

**THE PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS ABOUT THE  
LEADERSHIP STYLES OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS IN GHANA**

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**Abstract**

*The study is an examination of the perceptions of professional academic librarians of the leadership styles of University Librarians in Ghana. Perception is the process through which a person, object, thing and the environment can be recognized or realized. In organizations, staff are always judging one another and university libraries are no exception. Theories of leadership and gender issues are discussed. The case studies of five public university libraries and their librarians are presented as one unit. The study is a descriptive survey where the author used the questionnaire to elicit responses from fifty (50) out of sixty (60) professional librarians. The study concludes that the telling style of leadership was more dominant among male University Librarians as compared to their female counterparts. It is recommended that University Librarians should be seen to be flexible and adjust styles as the situation demands and that any change in style should be communicated to subordinates.*

**Keywords:** LEADERSHIP STYLES, GENDER ISSUES, UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS, GHANA.

**Introduction**

Leadership remains one of the main factors that determine group behaviour and so there is a strong demand for leaders of quality. Leadership in management involves concern both for task performance and for people's needs, aspirations and expectations. Concern for people requires paying attention to and knowledge of, the influences which motivate people as members of groups and as individuals. Indeed, the way in which a manager chooses to exercise his or her leadership style can have a strong influence on the performance, motivation and morale of his or her subordinates.

There are important differences between leadership levels in organizations. At the lower level, the emphasis is on interpersonal leadership. Here the leader's task is primarily to achieve short-term goals and to facilitate personal involvement and teamwork. The

leadership that takes place at the highest echelon of large organizations such as university libraries involves institutional leadership (Sadler, 2004). The interest of the researcher is institutional leadership in university libraries in Ghana. This is because, at this level, the role lies mainly in the area of developing and maintaining systems of beliefs and values. Essentially, the major functions are to define policy, build the kind of social structure which will put that policy into effect, and to maintain the values which will ensure continuity.

Some literature seem to suggest the existence of a distinctive feminine style of leadership, characterized by greater willingness to listen, being more empathetic and people oriented and less aggressive in the pursuit of goals compared with their male counterparts (Rosener 1990 ). Not all research findings, however, attest to this type of orientation because some studies have found differences (Hooijberg & DiTomaso, 1996 ). This study aims to establish the type of leadership orientation that pertains in Ghanaian university libraries.

### **The Leadership Challenge**

Historically, there has been much debate about the precise meanings of leadership. In fact, it is a highly contested concept. The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2003 commented that by one estimate there are 350 definitions of the term but also remarked that they were so few. Indeed, and as Hodgkinson (in Ribbins, 1993) remarked, there is much more “magic” surrounding the concept which bewitches rather than clarifies. According to him, leadership is both a process and property and as a process, it involves the use of non-coercive influence to direct and coordinate the activities of the staff to meet a goal. As a property, it is a set of characteristics attributed to those who are perceived to use such influence successfully (Jago, 1982). It also needs pointing out that a leader may possess the characteristics attributed to him/her and on the other hand, the leader may merely be perceived as possessing them. Like many other authors and researchers, the author does not intend to get into the great debates about such meanings. It is therefore sufficient to understand that leadership is a set of activities observable to others that occur in a group, organization or institution involving a leader and followers who willingly subscribe to common purposes and work together to achieve them (Clark & Clark, 1994).

For the purposes of this paper, leadership is defined as influencing others to work willingly towards achieving specific objectives. It is about mobilizing people towards shared values and goals especially common aspirations, properties and results. What makes leadership a challenging concept to master is the need to understand a variety of

leadership theories and to translate them into leadership skills through application and practice. The fluidity in the library environment as a result of technological innovations also presents a challenge. Indeed, when the situation is relatively stable there is the need to arouse enthusiasm, energize subordinates, and persuade them to give-up cherished ideas than when there is a strong requirement for change. It is true that management is perfectly adequate when things are routine and predictable but not when the organization is characterized by turbulence and uncertainty. Leadership is called into question when the latter is the case.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is commonly believed that society is suffering from a leadership crisis. People are dissatisfied with their leaders and confused about the type of leadership they want. This is especially true about instances of leaders in the Arab world where there have been massive uprisings because of dissatisfaction with them. Although many of the complaints about the lack of leadership are focused on national leaders, the same type of gap between expectations and reality can be found in many other areas, including university libraries. There is no doubt that there are many competent managers, but only a few of them seem to have a clear vision of the future and the knowledge of how to get there. In librarianship, as in other areas, the same troubling pattern exists. In most cases, after individuals have been appointed to leadership positions, they quickly lose their luster. They therefore merely protect resources of the organization religiously without making any efforts to drive their organizations forward. The study is therefore an attempt to address some of the leadership problems encountered in university libraries in Ghana by drawing attention to some of these lapses for remedial action. The study recommends that an efficient succession planning be implemented to address these leadership challenges.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study has the following objectives to achieve:

To explore the leadership styles of current University Librarians in Ghana;

To compare and contrast the leadership styles of male and female University Librarians in Ghana.

