Fostering Innovation in Library Management and Leadership: The University of Hong Kong Libraries Leadership Institute

Peter Edward Sidorko
Deputy Librarian
The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

In 2003, the University of Hong Kong Libraries launched its inaugural *Library Leadership Institute*. This residential leadership and management training experience is aimed at providing library directors and senior librarians from research libraries in the East Asia region with the unique opportunity to develop new skills in the volatile area of innovative management and leadership in the information sector.

Following four consecutively successful Institutes, this paper will draw on the experience gained in delivering such an Institute. With participants hailing from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and several other countries in the region, the author, who is also the principal organiser for the Institute and a regular facilitator, will outline:

- The background to creating and delivering such an Institute;
- The identified needs for such training;
- An overview of how the Institute operates including the philosophy and techniques adopted including the use of practical/real-life experiences, case studies, high level participation, teamwork, problem solving, group and individual presentations and specialist international facilitators;
- An overview of the changing needs of participants attending such an Institute;
- The experience of participants attending the four Institutes; and
- An analysis of the degree of success of the Institute with a review of survey results of past participants' views on the practical leadership, management and innovation skills gained by them.

The paper will conclude with an overview of the likely future directions for the Institute.

Keywords: Leadership, Management, Librarians, Professional Development, Skills.

1 Introduction

The range and complexity of challenges facing libraries and librarians today are unprecedented. Certainly the proliferation of information technologies has made a significant impact on libraries in the way they deliver their services and content as well as the format of that very content as most libraries move towards digital collections or at the very least hybrid print and digital collections. In this environment there is also growing expectations of users for quality, accuracy and immediate responsiveness to their needs.

In Hong Kong, and indeed in many other parts of the world, funding for academic libraries has been reduced or flattened in response to the economic downturn that was experienced in recent years. In China however, just the opposite has been the situation during the past five years with several large new academic library buildings being dedicated annually. Within this volatile climate the need for strong leadership is essential and librarians "need to be quick, nimble, flexible and able to deal with constant ambiguity in an ever-changing environment" [1]. The ability to do this does not necessarily come naturally to librarians nor, for that matter, to any other professional group. Many library courses today include subjects dealing with issues such as leadership and organisational change (for example the Master of Science in Library and Information Management (MSc[LIM]) course at the University of Hong Kong includes subjects such as leading and managing in the workplace and professional development and change) but the introduction of such subjects is a fairly recent phenomenon.

2 A Leadership Institute for Asian Librarians

While leadership institutes for librarians are common, these are largely concentrated in the United States and to a lesser extent in other countries. In fact in their 2004 article on library leadership training programs, Mason and Wetherbee [2] provide a comprehensive listing of such programs available to librarians worldwide and note that "the majority are located in the United States, but one exists in Australia and another in Canada" [3]. In recognising the dynamic and unpredictable world that today's librarians operate within, leadership skills for these librarians becomes a necessity rather than a luxury. This need is no less critical in Asia

than it is in these other countries where such institutes are available.

In 2002 the recognition of this need compelled the University's Librarian, Anthony W. Ferguson, and his Senior Management Team to develop a program aimed at Asian librarians. As a then serving faculty member of the Australian CAUDIT-EDUCAUSE Institute [4], the author had gained valuable experience in facilitating and organising such an event. Key objectives for the Institute were identified. Broadly speaking these were, and remain:

1. To develop and enhance innovative management and leadership qualities in academic and research librarians in the East Asia region including Hong Kong's own librarians, particularly at our own University, and,
2. To enhance collaboration and foster relations among academic and research libraries in the region.

These objectives served as the guiding principles for the development of the program that would evolve into the University of Hong Kong Libraries Leadership Institute [5]. Following planning and development, the first Institute was held in May, 2003 over a five day period. Following on from the successful first year and in response to the overwhelming demand for places, it was agreed that the Institute should be held annually. The fourth Institute was held in May, 2006 over a four day period.

3 Institute Operations

In order for participants to gain a complete experience and in order to facilitate networking and collaborative opportunities, it was determined that the Institute should be multi-day and residential in nature. Also, in order to ensure focused attention from facilitators, the number of participants is kept at an optimal number of around forty. Other techniques that were adopted included the use of practical/real-life experiences, case studies, high level participation, teamwork, problem solving, group and individual presentations and specialist international facilitators. The emphasis of the Institute was intended to be on examining leadership styles, self-discovery and analysis and development of skills.

