LEADING LIBRARIES

HOW TO CREATE A SERVICE CULTURE

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CONTENTS

Preface | vii
Acknowledgments | ix
Introduction | xi

CHAPTER 1 **LEADERSHIP THEORIES: TRADITIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL** | 1

CHAPTER 2 **SERVICE LEADERSHIP AND ITS PARADIGM IN LIBRARIES** | 13

CHAPTER 3 **CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AS THE FOUNDATION** | 27

CHAPTER 4 **BUILDING RAPPORT** | 43

CHAPTER 5 **BALANCING ENCOURAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY** | 57

CHAPTER 6 **INNOVATION AND EVOLVING SERVICE** | 73

CHAPTER 7 **STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE PRACTICE OF INNOVATION AND STRATEGIC THINKING** | 89

CHAPTER 8 **SUSTAINING SERVICE AS A VALUE** | 109

CHAPTER 9 **FORMALIZING SERVICE LEADERSHIP IN LIBRARIES: EMBEDDING PROCESSES AND POLICIES** | 125

CHAPTER 10 **SERVICE LEADERSHIP IN LIBRARIES** | 139

Bibliography | 153
Index | 163

PREFACE

While writing this book, we struggled with a very fundamental concept: leadership. It has given us pause at every turn. Perhaps it is because nomenclature and detail have always been important to our profession. We know this to be true because when we first started discussing the concept of this book with the American Library Association (ALA), the working title was actually *Managing People in Libraries: Creating and Sustaining Servant Leadership in Service Organizations*, a title that spoke very much to the model and the values that we wanted to convey. However, while ALA was interested in the concept and thought that it would have appeal, there were questions about the use of the word *servant*—not concerns that we were using servant leadership as a lens to look at management in our profession, but rather the apprehension that the use of the word "servant" would be distasteful to the audience, particularly those readers who would be interested in reading a book about leadership.

Perhaps the term *leadership* has confounded us because it seems always to be contingent upon a position of authority or, in other words, management titles, and what is discussed in this book makes no such assumption. Certainly, those in positions of authority have more opportunities to lead and certainly more responsibility. As Voltaire is reputed to have said, "With great power comes great responsibility." Strangely, a leader, particularly a leader who places service above all, is practically the antithesis of the traditional authoritarian model in libraries. More than that, there is a pervasive argument about whether a true leader seeks power (or authority or control) or has a more altruistic purpose. Many leadership theories have taken one side or the other of this argument, explicitly or by assumption. That said, if service is at the core of librarianship (and there may be arguments against that as the profession evolves), then it should also be at the core of leadership in libraries.

We have searched through leadership books and management articles, philosophical treatises and political documents, even dictionaries and thesauri, searching for a word that would convey the essence of leadership without the presumption of some sort of hierarchy. *Entrepreneur* was an attractive term, particularly in view of its recent popularity in library literature. Advocate, champion, activist, frontier, guide, advisor, visionary, pioneer, revolutionary, and many more words were all considered and rejected because of the political connotations that many of these terms have assumed.

So, we will stick to the term *leadership*. That said, we want it understood that we are not talking about the standard definition of leadership.

The title of this book was chosen very deliberately. We wanted to explore leading in libraries—not leadership in terms of being a leader (largely assumed by position authority) but the act of leading—with a focus on what it means to lead, the acts and behaviors that manifest and how they are derived from individual interactions with others and how they impact a larger organization.

This book is not precisely a how-to, although it will provide some examples and cases along with some reflective exercises and tools so that those who are so inclined can see how a commitment to service manifests in action. The service orientation is fundamental. Many management books and indeed many managers prescribe certain behaviors that are leadership behaviors or management best practices, but there is no commitment, no sincerity behind those actions. What we are discussing goes beyond leading with intention; it is leading with meaning.

Included in this volume are tools for exercising service leadership skills and modeling service leadership behavior. A service commitment is mandatory; otherwise, the efforts lack sincerity and are just going through the motions. As Robert Greenleaf said, "technique without the attitude is phoney."[1]

NOTE

1. Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant Leader Within: A Transformative Path* (Mahwah, NJ: Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 2003), 46.

