as emails going unanswered or asking others for help.

²⁴ Newport, Cal. (2016). *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*. Grand Central Publishing, Hachette Book Group.

There is always the big question of how to fit all the responsibilities one has in one day. The inability to accomplish what one set to do in a given period of time can be a cause of great frustration. One participant spoke eloquently to this by noting that as one moves higher up within the ranks, most of the day is made up of stuff that flows from others such as the library board, staff, community partners or architects (as related to capital projects). There is far less predictability in how the day will go and the natural tendency is to fight these interruptions. Unfortunately, that is not feasible, and it is far better to simply plan for only spending 10% of your time on your "to do list" and the rest of the time on random things that come in.

The key is to have the attitude of being in control of one's time and making choices to focus on the important stuff. One participant brought up the element of trying to accomplish more than one thing with one action: having the biggest impact.

In line with the *Harvard Business Review* article, coaching direct reports and working closely with them is something identified in the research as well. Investing in people, hiring people with skills the CEO does not have, will make them successful, which in turn will make the CEO and the organization successful. By respecting and encouraging growth in staff, much better results can be obtained.

Transferrable skills and the MLIS debate

There is an ongoing debate amongst library professionals: does one need to have an MLIS to be a public library CEO? This is relatively new territory and of significance as it relates to this study. It is also controversial since those asked the question held the MLIS degree or not. As mentioned earlier, the study included a non-MLIS CEO which is representative of the population (most public library CEOs have an

MLIS). However surprising these findings might be, more than half the respondents, despite being professional librarians, believed that the skills needed to be a successful library CEO were transferrable skills and not necessarily unique to the profession. For those who did not support this premise, their rationale was based on facts and previous experience. For some, it was their intimate knowledge of the negative impact a non-librarian CEO can have on the organization. Others spoke of the advantage of being a librarian CEO: having a deep passion for community building and an understanding of the public library's role in intellectual freedom and digital literacy as something that is unique to the profession. As one participant identified it, a professional librarian will bring more passion to the job, but in truth, it is not necessary to understand readers' advisory to run the library. Another participant spoke of the balanced view: having directors who are a good mix of MLIS and other graduate degrees at the table will allow for better learning opportunities and growth. It was also recognized by some participants, that those who have other degrees bring skills to the table that are valuable and should not be easily discounted, skills that librarians do not have. Being respectful of one another and less judgmental is certainly the preferred approach.

This powerful debate will be further explored in the next section - *Public Motivation*.

Public Service Motivation

As one CEO put it: we need to value our profession (librarianship) and ensure that we take an active role in growing the next generation. Others spoke of the pride and passion that comes with being a librarian mentioning the specific skills that librarians bring. It is in this context that the question becomes: does being a librarian

make someone passionate about public libraries and the work they do or is it simply a question of public service motivation the value they place on their role in "making a difference" and doing something meaningful for society?

Much has been written on the topic of public service motivation. As Perry²⁵ explains it, public service motivation "has a common focus on motives and action in the public domain that are intended to do good for others and shape the well being of society". In the context of public administration, Perry and Wise²⁶ define public service motivation as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations".

There are many layers of how public service motivation applies to the role of librarians. The literature (same source) points out to elements of public motivation. For example, one of the characteristics that motivates employees is job significance. People need to feel that they have a positive impact on others. Public librarians certainly experience that on a daily basis, from interactions with newcomers who are looking for resources to get a job to a storytime where they are able to connect with young children and their caregivers and help develop their literacy skills.

To put public service motivation in the context of librarianship, it is best to look at the core values of librarianship²⁷ as defined by the American Library Association (ALA). In Canada, all MLIS degrees need to be obtained from ALA accredited university, so the ALA values apply. As listed, the values are: access, confidentiality/privacy, democracy,

²⁵ Perry, James and Annie Hondeghem, eds. 2008. *Motivation in Public Management: The Call of Public Service*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 1-9, chapter 13.

²⁶ Perry, James and Annie Hondeghem, eds. 2008. *Motivation in Public Management: The Call of Public Service*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 1-9, chapter 13.

²⁷ American Library Association. (2004). *Core Values of Librarianship*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>

diversity, education and lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, preservation, the public good, professionalism, service, and social responsibility.