3.1 Teamwork

The concept of teamwork remains a key component of the Institute. Based on information provided in their applications, participants are arranged into teams prior to the Institute and remain in those teams for the duration of the Institute which culminates in team presentations of their case study findings. Teams are assigned based on their employment positions as well as their place of origin. This

ensures that teams are diverse both in terms of their work skills and knowledge as well as their culture, thus providing a broader experience for the participants both professionally and culturally.

3.2 Content

The Institute is divided into sessions. Each session represents a topic that has been identified as a key issue facing librarians in the region at the time of the particular Institute. In 2003, our emphasis was less on the impact of technology on the library and more on the specific personnel related skills so necessary during a time of significant organisational change. Sessions dealt with topics such as changing organisational paradigms, problem solving, performance management, project management and collaboration. In response to participants' feedback and in recognition of the escalating impact of technology on libraries, the Institute has evolved into providing a greater emphasis on technology-based impacts on libraries and the skills required of leaders resulting from these impacts. At the 2006 Institute, sessions dealt with topics such as technology and converging changes, information management policy, open access publishing, forging new collaborations, scenario planning, strategic planning and project management for an institutional repository.

During each session, participants work in their assigned teams. Facilitators deliver information about the designated topic. Participants are encouraged to interact with facilitators, pose questions, debate issues as well as raise personal experiences relevant to the topic at hand. Upon completion of the formal part of each session, the facilitator provides a problem that enables participants to work in their teams to develop a solution based on the knowledge they have gained from the facilitator as well as drawing on their own expertise. At the session conclusion, each team will give a brief presentation on their findings. Typically each session lasts one hour or, for more complex concepts, two hours.

The Institute also provides opportunities for social engagement with participants enjoying communal meals (breakfasts, lunches and dinners) as well as visits to local cultural sights and/or entertainment. These social events have proven crucial in cementing partnerships, friendships and furthering the opportunity for library leaders to share views, problems and expertise.

3.3 The Case Study

An essential component of the Institute, and one that participants find highly rewarding and relevant, is the aforementioned case study. At the beginning of day one, the participants are provided with a detailed case study problem. In their teams, they are asked to

develop a solution using their own knowledge as well as insights gained from the Institute. On the last day of the Institute the teams present their solutions to the other participants and the facilitators. During the Institute two to three hours are allocated as "case study time" but rarely do participants complete the task in this time making it necessary for them to work together outside of formal, allocated session time.

3.4 Facilitators and their Role

As mentioned above, facilitators present discussion topics and encourage strong interaction followed by practical exercises that encourage further discussion and teamwork. Each Institute has had one principal facilitator, with the exception of the 2003 Institute when we had two. In addition to these we use other facilitators to deliver topics that are their special interests and in which they generally have considerable expertise. All principal facilitators have hailed from the United States and all have been at the forefront of library leadership in their respective areas of expertise. Over the years, additional facilitators have come from the PRC (3), Hong Kong (2), Macau (1) and Singapore (1) enabling a truly diverse Asian perspective. In addition to presenting and facilitating formal sessions, facilitators act as mentors during the Institute by participating in all social activities and offering advice and exchanging views in a less formal setting. The facilitators who have participated in the Institute are detailed in Table 1.

	POSITION	AFFILIATION
2003 Institute		
Melanie Hawks (Principal Facilitator)	Program Officer for Training	Association of Research Libraries (ARL), USA
Barclay Ogden (Principal Facilitator)	Head, Preservation Department	UC Berkeley Library, USA
2004 Institute		
George J. Soete (Principal Facilitator)	Organizational Development Consultant	San Diego, USA
Dong Xiaoying	Associate Professor	Guanghua School of Management at Peking University, China
Shirley Leung	University Librarian	Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong
Zhu Qiang	Library Director	Shenzhen University City,

