A Mixed Methods Evaluation Of A LIS Leadership Programme In South Africa

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Abstract: The paper reports on an evaluation of the three-year leadership programme of the Centre for African Library Leadership (CALL). Six two-week Leadership Academies were run by the Centre from July 2009 to April 2012, with 20 delegates per course; these were followed by three one-week Train-the-Trainer courses. The goal was to develop leadership qualities in current and future library managers – amid concern over the challenges confronting a new generation of LIS leaders. The paper focuses on the methodology rather than on the findings – demonstrating the benefits of triangulating the questionnaire data with the follow-up focus group interviews. The debates and discussions within the focus groups lent support to the survey findings but offered more nuanced insights.
Keywords: South Africa, leadership education, evaluation, Centre for African Library Leadership, Carnegie Library Leadership Academies

1. Introduction

The paper reflects on the methodology used in the evaluation of the leadership programme of the Centre for African Library Leadership (CALL), an initiative of the University of Pretoria Library and of the Carnegie Corporation in New York, which has in the last few years supported many projects in South Africa. Six two-week courses (called the Centre for Library Leadership Academies (CLLA)) were run by the Centre from July 2009 to April 2012, with 20 delegates per course; these were followed by three one-week Train-the-Trainer courses for selected alumni of the academies. The focus in the paper is on methodology rather than findings; and the author argues that the mix of methodologies served to mitigate the possible limitations of the programme evaluation.

The goal of the CALL leadership education project was to develop "leadership qualities in current and future library managers" in the academic, public, and national library sectors in South Africa – amid concern over the challenges

confronting the new generation of LIS leaders that has emerged in post-apartheid South Africa (Walker 2001; Thomas 2002; Moropa 2010). In 2005 the then president of LIASA placed the "transformation" of LIS within the context of the political and social transformation of post-apartheid South Africa. He argued that leadership training was the tool to "redefine" "services, management, collection development and quality service delivery" (Matthee and Satjoor 2005: 25).

The author's interviews with the two managers of the CALL project uncovered their concern over what one of them called "the challenging LIS landscape". They both argued that the South African LIS sector was weak because its leaders were managers rather than leaders. Leaders were needed who understood the context of South African LIS "within this democracy [and] the development agenda" and who had "the ability to have a vision for LIS, and not just see it as another service that has to be managed". Both alluded to the challenges in the LIS landscape in South Africa, many inherited from the apartheid past. Among these was the lack of experience and skills of some recently appointed LIS managers. As one pointed out:

> *We cannot ignore the inequities of the past. We cannot ignore the fact through employment equity* [legislation] *we have people being appointed through to managerial positions, senior executive positions without the relevant experience or skills, with the expectations that people learn on the job. And there are certain things that you just don't learn on the job.*

While agreeing on the inspiration for the programme in the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs in the United States, the two managers stressed that the programme had been designed by South Africans with intimate knowledge of the South African LIS sector.

2. LIS programme evaluation

The authority in programme evaluation is Donald Kirkpatrick whose hierarchical four-level Model of Training Outcomes, built in the 1960s, is still the starting point for most programme evaluation, despite some suggestions that it does not suit today's organisational realities. The four levels of the model are:
1. Evaluating reaction
2. Evaluating learning
3. Evaluating behaviour
4. Evaluating results (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick 2006).

Romaniuk and Haycock (2011, 35) state that "library evaluation has traditionally been focussed on the first and second levels with occasional extension to the third level". Level 4 (to what degree targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training event and subsequent reinforcement) attempts to evaluate the causal link between participants' changed behaviour and

organisational performance, but given the complexity and expense of doing so rigorously, Varlejs (2007, 186) recommends that "one must settle for the third level".

As mentioned just above, the hierarchical nature of Kirkpatrick's model has been questioned as out of keeping with contemporary organisational structures. For example, Giangreco, Carugati and Sebastiano's review of the training evaluation literature (2009) argues that today's organisations require different approaches to training as they are no longer tightly structured but rather "loosely coupled networks of individuals in which mobility is both a skill and a requirement" (2010: 163). Arguing that learning is the key to an organisation's survival, they ask the question "Are the traditional ways to evaluate it still valid and relevant?" (p.163) and suggest that rigid adherence to Kirkpatrick's hierarchical model might well be counter-productive.

Reviewing a number of Library Leadership training programmes, Mason and Wetherbee (2004) note that most evaluations rely on participant self-reporting, and measure short term goals rather than producing definitive results on the achievement of stated objectives. Romaniuk and Haycock (2011) echo this and note the importance of addressing issues of gender, diversity and leader self-efficacy. Many evaluations (for example Barney 2004; Neely 2009) have built on the evaluation questionnaire of the Snowbird Leadership Institute (Neely and Winston 1999).

