

# Managing and Managers of Academic Libraries

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**Abstract:** *This paper looks at attitudes about leadership and decision making among leaders in academic libraries in Norway and Romania. Two different surveys were conducted, containing similar questions, and the results were compared. The surveys uncovered demographics – “who are the leaders?” as well. One of the findings that concerns the status of the library leaders is that in Romania they are considered academics, and this is also mirrored in their backgrounds. For Norway, the recruitment to a leader position in the academic library comes through the ranks, so to speak – most academic library leaders have already worked in the library before they become leaders. This background is different from the Romanian situation. To what extent it also has implications for attitudes about leadership remains to be seen, or whether the differences that can be observed in the attitudes between the academic library leaders in the two countries can be explained otherwise.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership, academic libraries, Norway, Romania*

## Introduction

Libraries can be seen as warehouses for information, and when the information world changes, so must the libraries. In this paper we look at how leaders of academic libraries think and act in coping with changes that affect their libraries.

The warehouse metaphor is maybe too passive, and academic librarians globally have been forced –by personal inclination, by decisions made by the university or college they serve, by the changing times in academia and technology – to become more pro-active in order to survive.

An important feature in the discussions about librarianship of the future, and especially about academic librarianship, where many of the issues within e-science and information management are likely to be experienced most acutely, is the extent to which academic librarians are able to make strategic decisions about the way forward by themselves and, as they see fit in cooperation with staff, or whether the academic institutions to which they belong will be making those decisions on their behalf.

The paper reports findings from two surveys among academic librarians. One was carried out in Norway in the fall of 2011.<sup>1</sup> The survey was sent out to 35 university and college libraries and 78 librarians responded to the questionnaire. Since the total number of university and college librarians in Norway is 145 (*Statistics Norway*, 2010), the response rate is approximately 50%. In the survey, in addition to demographic information – age, gender, type and size of library, educational background, how long they have been a leader or worked in the library – the survey also investigated how decisions are made, by whom and with what kind of influence. The requirements (formal and others) for the job and the way leadership is conducted were also explored. The questions were posed in Norwegian, and the text of the questionnaire and answers were later translated.

The second survey was carried out among Romanian academic librarians from universities with government funding that are taking part in a new acquisitions consortium formed in early spring 2012. In this survey, the respondents were asked to reply to background questions, and to questions similar to those in the Norwegian survey about attitudes and ideas about different aspects of leadership. The questionnaire was translated into Romanian from Norwegian through English. During the translation questions were altered and fewer alternatives were offered for replies. The survey was sent to 25 library directors. Eleven directors replied, giving a response rate of 44%. Since the

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<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian survey is part of Ane Landøy's ongoing PhD research to be submitted to the Royal School of Library and Information Science in Copenhagen, Denmark. Original research includes 243 library leaders from both public and academic libraries. Here, only some of the results from her research regarding academic library leaders are presented.

actual number of replies was relatively small and the questions were altered (with fewer choices of response than in the Norwegian survey), the Romanian data is presented either in narrative form or in more concentrated tables.

## Leadership in Libraries

The survey is modeled closely on similar surveys of various groups of Danish and British library leaders (Johannsen & Pors, 2001; Pors, 2007; Pors, 2008; Pors, Dixon, & Robson, 2004). The Danish surveys were done in close cooperation with the Danish Association of Librarians, and aimed at uncovering and supporting issues within library leadership. Seen together, they give a fascinating picture of library leaders' changing focus, from being mainly concerned with the internal workings of the libraries to focusing a much higher degree of attention on the circumstances surrounding them (Pors, 2007). In their research Landøy and Repanovici (2012) found that this shift is even more pronounced for the Norwegian library leaders.

The changing surroundings are concerns for leaders of all kinds of libraries, and to a certain degree all libraries are under the same set of pressures from user expectations and rapidly changing technology, with the internet and electronic information sources being recognized as the most prominent. In the academic world, however, there are additional pressures from scholars' needs for access to the best possible and most up-to-date sources of information, and academic libraries that cannot deliver what their students, researchers and academic staff require will rapidly face threats of economic cuts or even of closing. Many academic libraries around the world are also facing severe economic problems due to the global economic crises and are looking at more efficient ways of fulfilling their visions and missions. This will include among other things the use of the new technological possibilities to create other sets of services, and to promote them to the users as improvements (Neal, 2010).