INTRODUCTION

LEADING LIBRARIES: SERVICE LEADERSHIP IN A SERVICE ORGANIZATION

Introducing and extending a service leadership model into an organization's cultural values and practices can be challenging. Not only does an individual have to be committed to service, but she must be able to communicate that value and the attendant vision to the stakeholders and then follow through with this vision, leading by example. However, for an individual to be a true service leader, she needs to embody the values of service leadership.

Libraries typify a service organization. They are models of public service in that their mission is to serve their patrons, be they faculty and students at a university or at an elementary or high school, citizens of a municipality, officials and employers of a government entity, or stakeholders in a private enterprise. Although libraries are attentive to their clientele, they have struggled to adopt this service value in their internal operations and may not model it for their colleagues and staff.

The foundation of the service leadership model in this book rests on five concepts: conscientiousness, rapport building, encouragement and accountability, innovation, and sustainability. These concepts are formalized or developed through two approaches that embed these values into the policies and processes of the organization: strategy formalizes innovation and strategic thinking and modeling reinforces all five values in the management processes and systems. The importance of these elements of service leadership will be highlighted briefly below, and each will be covered in more depth in a chapter dedicated to that concept.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness requires that service is a fundamental motivator. It could also be called character, integrity, or self-awareness. To be conscientious is to encourage an individual to be attentive to who they are and what they believe in. This self-awareness reveals their beliefs and disbeliefs, making them aware of their true values. Service leadership is typified by ethical people who strive to be trustworthy, credible, and committed to their values.

Being conscientious harkens back to Burns' transformational leadership theory and the underlying belief in moral leadership. However, moral leadership relies on the relationship between the leader and the followers, assuming that leaders are conscientious by taking responsibility for their actions while considering the "the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers."[1] A transforming leadership "ultimately becomes *moral* in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both."[2] However, service leadership reaches beyond the individual leader with positional authority and is based on the belief that all individuals can be service leaders if they are conscientious.

Chapter 3 will examine the following:

- contemplation and self-reflection;
- awareness;
- consideration and inspiration;
- honesty and integrity;
- authenticity and trust;
- values and decision-making;
- ethical leadership: altruism and service; and
- professional ethics.

Building Rapport

The way in which service leaders build rapport with their colleagues, employees, and customers or patrons is through communication—not just verbal communication but listening as well. As discussed in chapter four, listening is a key aspect of communication and is widely recognized as crucial to any organization. Despite this recognition, most literature examining the development of leaders focuses on the transmitting aspect of communication, such as talking or presenting, in which the leader speaks and the employee listens, which is crucial for the development of leaders. However, this assumes that communication is unidirectional and that the person with positional authority should be delivering the message. Service leaders, on the other hand, understand that two-way communication is fundamental to being a successful leader because it builds rapport with employees and patron, more effectively meeting their needs through the acknowledgment that people are valued and respected for their knowledge, beliefs, and concerns.[3]

But listening also goes beyond what is said, reaches even to what a person is not saying, in a couple of ways. First, a service leader can practice listening by observing an employee or patron's body language, including their eye and facial expressions, and voice fluctuations. This is often considered by some as listening for feelings. Second, a service leader can consider what is missing from the communication: Are there topics that are avoided or things that are specifically not said—the elephant in the room? Such topics are usually significant, if difficult, and very indicative about the climate in an organization. Communication is the foundation of rapport, building a shared understanding and personal investment.

In addition to elaborating on rapport, chapter 4 will examine the intricacies around communicating effectively and building a service leadership organization, including listening to others, encouraging open conversation and moral dialogue, and communicating concern.

Balancing Encouragement and Accountability

The third element of service leadership is to be encouraging to employees and colleagues while holding them and oneself accountable. Encouragement and accountability are really two sides of the same coin. One of the easiest ways for service leaders to encourage their employees is by delegating authority and empowering them to take charge and be leaders themselves. This demonstrates both encouragement and the opportunity for accountability. Leban and Stone believe that if a leader ties these motivators to the overall goals of the organization, then the leader will lay the foundation for a network of support throughout the organization.[4]

Procedural and social justice issues are another way in which service leaders can motivate and encourage their employees to succeed within the organization, holding their management team and themselves accountable. Creating a working environment that is harassment-free, bullying-free, and safe will create a positive work environment where morale is high and retention is high. Although there are federal and state laws as well as organizational rules calling for employers to have this kind of working environment, not all rules and laws are followed. Employees who believe that the leaders of their institution are lacking in procedural and social justice endure an environment of discontent and overall job dissatisfaction.

