

LAS LEARNING ALERTS

Library Association of Singapore



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LAS Learning Alerts is created by the Training and Development Committee. It keeps everyone in our library community up to date on new trends and news.

Write to us at training@las.org.sg if you would like to share material for LAS Learning Alerts.

Library Leadership

This issue looks at library leadership. You will find resources to help you grow as a leader, whatever your role or stage in your career. We also spoke with Ian Yap, Director of Resource Discovery & Management at the National Library Board. He began as a school librarian and has since led nationwide reading campaigns and Singapore's public library network. He shares why leadership starts with relationships, how he rebuilt trust in a team divided by competition, and why communication, critical thinking and connection matter most in the age of AI.

Librarian in the Spotlight

Could you briefly introduce yourself to our readers and share a little about your journey in the library profession?



Ian Yap
Director
Resource Discovery &
Management
National Library Board

It was pure serendipity that I took up a newly offered post for a school librarian when I was temping as a secondary school clerk. The myth of the job being that of a serious, mundane and highly rigid one was totally debunked by the deep thinking that went into organising information on shelves to turning the library into a haunted house for the sake of bringing horror fiction to life. Being a curious person and brain-packed with ideas, I was so taken by the varied activities I could venture in that I applied for a full-time position with NLB when I saw the recruitment ad.

I spent much of my NLB career getting people to read. My journey has taken me from reader services of all ages, professional development, international librarianship with IFLA, nationwide reading campaigns to overseeing Singapore's network of public libraries. Along the way, there have been festivals such as BookCrossing, Read for Books (currently Read for Good), and the first Big Book Giveaway.

Today, I oversee Content Readiness across a diverse range of collections - ensuring that materials are acquired, processed, described, preserved and made ready for discovery and use. My remit spans the full content lifecycle from acquisitions and materials processing, metadata management, logistics, warehousing to digitisation - essentially, everything it takes to move an item from arrival to access.

In short, a career devoted to books, people and keeping libraries relevant (with plenty of “other duties as assigned” along the way)

There are many different approaches to leadership. How would you describe your personal leadership philosophy and style?

I have always believed that leadership starts with relationships. I am not sure I have ever successfully led anyone simply by telling them what to do. I would much rather win hearts and minds - and help people see why the work matters and what we can achieve together.

A big part of my role is therefore translating what can sometimes sound like fairly ordinary responsibilities into something more meaningful: an outcome we can be proud of, an impact we can see, or simply something the team can point to and say, “We made that happen.”

I try to get to know the people I work with - their strengths, what motivates them and, importantly, where they would like to go next. I enjoy finding that sweet spot where someone’s aspirations meet what the team and organisation need. When we get that right, work becomes more than completing tasks; it becomes an opportunity for people to grow while contributing something that matters.

I am also, by nature, quite hands-on - at least until someone reminds me that I am the Director and should probably stop doing their job. I am happy to roll up my sleeves when needed, but equally, I know that my job is to create space for others to step up, take ownership and shine.

The same philosophy extends beyond my own team. I invest quite deliberately in relationships across the organisation. I like being the person who can connect the dots, bring the right people together, bridge different perspectives and occasionally make a roadblock disappear.

So if I had to sum up my leadership philosophy, it would probably be - know your people, give them something worth believing in, help them find their place in it, and clear the path for them to succeed. And occasionally, remember to keep my hands off.

How do you define effective or successful leadership in the context of the library profession? What qualities do you believe are essential for a library leader today?

For me, effective leadership in the library profession today comes down to three things: communication, critical thinking and connection.

Communication is about articulating a vision, translating it into something meaningful for the team, and bringing people along. It also means listening, showing empathy and being present. A brilliant vision is of little use if nobody understands it or wants to come along.

Critical thinking is even more important in the age of AI. AI can give us answers remarkably quickly; leadership is knowing whether we are asking the right questions. We need the judgement to test assumptions, validate what we hear, question ethical implications and not mistake a confident answer for the truth.

And increasingly, leadership is about connection and influence. Libraries are stronger when we speak and act collectively. A good library leader should be able to build relationships across institutions, bring fellow leaders around the table and convince them that an alliance can achieve more than any one library can alone. It takes some charisma, plenty of trust, and probably quite a few cups of coffee.

Perhaps the library leader of today needs to be part communicator, part critical thinker and part bridge-builder - someone who can bring people together, ask the difficult questions and give libraries a stronger collective voice.

Could you share a memorable leadership challenge you have encountered and how you navigated it?