In the Scandinavian context, most research about libraries is done on issues concerning public libraries and their role in society, while academic libraries are seldom the subject of studies. "Leadership" as a library topic is also not very well investigated. Still, recently there has been some research done on academic library leadership. Also globally, the interest in management and leadership issues has increased, in the LIS field as well as in the public sector and in business and organizational research generally (Pors, 2008, p.139).

Professor Peter Hemon at Simmons College in Boston, USA, is one of the leading LIS academics who have written extensively about leadership in the LIS-profession, although mainly from a US perspective, and within the traditional US educational framework. In his recent book *Shaping the Future* (Hernon, 2010), he lists some of the ongoing research trends. They are quite similar to the current trends in general (not library-specific) management research.

## Findings

### *Educational Background*

Table 1 shows the educational background of the Norwegian academic library leaders. More than two-thirds of the Norwegian academic library leaders were educated as librarians for three or four years in one of the LIS schools in Norway, Denmark or the UK. There is also a substantial group who have a minor in LIS with a major in another discipline. The group with a master's in LIS is small, which is not surprising since the master program at the Oslo University College (where the majority of Norwegian librarians are educated) is relatively new.

The Norwegian law for municipal libraries states that library directors or top level leaders have to be educated as librarians in an institution offering a LIS degree. There is no such formal requirement for leaders of academic libraries, and it is only rarely that advertisements for vacant positions mention a master's degree in LIS. There are, however, a number of leaders with a degree in leadership subjects, or a master's degree in other academic subjects.

Table 1. Educational background of library leaders in Norway (N= 78)

Degree	n	%
Librarian	53	68
LIS part of degree	13	17
Master's in LIS	3	4
Degree in leadership	9	12
Master's in other disciplines	17	22
Other	4	5

In Romania, the picture is somewhat different. 27% (3) of the academic library leaders were educated as librarians, but nobody has a postgraduate degree in LIS. The rest have a master's (27% - 3 ) or PhD (46% - 5) degree in fields

other than LIS. In Romania, according to the law, university library directors are academic staff. That is probably why just a few have had their main education in one of the LIS schools.

### *Leadership Responsibilities*

As for the Norwegian library leaders, findings indicate that 92% (69) of respondents have operational responsibility while 80% (60) have responsibility for staff, and 88% (66) have responsibility for finances. The mean number of staff for whom the respondents have responsibility was 11. The staff responsibility includes individual follow-up and assessment of subordinates, human resources, personnel policies, recruitment, etc. while the operative responsibility includes practical facilitation, coordination and professional quality management in the libraries.

So for Norway we see a picture of somewhat smallish libraries, divided into several branches and departments, and the leaders having direct responsibility for a limited number of staff. At the same time, we find that the mean length of employment with leadership responsibility in the library is 12.5 years while the mean work experience in the library sector is 22 years. The leaders can therefore be seen as quite experienced, having worked in the library before they become leaders, and also as library directors at the time of answering the survey. There seems to be a tendency among employers to prefer experienced librarians as leaders in academic libraries, as we can see from the difference in the mean number of years in employment in a library and the mean number of years as leader in a library.

The leaders of Romanian academic libraries also have operational, staff, and budgeting responsibilities. Ninety-one percent (10) have responsibility for coordination, 82% (9) for professional quality management and 64% (7) for practical facilitation. Regarding responsibility for personnel, 91% (10) have individual follow-up and assessment for personnel, 82% (9) are responsible for human resources, 64% (7) for personnel policies and 64% (7) for recruitment. 73% (8) have budget responsibilities.

As for Romania, the mean length of employment with leadership responsibility in the library is 15 years. Figures vary from 5 months up to 29 years. Contrary to the Norwegian situation, most library leaders have been employed as library directors from the beginning of their employment in the library. In Romania, one can become a library leader without previous experience in the same library, and can stay there throughout his/her entire career. Most of the respondents have had this position for more than 10 years, and all were over 40 years old at the time of the survey.