Chapter 5 will also address the following areas in depth and their implications for service leadership: influence, personal accountability as a library leader, emotional intelligence, empowerment, and social and procedural justice.

Innovation and Evolving Service

Libraries are facing change at an alarming rate; instead of slowing down it is increasing, driven by technology, economics, competing priorities and more. Libraries can approach change in one of two ways: They can drive the change or they can let it drive them. In many instances, the response is more reactive than proactive. Employees are often told how to fix a problem instead of being encouraged to address possible issues before they become problems. Employees understand that the organization that they work for has a culture that punishes instead of praises individual initiative. In an environment in which employees lack the motivation to be innovative, change management becomes impossible because the employees will continue to look up the organizational ladder for permission to change or seek a position in a different organization that will recognize their potential contribution. In the literature as early as the 1880s, James recognized that leaders need help and that their talents didn't always fit with the situation.[5] Davis and Luthans, behavioral theorists, furthered this belief by supporting the idea that a "leader's behavior serves as a discriminative stimulus . . . or cue . . . to evoke the subordinate's task behavior."[6]

Leaders today need their employees to be proactive and show initiative, collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards. Thus employees are needed who feel energetic and dedicated, and who are absorbed by their work. In other words, organizations need engaged workers.[7]

In the context of libraries and the change that they constantly face, chapter 6 will also explore:

- creativity, vision, and innovation;
- change management and strategic thinking; and
- challenging the process and risk taking.

Incorporating innovation into the culture can be done by encouraging strategic thinking throughout the organization and applying an inclusive and ongoing strategic-planning process.

STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE PRACTICE OF INNOVATION AND STRATEGIC THINKING

Building on innovation and strategic thinking, strategic planning is the practice or normalization of those values. It is also one of those activities that is generally organization-wide, although it can be done on a micro level within an organization. As stated above, it has traditionally been the managers' responsibility, in conjunction with their employees, to develop a strategic plan for their organization. However, creating a strategic plan is not enough; the organization needs not only to communicate this plan but also to follow through with it. The reason for this is that everyone throughout the organization knows what its values and mission are and also how the day-to-day business should be done.[8]

Following through on values is also critical for a leader. Leaders can do this by modeling the behavior that they value. If, for example, the leader says that he believes his employees should take risks but he is cautious and does not take risks, his behavior will speak volumes to the employee. As a result, employees will not take risks because they do not feel that the leader truly believes in risk taking.

A service leader, on the other hand, motivates employees to get involved in their organization, stressing the importance of strategic planning and how crucial their input is to the organization's future success. Employees, after all, are the lifeblood of any organization, and without them the organization would not exist. Without their expert knowledge and their day-to-day understanding of how the work actually gets done, the organization not only would stand still but fall apart. A service leader recognizes that the future of the library rests on the employees' talents and that by engaging them in the planning, they will become more invested in the outcome.

Chapter 7 will address the practices involved in strategic planning and following through, including the following:

- attributes of strategic plan;
- designing the strategic plan;
- crisis management;
- strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats;
- developing strategies; and
- assessing the library strategic plan.

SUSTAINING SERVICE AS A VALUE

Creating a service leadership organizational model is not a one-time endeavor; it must be nourished and developed so that it can continue to grow and become engrained in every corner of the organization. In order to sustain the service leadership model, leaders need to recognize that each employee is unique and holds fundamental beliefs and values that affect how they do their jobs. After recognizing these differences, leaders should acknowledge that employees need to be able to grow through professional development activities so that they can develop their strengths and work on their weaknesses. It is important for leaders throughout the organization to encourage professional development, not only for their employees' career development but also for succession planning and innovation for the organization. Ultimately, what the organization needs to create is a learning environment where people are mentored so that they can advance not only in the organization but in their careers.