A survey of LIS leadership evaluations shows the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, but there has been little use of longitudinal comparisons or control groups (Zauha 2007). The commissioning of some evaluations may only allow for summative, and not formative, measures. In a small sample study of 13 of the 15 participants to date, Lipscomb, Martin and Peay (2009) detail a multi-method evaluation process incorporating focus groups for participants and mentors, focus groups and email surveys for their home institution supervisors, and telephone interviews with programme designers and managers. An evaluation commissioned over 18 months (Wilson and Corrall 2008), was able to apply pre- and post-programme questionnaires, mid-programme telephone interviews, and participant observation during the programme and, at a subsequent event. Zauha (2007) showed that self-reported gains in various leadership skills areas persisted very similarly in a survey 22 months later. Referring to two past evaluations that had used control groups without much benefit, Mason and Wetherbee (2004) stressed the importance of careful experimental design of control and assessment groups.

3. The CALL evaluation brief and design

The brief given to the author was to: gauge the realisation of the goals of the CALL project; determine the impact of the CLLA courses on participants; and assess the relevance of CALL and its continuance. She endeavoured at all

times to follow the five guiding principles of the American Evaluation Association (2004): systematic enquiry, competence, integrity, respect for people, and responsibility for general and public welfare.

Data were gathered through:
- interviews with the UPLIS Director, the CALL Project Director and Programme Coordinator
- an anonymous online questionnaire survey of all alumni of the six CALL academies
- focus group interviews in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria with academies' alumni
- focus group interviews in Cape Town and Pretoria with Train-the-Trainer alumni
- examination of project documentation, website material, course evaluations, etc.

All interviews were transcribed, and qualitative data analysed with thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Questionnaire survey data was captured online through SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com), and downloaded to MS Excel and Statistica (www.statistica.com) for descriptive and statistical analysis of the quantitative data.

The interviews with CALL management gave insight into the CLLA selection processes, the content of the academies and the values embedded in them. It was clear that the managers saw leadership as far more than formal position or skills. Each described leadership as facilitating people's *self*-development, as in these words from one on the nature of leadership, "*creating the space or an enabling environment for people to shine*". They echoed the comment in the leadership education literature on the need today for "diffused" leadership in which people at all levels take on leadership responsibilities in order to, in Macneill & Vanzetta's phrase, " co-create the future" (2014: 16). Another value that emerged in these interviews was the importance of a leader's awareness of self, as illustrated in this extract:

> *I think it's more about creating the platform for people to understand what leadership is. What is the underlying philosophy? ...Because it leads to introspection. When one starts the conversation around leadership it cannot ignore the need for self-awareness.*

The time constraints imposed certain limitations on the evaluation. It relied largely on participants' perceptions of the impact of the project on themselves and their institutions, rather than comparing measurements made before and after the interventions. Survey and interview data could not be triangulated with direct observation or institutional records, but were however followed up and substantiated with focus group discussions, and specific examples in open-ended survey questions.

4. The three phases

As stated earlier, the aim in this paper is not to give a full account of the findings; however, some summarising of the findings of the questionnaire survey is required for the reader to make sense of the discussion of the focus groups that followed it.

Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire was designed to capture participants' opinions and perceptions on items relevant to the goals, objectives and training of the CLLA courses. Some key results from the questionnaire survey were:

- On a 7-point scale from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied, 54% of respondents were extremely satisfied with CALL training received, 39% very satisfied and the remaining 7% moderately satisfied – none were dissatisfied.
- There was 75% to 100% agreement (much of it strong) with 33 statements about the positive impact of the course on their skills, knowledge, behaviour and workplace activities.
- 48% claimed to be applying the skills and knowledge gained at the CLLA academy every day, and 75% at least once a week.
- 95% had taken on more challenging tasks.
- The positive nature of these ratings and percentages was fairly consistent across a range of respondent demographics, library types, and job levels. No subgroup responded negatively overall, just more or less positively.

Responses to the open ended questions reinforced the enthusiastic response to the quantitative questions. Expanding on these, Question 12 highlighted the most useful aspects of the course programme in the respondents' workplaces. Question 14 elicited a long list of ways in which the respondents had been applying their new skills and knowledge, although Question 15 revealed that a third of respondents had had certain difficulties in this application.

