

Archivaria

The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists

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Archivaria 97 (Spring 2024), pp. 152-175

Cite this article:

McIntosh, Robert. “Archival Leadership?” *Archivaria* 97 (Spring 2024): 152-175.

Archival Leadership?

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ABSTRACT Canadian archivists – members of a community that for many decades has thought deeply and widely about their profession – have published little about archival leadership. This neglect of leadership extends in fact throughout Canadian and English-language archival research journals. This short article aims to take a small step toward filling this large and perplexing gap in our scholarship. Two central questions are addressed: What does leadership in an archives look like? and Does this leadership differ at all in key respects from leadership in other institutions? In other words, do archivists have to be managed differently because the culture of an archives is sufficiently distinct from that of other workplaces? Outlining six aspects of leadership, the article addresses the qualities associated with successfully leading a team within an archives or with heading an archives. It then sketches six distinct features of the culture of an archives, arguing that archivists do need to be managed differently; leadership success hinges on sensitivity to the unique qualities of archival culture. This counterpoint closes by expressing hope that it provokes a reaction – that others will step forward to enrich reflection and debate on the distinct (or not) qualities of archival leadership.

RÉSUMÉ Les archivistes canadiens – membres d’une communauté qui dans les dernières années a profondément réfléchi à la profession d’archiviste – ont peu publié sur le leadership archivistique. Cette négligence est apparente dans les revues universitaires et professionnelles au Canada et de langue anglaise. Ce court article vise à faire un petit pas afin de combler cette lacune dans notre milieu. Deux questions principales sont soulevées : À quoi ressemble le leadership dans les archives? ; La forme de leadership dans les archives est-elle différente, dans toutes ses composantes, de celle dans d’autres milieux? . En d’autres termes, les archivistes ont-ils besoin d’une gestion différente en raison des particularités distinctes de la culture des milieux archivistiques par rapport à celle d’autres lieux de travail? Mettant de l’avant six éléments de leadership, cet article aborde les qualités requises pour mener avec succès une équipe dans les archives ou pour diriger un centre d’archives. Il propose six aspects particuliers associés à la culture d’une organisation archivistique, en faisant valoir que les archivistes doivent être gérés différemment. L’article soutient que le succès du leadership requiert une sensibilité propre aux caractéristiques uniques du milieu archivistique. Ce contrepoint se termine en exprimant l’espoir qu’il suscite une réaction particulière – soit que d’autres prendront le relais afin d’enrichir les réflexions et les débats sur les qualités distinctes (ou pas) d’un leadership archivistique.

Reading *Archivaria* over the decades, we would be hard-pressed to find serious or prolonged reflection on archival leadership – on the qualities associated with successfully leading a team within an archives or with heading an archives. Gordon Dodds’s review of *Archivaria*’s first decade is silent on this topic.¹ And when Laura Millar published in 2015 a wide overview of its contents over 40 years, “to see how we have used *Archivaria* to explain ourselves,” she made no mention of leading or managing in an archives.² Searching the database of published *Archivaria* articles using the term *leadership* yields paltry results. Apparently, works on archival leadership have not engaged the interest of contributors or passed the scrutiny of general editors and peer reviewers. Canadian archivists have not explained themselves – or their profession – by reflecting on archival leadership.

I focus on *leadership* in preference to *management* (or to the term commonly used a generation or two ago, *administration*) even if, in everyday use today, the three can be employed synonymously. Leadership, driven by critical thinking, means imagining new possibilities, seizing opportunities. It seeks the ongoing improvement of an organization.³ Managers, in contrast, ensure that the activities of the institution run smoothly along generally familiar lines. They “keep the machinery running.” While to some extent this is a false distinction – any leadership position involves ensuring day-to-day organizational objectives are met – *leaders* are necessary to the long-term health of any organization.⁴

1 Gordon Dodds, “Canadian Archival Literature: A Bird’s-Eye View,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983–84): 18–40.

2 She organized her review around the four themes of archival education, the profession (the nature of the “true” archivist); theory; and history, while citing many dozens of research articles – none of which broached institutional leadership. Laura Millar, “Explaining Ourselves: 40 Years of *Archivaria*,” *Archivaria* 80 (Fall 2015): 5–31, 9.

3 An article in the *American Archivist* cites Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith: “Managing is about efficiency; leadership is about effectiveness. Managing is about how. Leadership is about what and why.” The same article also quotes from Bruce W. Dearstyne: “Managers are well organized, focus on the work at hand, are performance and outcome oriented by nature, and pride themselves on getting the work done. . . . Leaders are change agents; they envision a better future for their programs, articulate goals, inspire employees, represent needs clearly, advocate passionately, and have a flair for program building.” George Mariz, Donna McCrea, Larry Hackman, Tony Kurtz, and Randall C. Jimerson, “Leadership Skills for Archivists,” *American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 102–22, 6–7. Prominent organizational theorists have put it very succinctly: “*Leadership* is wanting to do something new and better – and getting others to go along.” Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein, *Humble Leadership: The Power of Relationships, Openness, and Trust* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2018), 2.

4 The use of the term *leadership* in keyword searches of archival scholarly journals also has a very practical benefit: the term *management* casts too broad a net, encompassing records and information management as well as the management of archival collections and fonds, to give two examples. *Leadership* is also the term currently used in French. The word has been commonly used over the past few decades in a narrow sense: to describe a

Exceptions to *Archivaria's* neglect of archival leadership (and management, for that matter) are rare. Larry J. Hackman wrote as early as 1995 of the usefulness of external advisory and oversight bodies for archives.⁵ Jacques Grimard in 2004 issued a call for archival scholarship in Canada to devote more attention to program evaluation – a basic management concern.⁶ There are also a handful of research articles on archival leaders such as Douglas Brymner, Arthur Doughty, and Gustave Lanctôt,⁷ as well as W. Kaye Lamb.⁸ But in the vast scholarly reflection published over *Archivaria's* existence, these limited examples hardly demonstrate a professional preoccupation with archival leadership.