### *Leadership – Making Decisions*

From the background variables an image of Norwegian academic library leaders emerges: they have a solid basis as experienced librarians and leaders, and medium to long education. How this influences their thoughts on decision making is also explored. Respondents were asked about their opinions on certain statements regarding decisions made in the library.

Table 2. Agreement with statements about decision making (Norway)

	DA	AaL	A	QA	TA	N/A -DK	N=
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Strategic decisions by library leadership	3	10	5	33	48	2	63
Strategic decisions delegated in organization	22	16	16	25	17	5	64
Staff have large influence on decisions	5	18	21	38	19	-	63
Agreement important	3	16	18	48	15	-	62
Strategic decisions made by owner organization	16	18	13	21	21	11	62
Library influence on owner's strategic decisions	9	22	17	28	16	8	64

DA: Don't agree; AaL: Agree a little; A: Agree; QA: Quite agree; TA: Totally agree; N/A - DK: Not applicable or don't know

The most striking replies here are the 22% of Norwegian library leaders who reply that they don't agree with the statement "many strategic decisions are delegated in the organization", and the 16% who agree only a little. Even though slightly more than 50% of the respondents to some extent agree, the number of non-agreement and little-agreement can be seen to run counter to most research on leadership in the Nordic countries. One typical example of findings from research in Nordic leadership is Schramm-Nielsen et al (2004) who found "a management style characterized by informality, equality and restraint. . .[and] a consensual, participative and inclusive approach to decision making and change implementation" in their study of Nordic managers in different businesses (Schramm-Nielsen, et al., 2004, p. 181). In the Danish survey from 2007, however, Pors found something similar. His theory is that the academic institutions at top (rectorate) level make decisions that the library has to adhere to. Also, both the Danish and Norwegian academic libraries are smallish with little room for strategic decisions.

In the academic libraries agreement on decision making is very important, both for Denmark in 2007 (Pors, 2007, p. 25) and Norway in 2011. On the other hand, we see that the overwhelming majority of Norwegian academic library leaders quite agree or totally agree that strategic decisions are made by the library leadership. This supports the same tendency, that the top leadership makes strategic decisions rather than overseeing delegation in the organization.

Table 3. Agreement with statements about decision-making (Romania) (N=11)

	%	n
Strategic decisions by the library leadership	55	6
Strategic decisions are delegated in organization	36	4
Agreement about strategic decisions	73	8
Strategic decisions made by parent organization	27	3
Library has influence on owner's strategic decisions	45	5

In the Romanian survey, the questions were asked as “agree/don’t agree”. Some 73% of Romanian academic library leaders claimed that agreement about strategic decisions is important in their libraries while 45% said that the library has influence on strategic decisions, and 55% agree that these decisions have to be made by library leaders. About one-third agreed that “many strategic decisions are delegated in the organization”, and even fewer (27%) agree that “strategic decision are made by the owner organization”. Similarities as well as differences with the Norwegian findings are detected: one of the main differences is the significantly lower agreement with the statement about strategic decisions being made by the library leadership. At the same time, both the Norwegian and Romanian library leaders agreed that it is important to have agreement about strategic decisions.

Strategic leadership is more than just making decisions. In Table 4, influence ascribed to different aspects of leadership in relation to staff was explored. We see that the formal position, competences and personality/relations are understood as most important, and that “punish and reward” are much less significant for leaders in Norway.

This shows an image of a leader with persuasion as a leadership tool instead of dominance and reliance on force. It is also in tune with the picture we have of the Norwegian academic library leaders, in smallish libraries, with relatively long work experience in the library, first as staff and then as leader. The fact that many seem to have been promoted “from the ranks” will also influence their relation as leaders to staff. This phenomenon is well known in areas other than the library sector also.

Table 4. Influence ascribed to different aspects of leadership in relation to staff (Norway) (N=60)

	NS	AbS	MS	SS	LS	N/A - DK
	%	%	%	%	%	%
My formal position	3	12	18	33	33	-
My knowledge and understanding	-	5	13	35	47	-
My possibilities to punish and reward	42	35	7	7	-	10
My possibilities to manage resources	7	10	17	32	32	3S
My personality and relation to other people	-	-	10	25	65	-

NS: No significance; AbS: A bit significant; MS: Medium significance; SS: Some significance; LS: Large significance; N/A -DK: Not applicable or don't know

As for the Romanian survey, questions were asked as “agree/don’t agree”. Some 91% of Romanian academic library leaders agreed with the importance of academic knowledge and understanding, while 73% agreed with the importance of the possibility of managing resources. Only 36% found possibilities to punish and reward to be important. The least important influence is ascribed to the formal position.