Phase II focus groups

The next phase of the evaluation, the Focus Group interviews with the alumni of the six leadership academies, aimed at exploring in more depth some of the insights of the questionnaire survey. The interviews were both rooted in the prior analysis of the survey questionnaires and open to new ideas.. As the talk proceeded, ideas and insights were discovered and developed . The first three questions asked why people had attended the academies and about their high and low moments in the two week programme. The questionnaire survey had revealed general agreement that the academy had developed participants' vision of their library's mission, that it had positively impacted on their services and that it had taught them to be better leaders. The interviews pursued these three themes in asking participants to articulate their visions, give examples of improved service delivery, and describe changes in their day to day leadership behaviours. Then a question followed up some of the concern in responses to

the open-ended questions in the questionnaire over constraints experienced on returning to their workplaces. Then, participants were asked how they were sustaining the learning gained in the academies and for any final comment.

Train the Trainer focus groups
The aim of the focus groups with the Train the Trainer alumni was to explore their experiences of the course and how they had been able to apply their learning. According to the CALL documentation, the outcome expected of this component of the programme was "a team of 30 library trainers, facilitators and mentors to transfer their learning and training skills throughout the LIS sector". It has to be said that the wording raised some questions for the evaluator, for example: Did the use of the word "team" imply a plan that the graduates of the course work together. If so, on what platform? This question remains largely unanswered.

5. Academy focus groups: pursuing the connections

The focus in this section is on the focus group interviews with participants in the leadership academies that followed the analysis of the questionnaires. As anticipated, they ranged far beyond the list of questions prepared by the author. Six cross-cutting themes emerged from the discussions:
- The importance of self-knowledge
- Leading by taking responsibility for oneself
- The challenges of unfavourable organizational climates
- The benefits and challenges of diversity
- New visions for united South African LIS
- Sustaining the learning: looking to the future.

The analysis and categorization of these themes served to confirm and to develop the tentative findings of the questionnaires - and often to provide fresh and nuanced insights. Participants showed little interest in spending time on the practical skills that the academies had taught, which were covered quite fully enough perhaps in the questionnaire. In each group the discussion revolved rather around the changes in mindset and behaviour that the courses had brought about.

Some seemingly minor threads in the analysis of the questionnaires emerged as important points for lively debate. There is room for just three examples: diversity issues; the challenges of applying new learning in the workplace; and renewed vision for LIS in South Africa.

Diversity issues
"Appreciation of diversity" in the workplace had been fairly prominent in the questionnaire responses to questions probing what people had learned in the academies. But the bland survey finding perhaps obscured the depth of the CLLA experience. The academy's approach to the concept of "diversity" clearly

made a strong impact. There was almost unanimous agreement on the benefits of working in diverse teams. As one put it:

We came from different backgrounds, from different institutions and that helped a lot. I think it helped me as a person to have confidence in myself and it stretched my potential of thinking out of the box.

The honesty of two black participants reveals   the soul-searching that the academies brought to some. One commented:

The second one [high point] *was diversity. I thought I didn't have a problem before I went there. But when I went there I know I had a problem. ...I needed to move from tolerating people to accepting them throughout...*

The other recalled his shock on having to share a room with a white participant:

I walked through there and I found a white man there, and I thought maybe it's the wrong room. [laughter] *And I looked at my room number and I say, "But this is my room number." And he looked at it and he said yes. You know, it was so, so awkward, because I never expected that, I had to drop my bags and walk out for a few minutes.* [laughter] *Afterwards we had a great relationship ...*

The heated debates in the focus groups around the visit to Constitution Hill [see end note]   and its adjacent prison uncovered the lingering hurts of apartheid. The visit was seen as by some as a high point of their experience and by others as a low. One participant prefaced a comment on the visit to Constitution Hill with the statement "I had such good relationships with my group – I was the only white – we thought like friends". He/she then went on to say that, after the visit, "We couldn't look each other in the eye anymore".   One participant, who described the visit and its aftermath of "emotional" confrontations as a "low" moment, questioned its relevance in a leadership education course but was answered thus:

*Things like that are not **said** in the work place but ... The more they speak about those things, the more the people become liberated and free from those things.*

Challenges back at the workplace
The focus group discussion was an opportunity to explore the comment in the questionnaire responses on the hurdles in applying new learning on returning from the academies. One or two saw leadership in terms of position, claiming to be limited in their attempts to bring change by their lack of power; several expressed irritation with rigid rules and bureaucracy. However, a stronger thread

was the need to take responsibility for change within one's own sphere as illustrated in these two extracts:

It doesn't matter what level you at, but you have to take a risk, I mean take your own decisions. I mean I'm not at senior management but I can make a difference.
The thing is it's up to the individual how to put yourself within the situation - you can have an impact even from a lower level. You don't need space or some authority to be able to lead.

An academic librarian picked this theme up in talking of poor service in her department and of how the academy had shown her not to wait to be told what was wrong. She had learned "to see things before they happen".

