

# The ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute

## A five-year old spreads its wings

by Ed Garten

*I hope that with the knowledge I gained at the institute, I will become proficient at turning annoying loops of communication that foil change to fulfilling circles that foster satisfaction and create results and movement on to more change.*

*I plan to look at my organizational challenges with new eyes and new insight.*

*The participants, themselves, helped me understand "the vision thing," as I was always self-conscious about trying to make a vision something grand; but sometimes doing a simple thing well is the grandest vision.*

These were a few of many comments solicited from institute participants six weeks after the fifth ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute. Readers who have been around most five-year olds will surely know that time of life as playful, delightful, and a time of inordinate curiosity. The 2003 institute was definitely a five-year-old in which to take delight!

Having financially supported each member of my library leadership team's engagement with earlier institutes, I recall each of them returning to work with nothing but praise for this intensive learning opportunity and more than ready to put into practice many new insights. But, then, several suggested to me in a none too subtle way, "Hey, now it's your turn." Already seeing the light at the end of my own administrative career, I had mistakenly assumed

that old dogs couldn't learn new tricks. Was I surprised; now my entire leadership team has a common frame of reference as we approach both service delivery and human resource problems.

The fifth institute was intensive, yet sheer fun. As one participant put it: "I learned that if Harvard professors can present complex concepts in ways that are so humorous I am still laughing (six weeks later), I can cultivate adding joy to the library experience for the people [who] work here and for those who use our resources and services. I hope to make a lasting contribution toward my library's cultural transformation to a joyous organization."

As in prior years, the institute followed a now well-established curriculum with participants having the opportunity to focus on a pre-institute reading of Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*.<sup>2</sup> Under the direction of Joan Gallos, we explored the four conceptual frames useful for analyzing leadership strategies: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Using the book that he coauthored with Lisa Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*,<sup>3</sup> Bob Kegan led sessions that challenged us to explore how the transformation of the workplace language we employ can become an efficacious vehicle for stimulating change within our organizations.

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### About the author

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The primary means of presenting often complex higher education issues was through the classic Harvard case method. Participants read, reflect upon, and address a set of challenging questions, within the context of a real life case (with the names changed to protect the innocent, or guilty!). Most of the assigned cases were not library situations, rather they were larger organization or systemwide issues. As one participant put it, "Given the level of management expertise represented by the participants themselves, added to the fact that most of these individuals have long been immersed in the literature on organizational change in general and library management in particular, it did not take long for me to recognize that my expectations were more than met by all of the instructors, and that each of them were drawing on his or her own rich body of research."

### **Now, not all hands up at once!**

Some of those who have reported on earlier institutes in these pages have focused on the high quality of faculty leadership. As with most of the prior Institutes, faculty included James Honan, Robert Kegan, Maureen Sullivan, Joan Gallos, and Joe Zolner.

Let me not lower respect for that leadership—it was simply exceptional; however, it is equally noteworthy to suggest that, given the level of collective experience among participants, in tandem with the various opportunities for small group

interaction, peer-to-peer learning was guaranteed to be nothing less than infectious. Indeed, the institute planners facilitated future interaction by setting up a post-experience electronic list as a means to carry forward conversations that emerged during the program.

Given the likely number of "Type A" personalities in the room, there were few wallflowers in this bunch; indeed, at every opportunity for response to questions posed by faculty, typically dozens of hands would go up, figuratively crying out: "Pick me, pick me!" Instructors had an almost uncanny way of solidifying a sense of fairness of involvement among participants, drawing forth a rich tapestry of experience and insight, as well as some measure of what could only be called administrative angst. The knowing laughter of recognition of experiences shared, as well as the recognition of the often difficult human issues with which deans and directors are faced, threaded its way through each of the interactive sessions. Those hands that readily rose to offer insight, perspective, and powerful example came from 32 states, two Canadian provinces, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, and Australia. The energy in the room was palatable and contagious. That energy was enhanced by a horseshoe-shaped and tiered, high-tech learning environment, one that allowed even 97 participants to enjoy a sense of intimacy and interaction. Nearly a hundred mid-career and senior administrators became a community of learn-

## **ACRL invites you to attend the 2004 ACRL/ Harvard Leadership Institute: August 8–13**

Registration for the 2004 ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute is now open! The institute will be held at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 8–13, 2004.