Romanian leaders in academic libraries rely more on their academic knowledge and understanding, while Norwegian leaders think of their formal position as a more significant influence than the Romanians do. This is probably because the Romanian library directors are recognized as academics in their universities, and therefore consider themselves just as much academic staff as library directors. This is also in accordance with their educational background, where the Romanian leaders to a much higher degree are PhD holders from other academic disciplines, not LIS. For both groups of leaders the possibilities to punish and reward are seen as less significant.

We have also seen an indication that this group of Romanian library directors to a lesser degree than the Norwegian library leaders were recruited from library staff, but they came from outside the library to become directors. It would be interesting to research this further, to see whether it is true for all Romanian library leaders, and what differences in perceptions and attitudes can be explained by this.

Table 5. Influence ascribed to different aspects of leadership in relation to staff (Romania) (N=11)

	%	n
My formal position	27	3
My knowledge and understanding	91	10
My possibilities to punish and reward	36	4
My possibilities to manage resources	73	8
My personality and relation to other people	27	3

The degree of agreement with statements about the job situation and the framework for decisions is explored in Table 6. We see that the Norwegian leaders have quite clearly defined targets, responsibility and authority, and hardly ever doubt where a task belongs. On the other hand, almost half do not have a written job description although they have a clearly defined leader on the next level.

Table 6. Agreement with statements about job situation (Norway) (N=60)

	DA	AaL	A	QA	TA	N/A - DK
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I have clearly defined targets	10	23	18	38	10	-
For staff, it is obvious that I am the leader	2	8	23	40	27	-
I have clearly defined responsibility and authority	2	13	23	30	32	-
I have a written job description	40	5	8	8	35	3.3
I never doubt where a task belongs	17	12	18	33	20	-
I have a clearly defined leader at the next level up	15	17	13	15	40	-

DA: Don't agree; AaL: Agree a little; A: Agree; QA: Quite agree; TA: Totally agree; N/A - DK: Not applicable or don't know

The situation is a bit different for the Romanian library directors. All have very clearly defined responsibility and authority with 73% having written job descriptions, 64% with a clearly defined leader at the next level up and never doubt where a task belongs, and 46% are sure that for staff it is obvious that they are the leader.

Table 7. Agreement with statements about job situation (Romania) (N=11)

	%	n
I have clearly defined targets	100	11
For staff, it is obvious that I am the leader	45	5
I have clearly defined responsibility and authority	100	11
I have a written job description	73	8
I never doubt where a task belongs	64	7
I have a clearly defined leader at the next level up	64	7

## Conclusion

We have analyzed two quite different systems of academic libraries, both of which have developed new and modern libraries in recent years. Perhaps the Norwegian system can be said to be more advanced regarding implementation of new information and communication technologies. Our first conclusion is that library leaders in both countries are confronted with the same user needs, with the same information preferences for the tools of the new generation.

From these two surveys we get an image of academic library leaders in smallish libraries, with responsibilities for personnel and budgeting, and to a certain degree also for strategic decisions. The libraries are, however, clearly parts of their universities, and major decisions are made at the top level (Senate or equivalent). The Norwegian academic library directors seem to be recruited through the ranks, and the Romanians mainly from outside the library. The Romanian academic library leaders are also more often considered as academic staff of their university. Some of the differences in perceptions and attitudes may be explained by this, but further research and more respondents would be necessary for a better picture.

In the discussion about the future, with e-science and the roles of (academic) libraries as points of focus, one needs to take into consideration the fact that strategic decisions often are made on the top level. The libraries may be allowed to suggest, and may also be consulted about plans for e-science, but the final decision will be at Senate level.

No matter where they are situated, library leaders have to be familiar with the latest technology developments and the latest devices to provide information. They have to promote a continuing education system that is up to date, also for the librarians. They have to keep up with marketing and other research regarding users' needs for any kind of information.

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