Renewed vision
As mentioned earlier, one of the drives behind the academies was concern over what one of CALL managers called the inability of South African librarians to see the "big picture". In trying to articulate their vision for LIS, participants in all the focus groups referred to their aspirations to raise the visibility of libraries and the library profession. One talked of the importance of "selling their vision" and several used words like "making LIS more visible" and rising above the "radar screen".

There were several examples of attempts to be more responsive to users' needs. An academic librarian described how he had re-arranged his library's knowledge commons space to meet the preferences of students; and a public librarian reported on the increase in her user numbers since she had cleared her library of hundreds of unreadable books and made it a "place where people want to come back to".

Divides within the LIS profession surfaced in the discussion of vision. One public librarian's comment on the "hurtful" attitudes of academic librarians provoked an academic librarian to answer that it was "just in the imagination". However, her feeling of being "second-class" was echoed in the other groups. One public librarian talked of her sense of inadequacy at the beginning of the academy when she was surrounded by academic librarians. The talk of divides led to calls to move out of the silos of academic and public librarianship – and for moves "to unite LIS". As one put it:

We need to see each other as librarians – not as one from a public library, one from an academic library.

6. Train the Trainer courses

It was interesting to see how many of these same themes emerged in the three Train the Trainer focus groups. It became clear that many had changed their conceptions of "training" in the course of the week. There was debate around

the concepts of teaching, training and facilitating, with admissions that librarians tend to favour "presentations". There was agreement on the importance of knowing the audience and catering for diversity – including the needs of Generation Y students. Both groups spent time exploring how their relationships with colleagues, in their day to day interactions and at meetings, had improved with new listening and negotiating skills. However, there was little evidence of alumni moving beyond their own library walls as was suggested in the CALL programme goals. It seemed that no platform as yet existed to enable this.

As with the leadership academies, the premise of the course design seemed to be that, before people can train others, they need to build their own self-knowledge. There was consensus in both focus groups that what distinguished it from other Train the Trainer courses was its emphasis on self-exploration. There was praise for the quiet reflection that began each day, which one participant described as a "meeting with yourself". The outcomes of this philosophical, less mechanistic, approach seem to be more than new training skills – as reflected in several comments on acceptance of self and new insights into ingrained habits in dealing with people. There was gratitude to the course hosts who created the safe environment for what Cape Town participants described as a process of "stripping down" and "breaking down" – then of "rebuilding". In some, this process reinforced ideals and beliefs in the social mission of libraries, as shown in a ringing statement from a public librarian "I am passionate about the people!"

7. Conclusions

It is hoped that the description of the various phases of the CALL programme evaluation process in this paper has demonstrated how the mixing of methodologies and triangulating of data took the evaluation beyond the first two levels of Kirkpatrick's model. They provide credible evidence of learning and behaviour changes – and of a few unfulfilled goals.

As stated in an earlier section, the questionnaire survey found that 75% of respondents reported using new skills and knowledge at least once a week. The focus groups offer support as well as explanations for these positive outcomes. For example, the following extract suggests that it was not just the training that was sustaining the learning – rather it was belief, firstly, in the value of the LIS profession, then in the personal ability "to make a difference":

> *I must have grown in leaps and bounds. I take more risks, I'm more confident of my profession and it will last because now I know I can make a difference. I use now not only what I learned at the academy but I'm going back to all the courses I've taken.*

The values that were embedded in the programme were made explicit in the interviews with the CALL managers – for example their beliefs that leadership begins with introspection. Participants would agree that the emphasis was as much on introspection and self-awareness as on specific skills. Many might indeed claim that this "inside-out" approach (James 2008) is what made the learning of new skills "stick".

Another goal of the programme was to develop amongst future leaders a sense of purpose and vision for South African LIS. The evaluation found that, indeed, the CLLA had nurtured aspirations for visible, relevant and united LIS. The vision might be encapsulated in the following three extracts from both public and academic librarians, each in a different focus group:

> *My vision is for libraries to better the country.*
> *Libraries are social agents – to change people's lives and to grow our youth yes.*
> *My vision is to have an impact on an individual's life – to change someone's life.*

i. Following the country's first democratic elections in 1994, Constitution Hill was built on the site of a century-old prison complex where the leaders of major liberation groups, including Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, were once detained. It also housed rebellious British soldiers during the Boer War, striking mineworkers, political activists, gangsters and criminals, and ordinary people arrested under the apartheid government's Pass Laws. It is now a multi-purpose, multi-faceted heritage precinct in the heart of the city, where visitors can learn about the injustices of South Africa's past while observing the process by which the country's freedom was won and is now protected.

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