		China
2005 Institute		
Arnold Hirshon (Principal Facilitator)	Executive Director	NELINET, Inc., USA
Zhang Hongyang	Associate Research Librarian and Assistant to the Director	Peking University Library, China
Hsianghoo Steve Ching	University Librarian	City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Paul W.T. Poon	University Librarian	University of Macau, Macau
2006 Institute		
Paul Gandel (Principal Facilitator)	Vice President for Information Technology and Services and Professor, School of Information Studies	Syracuse University, USA
Johnson Paul	Deputy Director of Publishing and Research Services	National Library Board of Singapore, Singapore

Table 1
Facilitators and their Positions and Affiliations at the Time of the Institute

3.5 Financial Support, Scholarships and Co-Sponsors

From the beginning we recognised that, if the Institute was to be a success, our own library would have to be willing to commit its own resources to the enterprise. Yet, since the majority of the participants would not be our own staff, we decided to make it as self-supporting as possible and to make up the rest through the generous support of publishers and vendors from throughout the region who share the goal of developing Asia's libraries and librarians. These supporters [6] have assisted by providing funds that help to minimise the cost of the Institute and to contribute to its success. Additionally, sponsorship funds have been used to provide partial scholarships for participants whose institutions' professional development budgets are less generous than others and who are therefore in greater need of financial assistance in order to attend the Institute. Since 2005, Hong Kong's Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee (JULAC) has also been a co-sponsor and its member libraries have supported the Institute by sending librarians to it each year. In 2004 the Shenzhen Joint

Universities Centre Library and in 2005 the University of Macau Library also served as co-sponsors.

4 Participants' Profiles

As the Institute's focus is aimed at librarians from the East Asia region, the majority of participants work in the region. Table 2 illustrates the breakdown of regions from which participants have hailed.

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Fiji		1		
Hong Kong	23	27	26	18
Macau			6	
Malaysia				1
Philippines			1	
PRC	11	13	11	12
Singapore		1	1	1
Taiwan	1	2	5	4
Thailand				2
TOTAL	35	44	50	38

Table 2
Breakdown of Participants by Region

While the Institute was originally aimed at library directors, deputy directors and senior librarians, the applications received over the four years highlight that there is a need to extend this target group. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the seniority level of participants over the four years. While the degree of seniority is broader than anticipated, experience has shown that this range has provided an even greater diversity of perspectives than was originally expected.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	TOTAL
Director	8 (22.9)	6 (13.6)	5 (10)	6 (16)	**25 (15)**
Deputy Director	9 (25.7)	7 (15.9)	6 (12)	8 (21)	**30 (18)**
Senior Manager	9 (25.7)	13 (29.5)	11 (22)	9 (24)	**42 (25)**
Lower manager	9 (25.7)	18 (41)	28 (56)	15 (39)	**70 (42)**
TOTAL	**35 (100)**	**44 (100)**	**50 (100)**	**38 (100)**	**167 (100)**

Table 3
Breakdown of Number of Participants by Management Level (Percentages in Brackets)

The large number of lower level managers attending the Institute is most likely attributable to a number of factors. Firstly, as a significant proportion of the participants work in Hong Kong there are only a small number of research libraries within that region and therefore only a small number of directors, deputy directors and senior librarians to choose from. Secondly, as the multitude and complexity of issues that are increasingly dealt with in research libraries grows, it is necessary for even lower level managers to develop leadership skills to thrive in such an environment.

5 Challenges Facing Today's (and Tomorrow's) Library Leaders

In order to better tailor the Institute to participants' identified needs, as part of the registration process for the 2006 Institute we started requesting applicants to identify the top three challenges facing them in their current work environment. While some of the identified challenges were specific to some of the particular institutions at which applicants work, there were also many recurring and common themes. The major categories of challenges identified by participants in their application forms can be seen in Table 4.

Challenge	Number identified
Managing digital/hybrid collections	20
Meeting growing user demands	16
Budget shortages including appropriate distribution	9
Convincing users of the value of the library and its resources	8
Information literacy in an electronic age	7
Personnel issues, staff management, motivation etc.	7
Staff shortages and the need to do "more with less"	6
Space shortages	6
Keeping current, learning new skills, professional development	5
Collaboration v competition	4
Digitisation issues	3
Maintaining technical infrastructure	2
Virtual reference	2
TOTAL	95

Table 4
Major Challenges Identified by Participants (2006 Institute).