One of my earliest leadership lessons came when, as a very young manager, I was asked to head a library where the staff knew the collections, services and customers far better than I did.

During my onboarding, one team lead stopped short of sharing too much with me because she feared that if I knew what she knew, she might lose her job. That was when I realised I had inherited not a knowledge problem, but a trust problem.

The culture had become highly competitive, with staff vying for the boss's favour. One of my first moves was therefore to remove the things that reinforced that competition including a weekly chart ranking staff by the loans generated from their clients. Instead, I focused on identifying what each person was good at, recognising those strengths and giving them opportunities to use them. At the same time, I encouraged everyone to upskill, not because their jobs were at risk, but because we could all become better at them.

Trust, of course, does not arrive by memo. It took many conversations, some leaps of faith and reassurance upwards as well as downwards that things were going to be fine. Most importantly, I painted a picture of what we could achieve together. We introduced one new service or collection at a time, that excited our customers – the usage grew, and the team subsequently received compliments and awards for its work. Some staff can still recall that this was the best stint they had in their career.

Learning Resources

Library Leadership & Management (LL&M)



<https://llm.corejournals.org/llm>

Focuses on practical leadership and management issues in libraries, with an emphasis on organizational change, team development, project management, professional growth, and effective leadership practices.

ALA Core — Leadership & Management Competencies



<https://www.ala.org/core/continuing-education/leadership-and-management-competencies>

Core has developed 14 leadership and management competencies specifically for library professionals, providing a comprehensive framework to support professional development, staff training, career advancement, and library and information science education.

Leadership and leadership development in academic libraries



<https://www.sciencedirect.com/org/science/article/abs/pii/S0143512417000448>

This paper is useful for distinguishing three forms of library leadership: emergent, team, and formal leadership or headship. The authors note the literature has focused mainly on formal and managerial roles, with less attention to informal, emergent, and team-based leadership.

Learning Resources

Inclusive Leadership – John J. Meier



<https://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/26771>

This resource presents inclusive leadership as a practical approach to creating equitable, participatory, and inclusive library workplaces, supported by theory, research, and practical examples.

New trend: Library leadership in the age of AI



<https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/ithaka-sr-us-library-survey-2025/>

AI is emerging as a key area of library leadership, supporting services, research, data analysis, and administration while raising concerns about privacy, ethics, bias, and governance. The growing focus is on **human-centred AI leadership**, ensuring that AI adoption is ethical, inclusive, transparent, and aligned with library values and mission.

Leadership and Emotional Intelligence: A Study of University Library Directors and Their Senior Management Teams



<https://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/16043>

This research examines the emotional-intelligence traits considered important for university library directors and senior management teams.

Upcoming webinars and conferences:

Reimagining Libraries: Mission · Vision · Function

<https://silf.library.sh.cn/en/>



October 21 to 23, 2026
Shanghai Library East
Shanghai

Themed “Reimagining Libraries: Mission · Vision · Function,” the session gathers library and information professionals worldwide to explore AI and smart libraries, open science, digital resources and preservation, reader services, and the evolving role of libraries.

Singapore Open Research Conference 2026

<https://libguides.ntu.edu.sg/SGORconference2026>



November 4 to 5, 2026
Nanyang Technological University
Singapore

The Singapore Open Research Conference 2026 brings together researchers, librarians and research professionals to exchange ideas and practices on open research and scholarly communication. Sessions cover open access, research data, research integrity and emerging technologies, while fostering collaboration across Singapore's research community.

What We've Learned: Confronting AI's Challenges in Libraries

<https://web.cvent.com/event/98632c12-9bee-4ab5-bb05-5fcf69f453a4/summary>

November 16 to 17, 2026

A two-day virtual conference exploring the practical realities and challenges of generative AI in libraries. Library professionals will discuss AI integration and tools, AI literacy and instruction, research accuracy, copyright, ethics and licensing, institutional policies, change management, and the impact of AI adoption on staff and services.

Upcoming webinars and conferences:

Transforming University Libraries: Library Leadership & Innovation Programme (TULLIP)

<https://nus.edu.sg/nuslibraries/tullip>

January 11 to 15, 2027
National University of Singapore
Singapore

Organized by NUS Libraries, TULLIP is a five-day professional development Programme bringing together library professionals from ASEAN and beyond to explore the future of university libraries, focusing on leadership, AI and digital transformation, partnerships, placemaking and innovation through workshops, case studies and experiential learning.