It is easy to see how well all these values fit into more general public service values. And while some are library specific (intellectual freedom and access), others are relatively generic (professionalism, service, social responsibility). Contrasting those values with the values of Ontario municipal leaders as outlined in the AMCTO Code of Ethics and Values²⁸, there will be overlaps: promote community well being; deliver public service effectively and efficiently; protect the legacy of future generations; protect confidential information.

There is no conclusive answer to the librarianship vs. public service motivation debate. It could be that some people are attracted to the profession for the same reasons they could be attracted to another public service career while others might be attracted because of those library specific values. Regardless, it is important to understand that there is overlap between the two. That becomes significant when trying to understand people's motivation and their willingness to accept change. As one study outlines²⁹, there are four dimensions of public service motivation: attraction to public service; commitment to public values; compassion and self-sacrifice. The study found that employees who score high on self-sacrifice were more likely than others to support organizational change "primarily because of their direct commitment to changes that improve public service provision".

²⁸ Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers. (2018). *Code of Ethics and Values*. Retrieved from <http://www.amcto.com/About/Code-of-Ethics-Values>

²⁹ Wright, Bradeley et al. 2013. Motivated to Adapt? The Role of Public Service Motivation as Employees Face Organizational Change. *Public Administration Review* 75(5): 738-47.

Municipal and Library Board Relations

The *Political Context* section provides a summary of how a library CEO works with politicians, the library board and municipal staff. Participants in this study indicated a variety of different relationships with the players, which is a good representation of the models presented above.

The majority of participants indicated that they report directly to the library board and there is absolutely no reporting relationship to municipal staff. In only one case, the CEO is hired by the municipality and seconded by the library and reports directly to the mayor who is the chair of the library board. It was recognized that this relationship is not an easy one particularly as this CEO had previous experience in another community working at arm's length with the city.

Regardless of reporting, those participants who indicated a good working relationship, cited examples such as: being proactive about having councilors aware of what's going on in the library by building informal relationships and regularly inviting them to events, working closely with the city which is particularly helpful when it comes time to engage in capital projects, proactively supporting the city when a new initiative comes up without being directed to do so. One CEO identified the role of individual councilors as board members vs. their responsibility for initiatives in their ward as being problematic. Being able to support the growth of the library system across the city vs. the focus on branches in their ward is something that some councilors struggle with. In the same community, public library service is not at the top of the policy agenda, while other community services are. It is challenging in this situation to learn how to build relationships which often take a while to develop. As another CEO pointed out, when

there are problems, it is either a staff issue (library - city staff) or a council - board issue and the best way to resolve it is to try and understand the underlying issue and work hard to make the relationship better.

In one instance, it was identified that the library board - CEO relationship is also one that could be rather delicate. When the CEO has professional commitments outside of the day-to-day job, the board might be concerned that the individual will not be able to focus their entire energy on the job. Understanding the responsibility a leader has to the broad library sector and future leaders is something that will require a lot of discussions in some cases, as the individual will always be accountable to the board and want to maintain their respect.

Being a separate legal entity from the municipality allows libraries to ask council for funds for a new library for example, not ask them what they think. The role of the board is to determine the need. By being separate, libraries can be nimbler, yet remain supportive of city initiative. In today's environment as one participant notes, focusing on data driven decisions will take a library much further when seeking funding from council. Maintaining collegial relationships with city staff and actively building relationships with councilors on the board is something all participants identified. It is the skill of political acuity that is very valuable in this instance. What makes it difficult at times is that in today's employment context, it is very unlikely that CEOs will be in the same position for a long time (15+ years). Every time a new CEO is hired, or a new board is appointed (every 4 years), those relationships need to be re-built. This relationship building skill ties in to the skills identified above: communication skills; relationship building and influence.

Parallel with the Role of a CAO in a Municipality

This research paper identified a number of topics that need to be brought together and analyzed further: transferable skills are preferred; library CEOs don't need to have an MLIS, although one is preferred; there is a strong link between public service motivation and the values of librarianship; CEOs work very closely with municipal staff and politicians.

To bring the skills into perspective, the list compiled above will be compared to the characteristics of the successful CAO list provided by Siegel³⁰. That list separates the characteristics into traits, skills and behaviours. There are so many overlaps between those three elements and the findings of this study. To be more precise, some that are included and closely related are:

- Traits (respect; passion)
- Skills (emotional intelligence; politically sensitive; good communication skills including listening)
- Behaviours (be change oriented; build teams; surround yourself with great people; promote training and development opportunities; respect work-life balance)

In this book, five successful CAOs are profiled. Their stories have much in common with the participants in this research study. While of course a CAO's responsibility is greater in the sense that they oversee the operations of an entire municipality, the behaviours, traits and skills described are almost the same as those identified in this study. There are many examples to illustrate this, from the strong

³⁰ Siegel, David. 2015. *Leaders in the Shadows: The Leadership Qualities of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers*. Toronto: UTP.

support of mentoring younger professionals to their belief in the need to assemble a good team of people. To summarize it, Siegel³¹ says that the "major responsibility of a contemporary CAO is to assemble a strong team and to create an environment in which the team can excel". This is directly related to the comments many participants made. They all spoke of the need to have a strong team, to provide coaching opportunities, to give them room to grow and to always work towards building trust.

Siegel's book³² puts a significant focus on the concept that a municipal leader (a CAO in this context) should be able to successfully lead up to council, down to staff and out into the community / external stakeholders. When participants in this study were asked how they feel this concept applies to the work they do as public library CEOs, they all agreed with the statement. In addition, one participant commented on how the applicability of this statement is just a bit different in one area in the context of public libraries and that is because unlike the mayor who is the public face of the municipality vs. the city manager, in a library, it is more likely that the CEO is recognized in the community more than the chair of the library board. The board is appointed and it does not require the same level of visibility that politicians require. One respondent noted the importance of the "leading out" element: it is not enough for the library to do great things, stakeholders need to know this. If they do, they are able to raise the awareness of what the library does with others, in particular with politicians and funders.

Another participant spoke of the need for everyone in the organization to think through this lens and treat everyone as they are the most important customer. This ties

³¹ Siegel, David. 2015. *Leaders in the Shadows: The Leadership Qualities of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers*. Toronto: UTP.

³² Siegel, David. 2015. *Leaders in the Shadows: The Leadership Qualities of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers*. Toronto: UTP.

directly into advocacy and library leaders have known and focused for a long time on advocating for the value of the public library in the community.

To further expand on this parallel between the role of the CAO and that of the CEO, it is worth noting that over the years there have been several public CEOs or directors who only held an MLIS, no other graduate degrees and who have taken on senior roles in a municipality at one point. Markham and Halton Hills are both recent examples.

The arguments all point in the direction that the skills required to successfully lead a public library are very closely related to those required to run a municipality. And while the academic qualifications and backgrounds may vary, it is really the transferable skills such as communication, teamwork and all the others listed in this research paper that allow those in leadership positions in local government to successfully implement the strategic goals of the organization.

Conclusion

This research study set to determine the key leadership skills required to successfully lead a public library and to pin point any trends in the career paths of those leaders identified as great examples of public library CEOs.

The findings identified are valuable to current library leaders and human resources departments as they focus on succession planning, to library boards when they embark on the recruitment of a new CEO and to those aspiring to such positions in the future as they plan their careers and their professional development opportunities.

The research identified several key findings of interest to the groups identified above. Below is a summary:

- The career journey of participants point to some trends: accidental librarian; spent majority of their time in public libraries or have come to the role with significant administration experience in local government; have at one point been a specialist and recognize the value of being a generalist in the context of the work a CEO does; have been in a children's librarian role for a period of time.
- The leadership skills and behaviours identified are transferable and not unique to the profession. The key ones are: communication skills; relationship building and influence; change management; teamwork; professional involvement and mentorship; business skills (financial management; project management; policy writing and analysis); time management and successful work-life integration. In addition, others have been discussed during the interviews and some of those tie in to the character leadership dimensions³³. They include humility, humor, courage, integrity, judgment, collaboration, accountability and political acuity.
- The ongoing debate over the need to have an MLIS to be a library CEO or not did not result in a unilateral view from those interviewed. While some felt that a librarian is uniquely qualified to successfully run a public library because of their deep passion for public libraries and their understanding of digital literacy and intellectual freedom, not all agreed that having an MLIS is a requirement, but it could be a preferred academic qualification.
- There is a strong parallel between the skills and behaviours exhibited by a public library CEO and those a municipal CAO needs to possess. Evidenced by the list

³³ Seijts, G., Gandz, J., Crossan, M., Reno, M. (2015). *Character matters: Character dimensions' impact on leader performance and outcomes*. *Organizational Dynamics*. 44. 10.1016/j.orgdyn.2014.11.008. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270397738_Character_matters_Character_dimensions'_impact_on_leader_performance_and_outcomes

provided in Siegel's book, there is the argument that a municipal leader regardless of the field will have much in common. This further supports the earlier noted point about transferable skills and the MLIS requirement. In addition, a library CEO, just like a CAO, needs to know how to lead up, down and out. All participants supported this concept and its applicability to their role.

- While public service motivation might be seen as the explanation for the librarian's passion for public service and the value of public libraries, there is no conclusive answer to this. Some will continue to argue that librarians bring unique skills to the table and that those skills are not the same as those of other public servants.

As one participant put it: working in a public library is great, we build communities. And we can do so in a great work environment.

It is the ultimate role of a CEO to create a work environment that supports staff to accomplish the strategic priorities determined by the library board. Doing so successfully will involve a great deal of relationship building, looking outside the library community for great examples of innovation and success and having the emotional intelligence and political awareness to push agendas forward and persuasively influence those in a position of power to fund and support the public library.

The CEO role can sometimes become too focused on the administration and forget about the public and staff. It is important to never forget that while the focus of leading up, down and out will shift throughout the course of one day, all three elements should be equally important. By building a strong and diverse team and having the tools to question and probe recommendations and decisions they make, the leader will

be able to focus the attention on always working ahead and continually being innovative and bringing about change. As all participants remarked, change management and successfully modeling change within the organization is what drives innovation and encourages staff. This will often require making quick decisions and having the courage to do so.

While it is possible that the specific findings of this study in terms of how the skills and behaviours identified are applied in the context of public libraries in 2018 will shift with time as the environment and priorities change, the concepts themselves are likely to remain relevant for many years to come. Skills such as relationship building, communication, courage and political acuity are likely to always be present in the toolbox of a successful library leader and transcend the boundaries of libraries to extend to all local government leaders.

Definitions

ALA - American Library Association

AMCTO - Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers

APPL - Advancing Public Library Leadership

CAO - Chief Administrative Officer

CELUPL - Chief Executives of Large Urban Public Libraries

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

CFLA - Canadian Federation of Library Associations

CULC - Canadian Libraries Council

MLIS - Masters of Library and Information Science

NELI - Northern Exposure to Leadership Institute

OLA - Ontario Library Association

PLL - Public Library Leaders

SOLS - Southern Ontario Library Service

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

- Can you give me a brief career history including your academic accomplishments?
- So what got you interested in librarianship (or working in libraries depending on the context) and more specifically in being a public library CEO?
- There might be some discussion here about being a generalist vs. a specialist over the course of the career.
- From all the academic courses / programs you have taken over the years, what do you think has been the most useful in preparing you for your current position and why?
- How long have you been in the current position?
- Can you tell me a little more about your current reporting relationship(s)? In some Ontario libraries there is a very close relationship with the municipality, sometimes as close as having the CEO report to the Commissioner of Community Services. In others it is very separate. Then there is the library board as mandated.
- Can you describe a bit how these relationships have impacted your effectiveness over the years?
- Can you tell me a bit more about what else you do professionally and / or as a volunteer in addition to your job as CEO? How do you think these activities contribute to your success?
- What about work life balance and time management? Are there any tips or tricks you have developed that allow you to have such a demanding career and still engage in other activities (as described above)?
- In your experience, what have been the key elements that allowed you to feel that you are being successful in your position and that you are accomplishing your goals?
- Do you think it is possible that despite strong leadership, a team might not be able to accomplish goals or have you ever seen teams turn around with the right leader in place?
- Deep work is often challenging to accomplish in today's environment. Tell me a bit more about what you do to keep yourself energized in your role and maintain focus.
- If you were to provide advice to those looking to move into such a position in the future, what do you think are the key skills they should have?
- Do you think that these skills are unique to professional librarians or are there transferable skills that others with various educational backgrounds could apply to the position?
- The literature points to a the concept of a municipal leader as having the ability to lead up (board), down (staff) and out (community and external stakeholders). What do you think about that?
- And since we are in the world of libraries, is there a book that influenced you as a leader that you would like to recommend and why?