To examine the leadership perceptions and preferences of librarians working under these University Librarians.

### **Theories on Leadership**

Generally speaking, there are about nine (9) theories on leadership namely, Great Man, Trait, Power and Influence, Behaviourist, Situational, Contingency, Transactional, Attribution and finally, Transformational (Sadler, 2004).

The Great Man theory believes leaders are not only exceptional, but are born with innate qualities and destined to lead. This is a bit of an old fashioned ideal, largely borne out of the historical perspective of men (or women) being born to lead by right of birth.

The Trait or Charismatic Theory depends on abundant qualities associated with leadership. Proponents draw on adjectives that describe virtuous human attributes from ambition to zest for life. While charisma is often regarded as a key quality necessary to be an effective leader, it is alone not enough. The focus is on Power and Influence theory based decision making while ensuring the passivity of subordinates.

Proponents of the Behaviourist theory concentrate on what leaders actually do and how they are perceived to do it rather than on their qualities. Simply put, the behaviours they exhibit on a daily basis.

The Situational approach views leadership as particularly specific to the situation in which it is being exercised. This theory was developed by Blanchard and Hersey (1988), and it is based on the idea that one's leadership style varies depending upon the situation and that the skills needed are developable. A good example is military leadership which demands skills, qualities and behaviours that differ from those associated with successful leadership in industry.

Contingency theory is a refinement of Situational leadership and focuses on identifying the situational variables which best predict the most effective leadership style to fit a particular circumstance.

Attribution theory puts emphasis on the power of the subordinates and the factors which cause them to attribute leadership to a particular person.

The focus of Transformational theory is change and the role of leadership in envisioning and implementing the transformation of organizational performance. It stresses the importance of the dichotomy between leaders and subordinates. This 'contract' demands rewards and recognition from leaders in return for loyalty from subordinates. Typically, leaders who use this style have a strong self awareness and use a range of soft skills to gain commitment from subordinates.

Summing up on theories of leadership, it is clear that leadership takes a wide variety of forms depending on the situation. Leadership today focuses on behaviour, skills and attitudes are the most favoured because they are developable. These are situational,

transformational and behavioural. In other words, a leader must recognize what is required for a situation and the people involved and the ability to adapt behaviour accordingly. The researcher's interest is however in the Behaviourist theory because the behaviour of a leader can either motivate subordinates to feel to be part of the library or not.

### **Styles of Leadership**

Generally speaking, work on styles of leadership has been based on the concepts of autocracy and democracy. White and Lippit (1953) carried out early studies on leadership and their objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of different ways of exercising the role. In their first study in 1939, they compared two contrasting leadership styles namely autocratic and democratic. To them, the autocratic leader takes decisions and imposes them on the group, expecting them to carry them out without questioning their rationale. On the other hand, the democratic leader encourages his subordinates to participate in the decision-making process where he/she is seen as the coordinator. Subsequently, a third leadership style was examined which they described as laissez-faire. This type of leader plays a passive role in the affairs of the group.

The study of White and Lippit (1959) on leadership styles was criticized by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) as looking too much at the concept in black-and-white keys of a piano. They postulated that the concept of leadership styles varies along a continuum, adding that, as one moved away from the autocratic extreme, the amount of subordinate involvement or employee participation also increased. They further suggested that the type of leadership represented by the democratic extreme of the continuum would hardly be experienced in formal organizations. According to them, at least four leadership styles can be located at points along such a continuum: autocratic (tells), persuasive (sells), consultative, (consults), and democratic (joins).

### **Gender Issues**

According to Sadler (2004), the literature on leadership has a strong masculine ring to it because most lists of outstanding business leaders are exclusively male and many researchers use masculine pronouns. However, more and more women are assuming leadership roles and currently in Ghana, three University Librarians are females. In fact, the libraries of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) , the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT) are all headed by females.

Some researchers have conducted research into the leadership styles between males and females. Quoting findings by Bass (1992), Hooijberg and DiTomaso (1996) stated that once women attained leadership positions their behaviour is similar to that of men. In a study of the careers of seventy eight (78) of the most senior women in corporate America, Morrison, White and Velsor (1987) expected to find a distinctive feminine style of leadership, pregnant with willingness to listen, more empathetic, people oriented and less aggressive in the pursuit of goals compared to males. However, they did not find any significant differences between the two.