While many participants' identified challenges were easily classifiable, these classifications do not provide adequate justice to some of the descriptions

of the challenges. Again, it should be noted that social and economic environments of the countries from which participants originate vary significantly. China's economy has been expanding at breakneck speed while Hong Kong was negatively affected by the unstable world economy. The following represent a few challenges identified by participants and are provided here to enable a greater understanding of the complexity of some of the identified challenges.

- Strive to meet increasing demands of a growing student population and increased research projects under severe manpower and financial constraints and price increases. These demands include expanding scholarly information and electronic resources, improving our reference and access services, exploring collaborative programs between libraries, etc.

- Budgeting: Increasing costs of e-resources: allocate library budgets tactfully to meet the ever increasing costs in e-resources under tight budgets; redefine the new role of professional and para-professional staff under organisational change of "do more with less".

- The dynamic nature of digital materials provides challenge. As databases add new titles & exclude some titles, the information is not always immediately available or even ever available. To guarantee timely information for changes in resources, communication with database providers seems to be very important. We also need to make decisions in time management and project management to be cost-effective. Effective digital resource management also requires cooperation within an individual library, e.g. among library teams such as technical services sections and public services sections.

- Apply latest information technologies and upgrade our service infrastructure to better support user networked information access and library operations under the fast changing technological environment and tight library budget. Boost staff morale under limited promotion opportunities and a further reduction in library staffing due to job freeze on most vacancies.

- The uncertainties of government funding and human resources policy in tertiary section have caused latent psychological frustration among staff. However, it seems to be a norm for all organisations following

a trend of "doing more with less". How can a library leader lead his team in such adverse context and manage to get result?

At the beginning of the Institute, participants were provided with a copy of the challenges they had submitted. Every participant was also given a consolidated but anonymous version of the challenges in order to gain a broader perspective of the range of issues that were challenging their co-participants.

6 Overcoming these Challenges
At the end of the 2006 Institute, participants were asked: based upon what you have heard and learnt at the Institute (1) what can *you personally* do, and (2) what can *your library* do, to overcome the three challenges you identified prior to the Institute?

Some of the responses to these questions reflect a refreshing enthusiasm that was less apparent in their identified challenges. Some of those provided include:

- I will help the staff to have a proper concept and perception of "doing more with less." Staff are not independent from the adverse context faced by the library. Understanding and cooperation are needed from staff. Frequent briefing should be given to the staff and encourage them to streamline or re-design their daily work.

- My Library will partner with other cultural units (i.e. gallery, museum, etc.) or student service units (i.e. Student Administration Office, Health Centre etc.) to develop into a cultural hub or information hub of the institution. Thus, the access number of the patron could be maintained. And they could have a change of their concept that only books are available in the library.

- I have learnt about opportunities other than fundraising to deal with our budget strain like collaboration, making use of new services and technology provided by other parties.

- I will build networks with other librarians from other institutions so that it will be much easier to collaborate or share the resources that are not physically available in my library.

- Before this Institute, I didn't know how to manage a project. I have wasted much time in a lot of useless things. Now I know how to use my time and energy more efficiently.

- My library will adopt a management style which takes into consideration humanity. We will create good working relationships among staff and offer awards or encouragement.

- My Library should provide a platform for users to share 'stuff', as an IT hub for exchanging, sharing and retrieving information. Moreover, the library should encourage users to make use of the platform. User education is required too.

7 Institute Evaluation

At the end of every Institute participants are asked to provide feedback on their experience at the Institute. Table 5 shows the average scores given by participants for the two questions concerning their satisfaction with the way the event was conducted and the overall usefulness of the event. As a best possible score is 10, it can be gleaned that the Institute has been very well received and is deemed to be highly useful.

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Satisfaction with the way the event was conducted	8.3	9	8.9	8.73
Usefulness of the event	8.5	8.5	8.7	8.3

Table 5
Average Evaluation Scores for the Four Institutes.

In addition to providing a score out of 10 for a range of aspects relating to the Institute (the other areas they score include logistical matters such as venue and food), participants are asked to write a short statement about the impact of the experience on them personally and/or professionally. A selection of responses over the years follows.

2003
- I must say that I am very fortunate to be here. It is very stimulating and interesting. I learnt a lot. The chance to interact and share with other leaders is also very rewarding.