To encourage a climate of learning, each individual working for the institution must become a steward, committed to everyone who works there. For Bradford and Cohen, the leader needs to be more than just a hero; he needs to be someone who develops his employees in order to build a successful team.[9]

Chapter 8 will discuss how to create a culture of purpose and service that is sustainable and effective, including the following:

- defining the purpose and vision;
- advocating service leadership;
- building an environment of trust;
- performance;
- development and mentoring;
- assessment and feedback;
- systematizing innovation and change; and
- building community, stewardship, and sustaining.

FORMALIZING SERVICE LEADERSHIP IN LIBRARIES: EMBEDDING PROCESSES AND POLICIES

While chapter 8 discusses building a service organization, chapter 9 is concerned with the codification of those values, the policies and procedures that provide the framework. These aspects may be overlooked, considered as less important, but formally documenting procedures and systems in a way that is aligned with values send a clear message. For example, articulating individual or programmatic goals consistent with values and evaluating and rewarding them accordingly will reinforce those values.

Modeling or sustaining the values in the organization is generally also an organization-wide effort requiring buy-in from a high level. However, like strategic planning, it can be done effectively at the unit, project, or service level. Sustaining the culture of service leadership requires more than just espousing its values and pointing to a philosophy document; it necessitates embedding the values within the activities and systems of the organization. In other words, the policies and procedures should reinforce the efforts that the organization wishes to model—in this case, that service in whatever form it takes is superlative. For example, it is a truism that people do what they are rewarded for, and in a service organization, the rewards are likely to be intangible though no less important in signally what is valued and reinforcing desirable behavior. Efforts around merit pay and raises, must go through the hierarchy. However, rewards of a more intrinsic nature can be identified and conferred at any level in the organization.

Chapter 9 will examine how to systematize and model service values in an organization, including the following:

- recruitment and selection;
- learning and personnel development;
- performance evaluation;

- rewards and compensation;
- accountability and termination; and
- leadership development and succession planning.

SERVICE LEADERSHIP IN LIBRARIES

Chapter 10 will focus on service leadership as an organizational value, how that manifests in its mission and activities and how it is perceived by patrons, both internal and external, including the following:

- employee as the patron;
- patron perception of the service culture;
- service quality; and
- organizational culture.

It will also discuss the environment of change in libraries and the necessity of being responsive and staying relevant. The mission of libraries is centered on their mission and providing what their patrons need: the ability to provide effective service is critical.

NOTES

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2. Ibid., 20.
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9. David L. Bradford and Allan R. Cohen, "The Postheroic Leader," *Training and Development Journal* 38, no. 1 (1984): 40–49.

INDEX

……

A

ability, leadership as, 6
accountability. *See* encouragement and accountability
action as nonverbal cue, 47
ADDIE (analyze, design, develop, implement, evaluate) model, 104, 117
advocating service leadership, 110–111
Aguilar, Francis J., 97
altruism, 32–33, 37
American Library Association (ALA)
    Code of Ethics, 38
    Freedom to Read Statement, 38
    Library Bill of Rights Statement, 38
Anzalone, Filippa Marullo, 49
assessment
    and feedback, 118–119
    of strategic plan, 95, 104–105
authentic leadership, 10–11
authenticity and trust, 34–36
Avolio, Bruce J., 8

B

Bass, Bernard M., 8, 129
Beck, Curtis D., 135
behavior
    leadership as, 6
    and usage patterns, 99
behavioral theories, 5
Bell, Arthur H., 43, 50–51
Bennis, Warren, 2
Berry, Leonard, 15, 130, 131, 135, 139
bias or preset agenda, listening without, 53
Bird, C., 4
Blanchard, Ken, 4
Brandt, Jeremy, 113
Buddha, 27–28
Buddhism, 27–28
bullying, workplace, 68–69
bundled service, 79
Burley-Allen, Madelyn, 34, 46
Burns, James MacGregor, 7, 8, 11, 32, 135
Bush, George H. W., 17