Some studies however, find differences between male and female styles of leadership. The findings are that unlike their males who employ more autocratic and directive style of leadership, their female counterparts use a more democratic and participatory approach. Rosener (1990) found out that female leaders encouraged participation, shared power and information to a greater extent than their male counterparts. To her, females go further to practice 'interactive leadership' which has to do with enhancing the feelings of self-worth of others with the conviction that high levels of performance results from people feeling excited about their work and good about themselves.

### **Methodology**

The research design is the descriptive survey that was undertaken in December, 2011. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data based on the variables of the study. These variables were identified from data sources such as reports, journals and books on leadership styles in organizations. The questionnaires were constructed by the author and covered respondents' data, leadership styles and evaluation of the leadership behaviour of University Librarians in Ghana. The researcher identified a colleague in each library and gave out copies of the questionnaire to each of them according to the number of professional librarians for distribution. In all, potential respondents numbered sixty (60) in five public University Libraries. In order to be able to elicit expected responses, coupled with the fact that the topic is an extremely sensitive one, the researcher used adjectives like tells, sells, consults and joins instead of autocratic, persuasive, consultative and democratic. The results are presented as one unit. However, where possible, significant differences were identified and highlighted. Table 1 illustrates the number of respondents for the study.

**Table 1: Number of Respondents**

<b>Name of Library</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Library A	10	20
Library B	16	32
Library C	8	16
Library D	10	20
Library E	6	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

The study covered five state funded university libraries in Ghana. A total of fifty (50) professional librarians composed of 30 males and 20 females responded to the questionnaire. For the sake of anonymity, the names of the respective libraries were written on a piece of paper, folded and put in a container. The author then picked them out one by one and named them accordingly. The naming was therefore not done according to any chronological sequence or with regard to their year of establishment.

**Table 2: Sex of Professional Librarians**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	30	60
Female	20	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

It is clear in Table 2 that the study targeted 30 (60%) males and 20 (40%) females who were professional librarians. This is especially important if one is to establish whether there is a difference in the leadership behaviours of both male professional librarians and their female counterparts.

**Table 3: Perception of Leadership Styles**

Perception	Respondents	%
Tells	20	40
Sells	6	12
Consults	14	28
Joins	8	16
None of the Above	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

The survey results in Table 3 show that majority of the respondents 20 (40%) perceived that University Librarians simply told them what to do. This means that they were not involved in the decision-making process. A significant number of them, 14 (28%) indicated, however that they were consulted by University Librarians.

**Table 4: Leadership Style Employed More Consistently**

Consistency	Respondents	%
Tells	22	44
Sells	6	12
Consults	14	28
Joins	6	12
None of the Above	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

On the leadership styles employed more consistently by University Librarians, survey results confirmed the earlier perception that they told their subordinates what they should do. Surprisingly too, the same number of respondents 14 (28%) also perceived that they were consulted during the conception and implementation of library projects.

**Table 5: Effect of Leadership Styles Employed More Consistently on Productivity**

Effect	Respondents	%
High Productivity	16	32
Average Productivity	30	60
Low Productivity	4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*



When the researcher further sought to find out the extent of impact of this style on productivity, majority of respondents 30 (60%) indicated average productivity while only 16 (32%) mentioned high productivity.

**Table 6: Attitude to Leadership Style Employed More Consistently**

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Sense of Belonging	22	44
Feeling of Neglect and Unimportance	32	64
Indifferent	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

Table 6 illustrates the attitude of respondents to the leadership styles of University Librarians in Ghana. A majority of 32 (64%) respondents indicated that it was one of neglect and unimportance. Indeed a significant number 22 (44%) also indicated they felt a sense of belonging.

**Table 7: Expectations of Leadership Style Employed More Consistently**

<b>Expectations of Relationship</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Warm and Sustained Relationship	19	38
Cold and Unsustained Relationship	31	62
Indifferent	x	x
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

On the expectations of librarians about the leadership styles employed more consistently by University Librarians, a majority of 31 (62%) said the relationship was cold and therefore could not be sustained. A significant number of them, however, 19 (38%) said it was warm and sustainable.

**Table 8: Preference of Leadership Style**

Preference	Respondents	%
Tells	X	X
Sells	6	12
Consults	36	72
Joins	8	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

On the issue of their leadership preferences, Table 8 illustrates that majority 36 (72%) of librarians preferred the consultative style while only 8 (16%) and 6 (12%) opted for the joining and selling approaches respectively. It is therefore clear that professional librarians in Ghana want their bosses to make them feel to be part and parcel of the library by simply involving them in decision-making processes. They do not also want to be told what to do as none of them showed any preference for it.

