

Chapter 5

Leadership Training for 21st Century Librarians Using INELI–SSAf Model as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is an integral aspect of successful organisations including libraries. Helping librarians to acquire leadership skills in order to adroitly navigate libraries through 21st century changes and challenges of the information environment is crucial. INELI (International Network for Emerging Library Innovators) was birthed globally as an initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to provide young leaders in public libraries across the world the opportunities to connect, learn, and explore new ideas and services that can transform their communities. INELI Sub-Saharan Africa (INELI-SSAf), an offshoot of the initiative for African public librarians, is a leadership training program with the primary objectives of exposing participants to concepts and practices about innovative information services in current times and assisting them to create within and across border networks for peer leaning. The topics taught include time management, advocacy, data management, smart risks, and innovations in libraries. (INELI SSAf is run by African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA)).

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INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership in libraries is crucial as the 21st century information landscape continue to evolve. An effective leader is one who can lead his followers to achieve the desired goal(s). Again, an effective leader is one who sees ahead, formulates what is needed to succeed today and in the future and successfully leads his followers to achieve the desired goal(s) by assisting them to realize their potentials. In order to achieve these, leaders need to be equipped with mindsets and skills that will assist them in managing change efficiently and spawning innovations necessary for 21st century library services. Leadership is birthed by an inner drive to make more efforts consistently, to complete tasks efficiently, and to show more tenacity in charting the way forward for greater success. Furthermore, leaders that are open-minded and confident about gaining new ideas and experiences are critical for the well-being of their organizations. Library leaders are then those who are knowledgeable enough to catch the vision of change and are willing to lead the staff to adapt to change.

It then follows that for librarians to continue being relevant and impactful in their different user communities, they need leaders who can point out the way on how to be innovative in rendering services to suit the information needs of the current times. The International Network for Emerging Library Innovators – Sub-Saharan Africa (INELI-SSAf) program as a case study, underscores the importance of exposing librarians to leadership training for innovative services and information products for the survival of public libraries in the competitive and ever-changing information provision environment. It is worthy of note that leadership in libraries is closely tied with innovation considering the wide array of changes that have been brought into the information provision sector by technology and social changes. Technology and nature are making change fast and completely unavoidable for all professions. However, it can be reasonably argued that the field of information witnesses more changes than every other sector. Internet, web 2.0 and Artificial Intelligence are bringing multitudes of changes in the way people interact and communicate. Social media, robotics and Internet of Things (IoT) are realities of the 21st century information sector. Organizations and agencies in the information provision sector are continuously learning how to adjust their procedures and services to align with and make use of these changes. Technology, changing community demographics, climate change and downturn in the global economy have all brought transformations to the practice of librarianship. Public libraries have been caught up in the squall of these changes. They have had to face radical shifts in the form and format of information needed by their patrons, stagnant or dwindling budget, and the increasing need to do more with minimal funds.

However, innovations do not spring up if they are not introduced in organisations such as libraries. Leadership has a large role to play in spawning new services,

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