- It is a good chance for me to step back and look at myself, and to share experiences with library management in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. It really is a good experience for my career life.

- The impact will be fairly significant. I will be able to share the experience with other attendees in the future. Also, I will use

several techniques myself and I will remind my boss of these techniques.

- The Institute has confirmed that communications is the key to successful leadership and provided a variety of tools, skills, and techniques to help me. I hope by adopting these skills appropriately, I shall become a more effective manager and a better person overall.

- It has made me much more aware of my own position as a leader and the responsibilities inherent in that role. I can take away from this workshop what I have learned, build on by further exploring the topics introduced and refer to them in my working situation in a practical way.

- I agree that the time involved is huge but the benefits are great. As a manager absorbed in daily work, I tend to forget some important ways and concepts in management. Taking a break by learning things new and recapturing old ideas. I believe that I am in a better position to evaluate the requirement of different jobs/staff, design alternative strategies and implement the solutions. More important the achievement honor and reward should be to the whole team.

- As China is in the process of rapid change, the Institute must be useful and relevant to colleagues in China.

2004
- The issues covered were very relevant and will help me very much in my work. I also made many new friends and learnt a lot about libraries in China, HK and Taiwan.

- A good occasion for self-refreshment and self-improvement. An excellent opportunity to know people from different areas.

- I have acquired new knowledge and skills in managing change, and of course, made a lot of new friends.

- Gave me greater understanding of how HK & China & Taiwan colleagues think and tackle common problems; Gratifying to know that librarians everywhere are open about sharing.

- It has been a valuable experience to work with colleagues from different cities with different library background; Gain

acquaintance with local and Mainland and overseas librarians; get to know latest development of libraries and IT.

- As a leader of a library, I must know how to balance my power and democracy. I will be a more facilitating leader.

2005
- The Institute has helped me to rethink and recollect what I personally & my library & colleagues collectively have been doing.

- It's a good career development activity. For mainland librarians it's a pretty new experience in terms of group discussion, case study.

- It gives me a chance to think about the future of the library and how we librarians should prepare for it.

- It helped me by introducing new information & ideas & reinforcing old knowledge. I appreciated the opportunity to meet and work with other librarians from HK, Taiwan, China & other places in the region.

- The Institute provides an excellent wake-up call for librarians about their future work environment.

- I have learnt new techniques which I can adopt and adapt in my leadership role. I can import what I have learnt to my team members at my workplace. Together we can think more creatively to solve problems.

2006
- Provided an opportunity of communication to librarians from different districts; got to know a lot of new friends; discussed some problems which all are interested in.

- Excellent! I've learned a lot. The speaker explains complicate concepts in a simple and easy understanding way, and the examples apply very much to our daily work.

- As an administrative person working in a fast-developing university library, it is good to have a chance to sit down to listen to the experts to talk about the new development of the libraries and new ideas in management; group study provokes thinking and helps to make us think more thoroughly.

- This Institute helps me in choosing/deciding our library direction and how can I work it out to ensure that the library and librarians are still relevant to the institution in future.

- This Institute inspires me to think about the future of libraries and what we should do to face it.

- Other librarians and heads of departments in our library will be able to share the achievement of this institute.

- Most of the time in the past, I would listen only, but wouldn't express my own opinions. In this institute, I learned from my team member of Hong Kong to express ideas openly.

8 Issues and Lessons Learned
Through organising an Institute such as this, there have been several issues that have been identified that have caused us to reconsider the content, the structure and the delivery methods adopted. Evaluating participants' experiences and feedback have led us to make changes from year to year. As an example, and as mentioned previously, there is a greater and increasing emphasis on technology related issues. There is no indication that this trend will abate.

8.1 Language
As may be expected from a culturally diverse group of participants there are issues relating to language and comprehension. As all of the principal facilitators have come from the United States there have been some problems with understanding from some attendees. This has been evident in terms of language but particularly in terms of metaphors and jargon that have been difficult to translate into local and diverse cultures. Facilitators are obviously instructed to avoid such usage but this is not always possible when it becomes necessary to explain complex management and technical issues. Attempts have been made at translations including both oral and written summaries. While this has had some success, the English language capabilities of participants is so varied that it is sufficient for some, unnecessary for others and totally inadequate for others. Despite warnings that English is the medium of instruction, participants with variable skills in English continue to attend the Institute. As the Institute evolves, the need for a greater degree of translation will be assessed including the possibility of fully bilingual presentations.