**Table 9: Satisfaction with Leadership Styles**

Satisfaction	Respondents	%
Excellent	8	16
Above Average	20	40
Average	21	42
Below Average	1	2
Total	50	100

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

When asked whether they were satisfied with the leadership styles of the University Librarians, the responses of librarians for “above average” 20 (40%) and “average” 21(42%) respectively were significantly close. Only 8 (16%) respondents said their satisfaction was excellent and significantly enough, this was for the female University Librarians.

When pressed further to state why they rated University Librarians the way they did, the following reasons were given:

- Experienced administrator
- Part of the decision-making process
- Wide gap between University Librarian and subordinates
- No consensus building

- Often consults
- Encourages those who are willing and prepared to learn
- Does not involve colleagues in decision-making
- No consultation
- Should encourage consultation with others to enable him access other ideas.
- Allows for collective decision-making
- Has created improved working environment.

A close examination of the above comments reveals that while some are complimentary and positive, others are negative. Survey results showed that even though some professional librarians were not consulted by their superiors in the implementation of library projects they admit that they achieved the desired results and therefore gave palatable remarks.

**Table 10: Confidence in University Librarians**

<b>Confidence</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Excellent	10	20
Above Average	20	40
Average	18	36
Below Average	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

Table 10 illustrates the confidence that professional librarians had in their University Librarians. The picture is not different from the case with their satisfaction too. When asked to state the reasons for their choice, most of the favourable comments were for the female University Librarians and these are: ready to guide when approached, efficient and hardworking, interesting and inspiring personality. The others were accomplished Librarians, no shared or set goals and no communication with colleagues/subordinates vertically and horizontally. The rest were performance is above average, ability to implement decisions to a large extent, achieved results, delivers, that is work is eventually done, experienced, open and frank. All in all, an analysis of the comments on the confidence professional librarians had in University Librarians revealed that they were all able to achieve their set goals but not necessarily meeting their needs and aspirations.

**Table 11: Overall Assessment Leadership Styles of Ghanaian University Librarians**

<b>Overall Assessment</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Excellent	12	24
Above Average	32	64
Average	6	12
Below Average	X	X
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2011*

On the overall assessment of leadership styles of University Librarians in Ghana, the survey results were positive with none of the respondents scoring any of them below average. The survey results, however, indicate that there is still room for improvement.

On any other relevant information, some professional librarians submitted the following: A respondent noted that his University Librarian is able to achieve some successes which cannot be sustained.

One respondent said he was indifferent and whether consulted or not he just performs his work.

Another respondent called for the need for more decentralized faculty libraries.

One of the respondents also noted that the researcher should have been interested in how visionary University Librarians are.

### **Discussions**

A critical look at the survey results showed that University Librarians in Ghana relied heavily on the autocratic (telling) style to realize their goals. It is also the dominant one. The telling style is mostly used for low readiness employees because they are unable and unwilling to take responsibility for their own task behaviour. Survey results, however, showed that the University Librarians also employed other leadership styles in order to achieve their set goals. Both the selling and participating styles also work for subordinates with moderate readiness while laissez-faire is appropriate for employees with high readiness.

The real effectiveness depends upon each University Librarian creating and developing his or her own unique style. In fact, understanding one's own preferred style is very essential because it helps one to understand the impact his/her style has on subordinates and when it is most effective. It should, however, be noted that in today's complex, readily changing and multi-faceted world, it is more important to adapt and vary the style to suit the staff involved, the situation and the prevailing circumstances.

### **Findings**

The study found out that majority of professional librarians perceived that the leadership styles of University Librarians was “telling”

The study found out that majority of the respondents stated that the leadership style most consistently employed by University Librarians in Ghana was “telling”.

The study revealed that female University Librarians tended to consult and join their subordinates than their male counterparts. This means high productivity and a sense of belonging. This confirms the study carried out by White and Velsor (1987), as well as Rosener (1990).

The study also found out that the “telling style” produced average productivity.

The telling style also meant a feeling of neglect thereby leading to a cold and unsustainable relationship.

The study also found out that majority of professional librarians preferred the consultative style so they can experience a sense of belonging.

The study also found out that majority of professional librarians indicated all University Librarians were experienced.

### **Conclusion**

The study examined various theories and studies on leadership styles. Leadership in management of university libraries involves concern for task performance and staff needs as well as aspirations and expectations. The way in which a University Librarian chooses to exercise his/her leadership style can impact positively or negatively on the performance of staff. There is no one style that can be said to be effective in all situations and the effectiveness will depend on a particular situation. In the library setting, the choice of a particular leadership style will depend on whether staff are in the low readiness bracket, moderate readiness bracket or high readiness bracket. As a result, University Librarians should be prepared to be flexible and vary their style according to the prevailing circumstances. The lasting solution will be for the respective university libraries to craft succession planning programmes for library staff.

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