

IJIDI: Book Review

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Libraries are spaces of peace. They are spaces of goodwill. They are spaces of intellectual stimulation. At least that is what most people who have never actually worked in a library tend to think. And while it is undoubtedly true that libraries can be all these things, they, like any other complex organization, are routinely beset by internal and external stresses, poor communication practices, difficult interpersonal relations, and toxic behaviours. In *Cultivating Civility*, authors Jo Henry, Joe Eshleman, and Richard Moniz set out to investigate and propose solutions to remedy these and myriad other challenges that not only impact the effectiveness of libraries within their communities of users, but also threaten to transform our workplaces into systemically dysfunctional environments for librarians and library workers.

The commitment these authors bring to workplace restoration is longstanding. All three previously collaborated on a survey of more than 4,000 U.S. library workers that resulted in the publication of their first book together, *The Dysfunctional Library: Challenges and Solutions to Workplace Relations* (2017). The present title builds on and extends the findings uncovered in this first study. Indeed, *Cultivating Civility* was not only based on this earlier work, but was prompted by a series of practical questions about dysfunctional library workplaces that their first book provoked. Readers wanted more than diagnosis. They wanted to know what might be done to remedy these problems and how individuals—from frontline workers to senior administrators—could develop healthier strategies for working together while at the same time affirming their individual perspectives and leveraging their individual strengths. Librarians and library workers, keen to develop stronger and more productive workplaces, will find much to consider in the creative advice and evidence-based solutions provided in the pages of this new book.

Cultivating Civility: Practical Ways to Improve a Dysfunctional Library is a realistic and solution-oriented book that presents practicable ideas for improving workplace communication, streamlining administrative functions, and restoring workplace relationships. The book is divided into four thematic areas organized around concepts relating to the individual worker, teamwork and collaboration, leadership, and the organization as an organic whole. The first five chapters focus on the individual as a workplace agent whose decisions—regardless of their place in the organizational hierarchy—have the potential to impact their colleagues. One goal of these initial chapters is to

persuade the reader that they, whether a frontline worker or an administrator, can contribute in powerful ways to the effective operation of the library through carefully curated professional and interpersonal relationships.

The next three chapters address team formation and operation with a strong focus on team-based communication, project management, and goal assessment. These chapters also foreground the importance of fostering a diverse library workforce and the need for visible functional teams that represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities they exist to serve.

Effective leadership is the theme around which chapters nine to fourteen are organized. Here the authors urge library leaders to be self-reflective and self-aware in their managerial practices while stressing the importance of authenticity, positive role modeling, and clear communication styles. These chapters also offer practical advice for aspiring leaders, including methods for developing sound management skillsets, that will promote one's ability to deal with workplace conflict effectively, manage resistance to change, and encourage collaboration across departments, units, and functional teams within the organization. Attention is also given, particularly in chapter twelve, to the ways in which all of these managerial and leadership practices must be tempered and adapted to accommodate the diversity of cultural backgrounds and practices that people bring with them to the workplace.

The book's final four chapters address the problems of dysfunctional organizations as a whole. Topics covered in these chapters include hiring practices and priorities, evolving organizational structures (especially relevant today as libraries worldwide struggle to implement sweeping technological and social changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic), and workplace training. Trust, inclusivity, and respect for diversity all emerge as central concerns that require careful attention as workers and administrators strive together to construct healthier and more productive workplaces.

Cultivating Civility has much to recommend it. The visual structure of the book is clear, and the language is approachable and direct. As a result, it is easy for the reader to move through the content and exercises without getting lost in jargon. At the same time, it is clear the authors enjoy language as they discuss new ideas and new phrasings—a few of these include Fobazi Ettarh's concept of “vocational awe” to denote one's devotion to the profession and the Zen-based idea of the “beginner's mind” to refer to subjective reflection on past experiences to surface hidden (remove the hyphen) biases. The book's typographical layout is also easy to follow. Key information is often spotlighted in easy to follow steps utilizing numbered or bulleted lists, and/or highlighting additional suggestions in framed boxes. The authors employ these framed boxes to draw attention to individual and group exercises and to highlight questions and exercises designed for reader and even group reflection at the conclusion of each chapter. Innovative suggestions include mindfulness meditation, labyrinth walks, and nature breaks. As one might expect for such a clearly written book, the individual chapters are short and to the point. And each chapter offers good practical solutions to challenging real-world workplace situations. Many also include case studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of the strategies proposed. For example, in one chapter about the importance of diversity in hiring practices, the authors not only refer to a variety of academic studies and workplace statistics, but also present a valuable case study of efforts being made at the J. Murrey Atkins Library at University of North Carolina at Charlotte to bolster diversity in the workplace (pp. 162-163).

Here then, is a book that is as readable as it is practical; nor do the authors shy away from difficult topics. I found their approach particularly forthright in the book's fourth chapter where they set to examine strategies for dealing with workplace conflict. Included in this chapter is the very unpleasant topic of workplace bullying. Librarianship is a helping profession, and as a result, tends to attract individuals with personalities hardwired to minimize conflict and disagreement of all kinds. Regrettably, as my own research on workplace harassment in academic libraries has demonstrated, this provides an ideal environment in which bullying and other aggressive behaviours can flourish. This is particularly problematic in environments that seek to foster workplace equity and diversity. *Cultivating Civility* is unflinching in its assessment of this endemic problem within librarianship. The authors note, for example, that such workplace harassment often goes unaddressed precisely because human resources departments typically act to protect the organization rather than the individual. Structural problems like this one can be addressed only if frontline workers, senior administrators, and everyone in between, work together to put an end to these toxic practices. The first step on that road is willingness on the part of authors like these to address publicly difficult subjects like this in a spirit of sincere honesty.

The seriousness with which these authors address issues of diversity and inclusivity is perhaps nowhere more evident than in a careful reading of the book's index. Among the many relevant entries one finds: "diversity," "lack of diversity in libraries," "diversity audits," "diversity, treatment of staff and lack of," "diversity librarians," "bias," "implicit bias," "bias, training to reduce," "discovery systems, bias in library," "organizational training, bias training," "diversity training," "search engines, racism reinforced by," and "teams, diversity". Although I was somewhat surprised not to find entries concerned with gender issues and accessibility, it became clear that these issues had been folded in under entries dealing with inclusivity concerns more broadly.

Cultivating Civility: Practical Ways to Improve a Dysfunctional Library is a book designed for all those employed in the library environment. Its themes of communication, forming cohesive and functioning teams, vision and role modeling by library administration and engaging all employees in the change process, are widespread and applicable to almost all libraries. I have only a few quibbles to offer. The first is that the authors tend to conflate leaders and administrators. Although it is very trendy to refer to administrators, managers, and supervisors as leaders in professional literature as well as in internal documents, leaders are not made by their place in the hierarchy. Leaders, in the genuine sense of the word, possess interpersonal qualities that manifest themselves in positive outward behaviours. If only all administrators were also genuine leaders, so many of the problems addressed in this book would simply not exist. It may have also been useful for the authors to draw some distinguishing lines between academic, public, and corporate libraries. The communities these libraries serve result in divergent working cultures that require nuanced approaches when addressing organizational dysfunction. For non-American readers, however, the fact that this book was written and published in the U.S. does nothing to diminish its value. The importance of workplace civility is constant regardless of one's geopolitical context. As we collectively face the world's challenges together—from climate change to COVID-19—the lessons *Cultivating Civility* sets out to teach seem all the more pressing. A book like this belongs in almost every library.

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