8.2 Matching Content to Identified Challenges
With the 2006 introduction of asking applicants to identify their top three challenges, we were able to

prepare an Institute that would better address their immediate needs. While the theory behind this is sound, there appears to be greater potential for better mapping the Institute content to the identified challenges. This, however, would require applicants to identify and submit their challenges well in advance of the Institute, thereby allowing the organisers and facilitators to develop a better tailored and more relevant Institute.

8.3 Diverse Range of Management Levels
As previously noted the range of management levels of participants is more diverse than was originally anticipated. As the Institute continues to expand and develop, and if it draws a greater degree of diversity in management responsibility and ability, it will become increasingly difficult for facilitators to deliver content that is suitable to all of the attending participants. In future years it may be necessary to develop two Institutes with one focused purely on leadership and the other with a stronger tendency towards management related issues.

9 The Future
The enthusiastic responses to the four Institutes demonstrate the value that participants derive from attending. Continued, annual Institutes for the foreseeable future are certain to continue to attract high calibre applicants and it is our intention to continue with them. As mentioned above in *Issues and Lessons Learned*, some changes may be necessary. In addition to those, there are some directions that the Institute will follow in the coming years.

9.1 Expanding Cultural Diversity
As is evident from Table 1, the majority of participants are from Hong Kong and secondly from the PRC. Other regions are less well represented and some places where we did expect applications have had zero representation at all. Most noticeable among these are Japan and Korea, and it is our intention to continue to encourage library leaders from those countries to apply. Similarly, participation from South East Asian countries has been limited and we believe that there is greater scope for expanding in that region as well.

9.2 Including Other Information Workers
As the role of the librarian continues to evolve in this information age, there are greater synergies that can be examined between librarians and other information workers. In particular, in universities there are many information workers including technologists, knowledge managers and specialists in institutional information management units. Bringing representatives from these groups together with librarians could serve to foster broader collaborative partnerships.

9.3 Consolidating Identified Challenges and How the Institute Has Helped Participants
We intend to continue to request applicants to define their major challenges and to respond, following the Institute, on how the Institute has helped them to address these challenges. We will consolidate these challenges and responses into a publication after a few years of collection with the hope that the publication will help other librarians facing similar challenges.

9.4 Following up on Past Participants
In order to determine the longer term benefits gained by past participants we will continue to maintain contact with them and to survey them on how their attendance at the Institute has helped them in their careers.

10 Conclusion
The breadth and depth of applications received from librarians in the East Asia region for participation at the University of Hong Kong Libraries Leadership Institute suggest that there is a need for such an Institute in the region. When we consider the evaluations and feedback received from participants of the Institute in the context of the two primary objectives of the Institute, we can discern that participants find the Institutes successful. The determination of longer term usefulness, however, may require further and more detailed investigation.

11 References and Notes
[1] Donna Brockmeyer-Klebaum. Leadership Institutes: The Living Legacy They Can and Can't Leave, *Feliciter,* October 1995, p 18.

[2] Florence M. Mason & Louella V. Wetherbee. Learning to Lead: An Analysis of Current Training Programs for Library Leadership, *Library Trends,* Vol. 53(1), pp. 187-217, 2004.

[3] ibid at p. 203.

[4] CAUDIT, *CAUDIT-EDUCAUSE Institute*, viewed 5 June 2006, <http://www.caudit.edu.au/institute/index.html>.

[5] The University of Hong Kong Libraries, *HKU Libraries Leadership Institute*, viewed 5 June, 2006, <http://lib.hku.hk/leadership/>.

[6] Support from the following alphabetically listed vendors and publishers have made the Institute possible:
- Beijing Founder Electronics Co. Ltd. http://www.founder.com.cn/cn/
- Blackwell's Book Services http://www.blackwell.com/
- Culturecom http://www.culturecom.com.hk/

- Elsevier http://asia.elsevier.com/
- IBM http://www.ibm.com/
- iGroup http://www.igroupnet.com/
- Tsinghua Tongfang
  http://www.thtf.com.cn/.