- **Increase your capacity to lead and manage during this five-day institute.** Find out if your organization is well-positioned to meet current and future challenges and discover if your own leadership is effective. Harvard Institutes for Higher Education faculty will give special attention to issues such as: leadership, organizational strategy, transformational learning, and planning.

- **Learn among the leaders and trendsetters in academic library administration.** The institute is designed for directors of libraries and individuals in positions such as associate university librarian, assistant

dean, vice president of information resources, university librarian, and college librarian. Attendance would also be useful for individuals regularly involved in decision-making that affects the entire library operation and that involves other important relationships on campus.

Don't miss this exciting educational opportunity! Registration materials and complete details about the institute are available on the Web at [www.ppe.gse.harvard.edu/highered/index.html](http://www.ppe.gse.harvard.edu/highered/index.html) (scroll down to ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute).

Registration spots will fill quickly. Don't forget to register early to ensure you have a space in this prestigious institute. Questions about this institute can be directed to [acrl@ala.org](mailto:acrl@ala.org); (800) 545-2433, ext. 2522.

ers and problem solvers early on the first day. Even for a bunch of gregarious library leaders, it was simply amazing.

### Learn, reflect, and apply

In the wake of a week of focused readings, guided discussions, and the intentional interaction with peer colleagues, the institute ended with an evaluation of the experience.

Having spoken with many participants who had attended one of the four earlier Institutes, it is clear that in the fifth year the overall program quality and pedagogical dynamic not only had been sustained, earlier years, in fact, had built on one another, enriching the latest iteration of this rewarding professional opportunity. As with earlier institutes, the 2003 class spoke of valuing the fluid nature of the experience; the balance between small and large group activities; the opportunity to be center stage with a group of gifted instructors; and the often candid sharing and palatable sense of collegiality evidenced among the seven or eight individuals who gathered early each morning in the various small reflection groups. Perhaps the only minor criticism anyone had of the program was the meager time given over to coffee breaks. A sip of coffee, perhaps a quick phone call or e-mail check and we were hustled back into our high-tech fishbowl of learning.

As planning for the next institute (August 8–13, 2004) commences, it is already certain that future participants will leave that experience, as did the 2003 class, with a profound sense of the immense changes shaping both our profession and higher education. As leaders we must make increasingly compelling cases

(“*Building faculty...*” continued from page 80) campus community’s teaching, learning, and research agendas. They must share their information expertise with their campus community and build productive partnerships with teaching faculty. There are numerous examples in the nation where academic librarians have become leaders on their campuses. On some campuses librarians have become campus information officers, on other campuses they have become high-level administrators to foster information technology, assessment, and faculty development. Other models can be developed, and only the lack of imagination can stop academic librarians from becoming leaders on their campus.

There are no limits for academic librarians in the 21st century, there are, however, endless op-

portunities. “The future looks bright for librarians who embrace their emergent roles as teachers and scholars. In many ways, technology is a vehicle for expanding the librarian’s sphere of influence and collaboration with teaching and research faculty is certainly one of the key elements to the profession’s future.”<sup>5</sup>

for change long before the need to do so becomes desperately obvious. I call this strategic resilience.

Within our information organizations much of the response to this need for organizational resilience, sadly, has been scripted: strands of nostalgia for what is (and what was), elements of denial regarding deep secular trends in our competitive environment, and an arresting arrogance rooted in the powerful political constituencies of legacy programs. Today, organizational renewal (indeed transformation) must be a natural consequence of an organization’s innate resilience in the face of rampant challenge.

Many of our current models of both change and leadership focus on *working to get better* as opposed to *working to get different*. I would argue that we must be about the latter if we are to hope to confront incipient trends and embrace emergent opportunities for our students and faculty. Fundamentally, the ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute is about helping leaders think about their organizations by employing compelling new language and metaphor as a means of framing and energizing organizational transformation and gaining facility in the use of tested techniques and strategies, ultimately to be placed in our evolving managerial tool kits.

### Notes

1. Lee B. Bolman and Terrance F. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).
2. Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). ■

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### Notes

1. ACRL’s “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.” (Chicago: American Library Association, 2000). Visit [www.acrl.org/infolit](http://www.acrl.org/infolit).
2. For more information on the TLT Group visit: [www.tltgroup.org](http://www.tltgroup.org).

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