Obituaries constitute the sole section in *Archivaria* where the topic of leadership has been regularly raised. Hugh A. Taylor, Gordon Dodds, John Hall Archer, John A. Bovey, Robert Garon, Phyllis Ruth Blakeley, Bob Morgan, Wilf Smith, Jean-Pierre Wallot, Michael Swift, Geneviève Allard, and Terry Cook are just some of the archival leaders profiled.⁹ These profiles are typically biographical sketches focusing on where they were employed, what they did, and what new funding they may have procured for their institutions and outlining their activities in

professional association showing "leadership" in addressing specific issues like developing archival descriptive standards. This is not the kind of leadership to be examined here.

- 5 Larry J. Hackman, "'With A Little Help from My Friends': External Advisory and Oversight Bodies in the Development of Archives," *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995): 184–95.
- 6 Program evaluation is a management tool involving the structured collection of information about a program's activities, characteristics, and outcomes to identify its strengths, limitations, and failures and to suggest ways of improvement. See Jacques Grimard, "Program Evaluation and Archives: 'Appraising' Archival Work and Achievements," *Archivaria* 57 (Spring 2004): 69–87.
- 7 There are a number, the most cited of which is Ian E. Wilson's "'A Noble Dream': The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83): 16–35.
- 8 Terry Cook, "An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 185–234.
- 9 See Terry Cook, "Hugh A. Taylor, 1920–2005," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 275–82; Terry Cook, "Gordon Dodds, 1941–2010," *Archivaria* 71 (Spring 2011): 167–72; Ian E. Wilson, "John Hall Archer, 1914–2004," *Archivaria* 57 (Spring 2004): 173–77; "John A. Bovey, 1934–2005," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 282–85; Marcel Caya and Marion Beyea, "Robert Garon, 1942–2012," *Archivaria* 74 (Fall 2012): 239–41; Lois Kernaghan, "Phyllis Ruth Blakeley, 1922–1986," *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986–87): 195–97; Catherine Arseneau, "Robert James (Bob) Morgan, 1938–2011," *Archivaria* 72 (Fall 2011): 270–73; Michael D. Swift, "Wilfred I. Smith, 1919–1998," *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998): 231–35; Michael Swift, "Jean-Pierre Wallot, 1935–2010," *Archivaria* 71 (Spring 2011): 178–81; Carman V. Carroll, "Michael D. Swift, 1936–2013," *Archivaria* 77 (Spring 2014): 169–71; Marcel Barriault, "Geneviève Allard, 1971–2011," *Archivaria* 72 (Fall 2011): 265–99. Interestingly, Tom Nesmith elaborates on Cook's intellectual leadership but is silent on Cook's (fine) leadership as a Government of Canada executive: "Terry Cook, 1947–2014," *Archivaria* 79 (Spring 2015): 207–13.

professional associations and their publications. But they also offer glimpses of these individuals as organizational leaders. Mike Swift cited Wilf Smith's informality and noted that staff addressed him as "Wilf": "While he might appear unassuming and even at times very 'low-profile,' in fact, he was a very effective administrator."¹⁰ Swift also wrote of Jean-Pierre Wallot's "strong leadership":

He brought an energy and a passion to the task that his colleagues and staff had to admire and were inspired to emulate. Indeed, it was that passion and his sense of dedication that inspired others to follow him. That was his leadership style. It was based on hard work and single-minded determination, and it was inspirational. Dr. Wallot never lectured people on how to work. Rather, he led by example.¹¹

In turn, Carman Carroll wrote years later of Mike Swift's leadership, saying he was "unflappable, even-handed, and always fair. He was bright, articulate, and not easily spooked!"¹² More recently, Geneviève Allard, a highly admired executive at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) who died tragically young, was described this way: "An excellent communicator in both official languages, she was able to articulate a vision and rally people toward a common goal, all the while creating a fun work atmosphere."¹³

The leadership silence in the archival scholarly literature extends internationally. A search of *Archival Science* using the term *leadership* produced only one article.¹⁴ The situation was little different in Australia's *Archives & Manuscripts*, where again, a search for the same keyword returned just a couple of relevant articles.¹⁵ There were also obituaries of Australian archival leaders.¹⁶ In

¹⁰ Swift, "Wilfred I. Smith," 235.

¹¹ Swift, "Jean-Pierre Wallot," 181.

¹² Carroll, "Michael D. Swift," 170.

¹³ Barriault, "Geneviève Allard," 266.

¹⁴ Jacques Grimard and Lucie Pagé, "Towards Program Evaluation in Archives," *Archival Science* 4, no. 1-2 (2004): 99-126.

¹⁵ Karen Benedict, "Business Archives Reporting Structures: Is There an Ideal Placement?" *Archives & Manuscripts* 27, no. 2 (1999): 26-39; and Adrian Cunningham, "Eternity Revisited: In Pursuit of a National Documentation Strategy and a National Archival System," *Archives & Manuscripts* 42, no. 2 (2014): 165-70.

¹⁶ For example, see Editorial Team, "Ian Maclean: Australian Archivist (1919-2003)," *Archives & