
**Leadership in Libraries: A focus on ethnic-minority librarians** offers a unique perspective on leadership in the field of libraries and information studies. Author Maha Kumaran writes that the focus of the book is on "visible minorities as in those who are non-Caucasian and have certain obvious characteristics that set them apart, such as accent, dress, etc., who work in the field of libraries and information sciences" (p. 6). However, she also stresses that while this may be the focus, the visible minorities that she feels will find this most useful are first generation visible minorities because of the challenges faced "trying or struggling to fit in" (p. 6).

The book is laid out in seven very readable and easily digestible sections. Kumaran begins by establishing context and defining relevant terms in the introduction and first chapter “Leadership as defined by culture, profession and gender.” The introduction and first chapter really serve to underline the intended focus of the book, fostering an understanding of the role that culture and leadership play together and an appreciation of the impact of the three key intelligences to leadership: cultural, social and emotional.

It is also in the first chapter that Kumaran begins to explore the idea of leadership versus management, which she fully develops in the second chapter “Managers and leaders.” I was initially concerned by the juxtaposition of managers and leaders, particularly in Table 2.1: Managers vs. Leaders, where managers are listed as being administrative and leaders as non-administrative (p. 55). This is repeated again shortly thereafter: “the manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people” or “the manager’s eye is on the bottom-line; the leader’s eye is on the horizon” (p. 55). This seemed to be solidifying the opinion that managers cannot be leaders, and vice versa. She ends this section, however, by stating that the roles today are often interconnected: both “managers and leaders manage and lead, and depend on each other’s skills to succeed” (p. 55). The next section on the topic reiterates that reversal – that not only can the necessary skills of both managers and leaders be taught and learned, but that these skills can then also be possessed by the same people.

The third chapter, “Leadership styles,” describes the theories behind leadership: *The Great Man, Trait theory, Behavioral theory, Situational theory and Contingency theory.* These are examined historically, developing the idea of how and why each worked in a given context. In looking at these styles and theories, leadership attributes are also examined, as is the dominance of women in the profession as a whole and the question of whether or not women bring a different leadership style, particularly in North America, the UK and Australia (p. 94).

“Leadership skills,” the fourth chapter, examines the major skills required of a leader: motivational skills, communication skills, time-management skills, fiscal skills and
conceptual skills. In contrast to other books on leadership, Kumaran describes these skills in the context of cultural differences. For example, Kumaran states that with “cross-cultural communications there are additional challenges: information is misunderstood or lost in translation for many reasons, such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, or confirmation bias” (p. 112), and she continues by clarifying these terms and setting these within the broader scope of the different types of communication that are used within organizations.

In chapter five, “Leadership in school, public, and academic libraries in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia,” Kumaran begins by acknowledging that leadership literature in librarianship typically focuses on the leadership crisis that libraries face: the “lack of leadership initiatives and the issue of librarians still being hesitant about leadership in libraries” (p. 133-4). She notes that this crisis is present across library types and even further amplified with regard to ethnic-minority leadership in libraries.

A review of the history of school libraries and leadership in the US, the UK, Australia and Canada shows a similar struggle for survival, funding and professional skills development. It is also noted that many school libraries are being run by solo-librarians, and with little funding, the issue of gaining leadership skills becomes even more challenging.

Public libraries, particularly in the US and Canada, have benefited from partners and advocates such as William Ewart, Andrew Carnegie and Melvil Dewey, but research indicates that many public libraries are “unprepared when it comes to future leadership” (p. 142). The issues for public libraries remain tied to government funding and a lack of partnerships. While the library associations representing the UK, Canada, the US and Australia all offer some variation of a statement on leadership, none focus on ethnic-minority leadership within libraries. Kumaran stresses that all leadership skills would be of value in the public library setting due to increased budgetary and funding concerns.

It was found that academic libraries focus on the importance of instruction as an integral part of the evaluative process. As such, there are opportunities for academic librarians to develop leadership skills, and it is further noted that much of the literature that focuses on ethnic-minority librarians is from academic libraries (p. 150); however, none of these quite get at what Kumaran does in Leadership in Libraries. This is where Kumaran outlines the “Ethnic-minority librarians survey,” its methodology and results. The survey questionnaires are appended at the end of the book.

Kumaran concludes with almost a call to action, stating that “Canada, the US, Australia and the UK cannot call themselves truly multicultural societies if their library leadership fields do not represent their demographics. Leadership is about being inclusive” (p. 166). It is also in the conclusion that an action plan using the “Four stages of leadership development” is suggested (p. 166-7).

The “Four stages of leadership development” mentioned in the conclusion was particularly interesting. New librarians might find much of Kumaran’s advice to ethnic-minority librarians personally useful: acquiring knowledge and practicing skills in the first
stage, applying what you learn and completing small projects in the second stage, accepting new challenges and bigger projects in the third stage, and, finally, gaining a following with others who trust you (p.166-7).

My only criticism of this title is simply that Kumaran sells her publication short. While Kumaran tells us that the focus of the book is on first-generation, visible minorities, I believe that it will serve not only this population but all people who work in the field of libraries and information sciences. This publication is not only useful, but relevant and a much needed addition to this area of literature.

**Leadership in Libraries** is both intensely personal and incredibly informative. The coverage of leadership in libraries, as the title should suggest, was extensive, and I found the content personally very useful, despite not falling into the visible minority focus of the book. The best and most useful parts of this book were its readability and applicability. First, the author's very understandable and thorough coverage of leadership theories, styles and skills, makes this a useful reader on library leadership generally. Second, this would be an excellent resource for ensuring that those leaders in the ethnic-majority not only understand the particular challenges that ethnic-minorities face as first generation visible minorities in libraries but, that in understanding these challenges, are still able to identify and cultivate the leaders within this group. A copy of this title should be on the shelf of any library – public, academic, or otherwise – that is interested in developing and strengthening the leadership of its people.

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