C

Carlyle, Thomas, 4
Caruso, David R., 62
Catch 22 (Heller), 96
challenging the process, 84–85
change
    barriers/resistance to, 119–120
    overview, 78–79
change management, 80–83, 119–120
Charan, Ram, 58
charismatic leadership, 9–10
Clair, Judith A., 97
Code of Ethics (ALA), 38
collective leadership, 19–20
communication
    concern, communicating, 49–54
    listening skills, improving, 51–53
    nonverbal cues, 47–48
    open conversation and moral dialogue, 48–49
    overview, 43–47
    tools for development, 54
community, building, 120
compensation and rewards, 132
concern, communicating, 49–54
Conger, Jay A., 10, 91
conscientiousness
    authenticity and trust, 34–36
    consideration and inspiration, 32–33
    contemplation and self-reflection, 28–31
    honesty and integrity, 33–34
    overview, xi–xii, 27–28
    self-awareness, 31–32
    tools for development, 39
    values and decision-making, 36–37
consideration and inspiration, 32–33
contemplation and self-reflection, 28–31
contingency theory (situational leadership), 5
Covey, Steven R., 35, 126, 141
creativity, 74–76, 78
crisis management, 97
customer service orientation, internal and external, 140–142

D

Daniel, Teresa, 68
Darwin, Charles, 78
decision-making and values, 36–37
DeGraaf, Don, 45
development and mentoring, 115–118
development tools. *See* tools for development
Devonish, Dwayne, 68
Dewey, Barbara I., 75
Dickson, Peter R., 139–140
direct service models, 79
Disney, Walt, 73
distributive justice, 65
diversity, 112–113
Drucker, Peter R., 92
Dupree, Max, 121

E

Edison, Thomas, 76
Einstein, Albert, 4
emotional blueprint, 62
emotional intelligence, 10, 61–63
empathetic listening, 46–47, 50
employee as customer, 140–142
empowerment, 63–65, 135
encouragement and accountability
  emotional intelligence, 61–63
  empowerment, 63–65
  influence, 57–58
  overview, xiii, 57
  personal accountability as a library leader, 58–61
  social and procedural justice, 65–69
  termination and accountability, 133–134
  tools for development, 69–70
entrepreneurs, librarians thinking like, 80
environmental scan, 99
ethical egoism, 37
ethical leadership, 11, 37–38
evolving service. *See* innovation and evolving service
exemplary leadership, five practices of, 9

F

failure, behaviors leading to, 58
fair treatment of employees, 66
favoritism, 67, 128–129, 134
feedback, 69, 83
Filek, Robert, 90
filtering out superfluous or repetitive information to get at the facts, 52
Follow the Leader (Gobillot), 3
Ford, Leighton, 135
formalizing service leadership in libraries
  accountability and termination, 133–134
  leadership development and succession planning, 134–136
  learning and personnel development, 129–131
  overview, xvi–xvii, 125–127
  performance evaluation, 131–132
  recruitment and selection, 127–129
  rewards and compensation, 132
  tools for development, 136
Franklin, Benjamin, 94
Freedom to Read Statement (ALA), 38

G

Galton, Francis, 4
Gates, Robert M., 17
George, Bill, 10
goals, 93–94
Gobillot, Emmanuel, 3
Goleman, D., 10
Great Man theory, 4, 5, 134
Greenleaf, Robert, 13–14, 29, 31, 49, 53, 111
Grönfeldt, Svafa, 15, 16, 22, 74, 78, 80, 142, 147

H

Haass, Richard N., 77, 84, 112, 130, 135
Heller, Joseph, 96
Hernon, Peter, 143
Hersey, Paul, 4
Herzberg, Frederick, 118
hiring process, 127–129
Hogan, Robert, 50
honesty and integrity, 33–34
House, Robert, 9
Hughes, Richard, 75
human resources (HR), 126
Humphrey, Albert, 97
Hunter, James C., 58

I

influence, 57–58
informational diversity, 113
innovation and evolving service
  challenging the process, 84–85
  change, 78–79
  change management, 80–83
  creativity, 74–76, 78
  innovation defined, 75
  motivating factors for, 74
  overview, xiii–xiv, 73–74
  risk taking, 84–85

- systematizing innovation and change, 119–120
- tools for development, 86–87
- vision, 74, 77, 78

inspiration and consideration, 32–33
integrity and honesty, 33–34
interactions
- list of common frustrating, 142–143
- patron's perception of, 144–145

J
Jones, Rebecca, 97, 99

K
Kanungo, Rabindra N., 10, 91
Kennedy, John F., 17
Kontakos, Anne-Marie, 66
Kouzes, James M., 9, 39, 84
Kovel-Jarboe, Patricia, 119

L
Larson, Colleen L., 67
leadership
- as ability, 6
- as behavior, 6
- development and succession planning, 134–136
- examples of, 4
- library leadership, 21–23
- management compared, 1–3
- overview, 3–4
- as relationship, 6–7
- service leadership and wanting to be a leader, difference between, 23
- as skill, 6
- as trait, 5–6

leadership theories
- authentic leadership, 10–11
- behavioral theories, 5
- contingency theory (situational leadership), 5
- ethical leadership, 11
- Great Man theory, 4, 5, 134
- overview, 1, 4–7
- servant leadership, 11, 13–14
- shared leadership (participative) theory, 5
- trait theories, 5
- transactional leadership, 5
- transformational leadership, 7–10

learning and personnel development, 129–131
learning organization, cultivation of, 19–21
Leban, Bill, 80, 118
Library Bill of Rights Statement (ALA), 38
library service, patron's perception of, 145–146
Lincoln, Abraham, 17
Lippmann, Walter, 17
listening
- bias or preset agenda, listening without, 53
- empathetic listening, 46–47, 50
- hearing words but not really listening, 46–47
- overview, 43–47
- signs that you are listening, presenting, 52
- skills, improving, 51–53
- in spurts, 47
- to what is said and what is not said, 51–52

Lueneburger, Christoph, 7, 11, 65, 110, 120, 121, 130

M
management and leadership compared, 1–3
manager, transition from employee to, 59–61
Mann, R. D., 4
Martin, Jason, 21–22
Maslow's hierarchy of needs, 113, 119, 130
Matarazzo, James M., 21
Mayer, John D., 61
McFarlin, Dean B., 66
McRaven, William H., 4
mentoring and development, 115–118, 135
metrics, 3, 36, 104–105, 131, 147
Millennium Librarian's Standards of Behaviors, 147
mission statement, 93
modeling, 35
Moorman, Christine, 139
moral dialogue and open conversation, 48–49
morality, 8
Moran, Barbara B., 149
Morgenstern, Jim, 97, 99
motivating employees, 118–119
Murtadha, Khaula, 67

N
Neal, Larry, 45
negative leadership behaviors, 58
nonverbal cues, 47–48
Northouse, Peter G., 5, 11, 33, 109, 135
Nye, Joseph, 4, 57

O
Oakleaf, Megan, 146, 147
objectives, 94
On Great Service: A Framework for Action (Berry), 139
open conversation and moral dialogue, 48–49
opinion, seeking diversity of, 53
organizational crisis, 81–82

organizational culture, 148–150
organizational leadership, 19–21
Origin of Species (Darwin), 78

P

participative (shared leadership) theory, 5
passive listening, 50–51
Patterson, Kathleen, 120
Pearson, Christine M., 97
performance, 114–115
performance evaluation, 118–119, 131–132
personal accountability as a library leader, 58–61
personal service, expectation of, 22
personnel development and learning, 129–131
Peter Principle, 60
physical service, 79–80
Pinchot, Gifford, 80
policies and processes. *See* formalizing service leadership in libraries
position descriptions, 127
Posner, Barry Z., 9, 39, 84
Powell, Colin, 112
preservice models, 79
procedural and social justice, 65–69
process behaviors, 6
professional development, 115–118
professional standards, 38
purpose and vision, defining, 109–110

Q

Quinn, James Brian, 15

R

rapport building
    concern, communicating, 49–54
    listening to others, 43–47
    open conversation and moral dialogue, 48–49
    overview, xii–xiii
    tools for development, 54
recruitment and selection, 127–129
reference interview, 54
relationship, leadership as, 6–7
resources, 93
respect, 113–114
responsibility, 94–95
rewards and compensation, 132
Riggs, Donald E., 21, 92, 93
risk taking, 84–85
Rogers, Everett M., 84
Russell, Robert F., 30, 77
Rust, Roland T., 139

S

Saks, Alan M., 67
Salovey, Peter, 61, 62
Schreiber, Becky, 22
self-awareness, 31–32
self-reflection and contemplation, 28–31
self-service, 79
Sendjaya, Sen, 32, 35
Senge, Peter, 19–20, 29, 77, 89–90, 113, 117, 120
servant leadership
    overview, 11, 13–14
    transformational leadership compared, 13
service leadership
    defining service, 14–16
    embodying the service leadership mindset, 18–19
    leader, difference between service leadership and wanting to be a, 23
    library leadership, 21–23
    overview, xi, xvii
service leadership in libraries. *See also* formalizing service leadership in libraries
    employee as customer, 140–142
    interactions, patron's perception of, 144–145
    library service, patron's perception of, 145–146
    organizational culture, 148–150
    overview, 139–140
    service quality, 146–148
    tools for development, 150–151
    user perception, 142–144
service organization culture
    advocating service leadership, 110–111
    assessment and feedback, 118–119
    community, building, 120
    defining the purpose and vision, 109–110
    development and mentoring, 115–118
    overview, 109
    performance, 114–115
    sustainability, 120–122
    systematizing innovation and change, 119–120
    tools for development, 122
    trust, building an environment of, 112–114
service quality, 146–148
Shannon, John, 22
shared leadership (participative) theory, 5
situation analysis, 99
situational leadership (contingency) theory, 5
skill, leadership as, 6
Skinner's reinforcement theory, 85, 118

Smith, Dayle M., 43, 50–51
social and procedural justice, 65–69
soft power, 57–58
Spears, Larry C., 28–29, 31
STEP diagrams, 97
stewardship, 120–121
Stoffle, Carla, 96
Stone, Romuald, 80, 118
strategic planning
  assessment of strategic plan, 104–105
  attributes of, 92–95
  crisis management, 97
  designing the strategic plan, 95–97
  developing strategies, 103–104
  environmental scan, 99
  overview, xiv–xv, 89–93
  situation analysis, 99
  strategy in, 94
  SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, 97, 98, 99, 100–103
  tools for development, 105–106
  usage and behavior patterns, 99
Strother, Judith, 15, 16, 22, 74, 78, 80, 142, 147
succession planning and leadership development, 134–136
sustainability, 120–122
sustaining service as a value, xv–xvi
Sweeney, Paul D., 66
SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, 97, 98, 99, 100–103
systematizing innovation and change, 119–120
systems thinking, 89–90

T

task behaviors, 6
Taylor, Robert, 54
teams, 112–113
technological change, 96
termination and accountability, 133–134
Tilley, Colin, 45
timelines, 94
tools for development
  conscientiousness, 39
  encouragement and accountability, 69–70
  formalizing service leadership in libraries, 136
  innovation and evolving service, 86–87
  listening and building rapport, 54
  service leadership in libraries, 150–151
  service organization culture, 122
  strategic planning, 105–106
training, 115–117, 129–131
trait, leadership as, 5–6
trait theory of leadership, 5
transactional leadership
  overview, 5
  transformational leadership compared, 7–8
transformational leadership
  charismatic leadership, 9–10
  exemplary leadership, five practices of, 9
  servant leadership compared, 13
  transactional leadership compared, 7–8
transition from employee to manager, 59–61
transparency, 35, 113
Trevino, Linda K., 11
trust
  and authenticity, 34–36
  building an environment of, 112–114

U

usage and behavior patterns, 99
user perception, 142–144
utilitarianism, 37

V

value diversity, 113
values and decision-making, 36–37
vanDuinkerken, Wyoma, 37
vision, 74–75, 77, 78, 110
vision statement, 93
Vondey, Michelle, 120

W

Weingand, Darlene E., 142, 149
Wilder, Stanley J., 21
Wilkes, C. Gene, 135
workplace bullying, 68–69
Wren, J. Thomas, 66

Y

Yukl, Gary, 62

Z

Zeithaml, Valarie A., 145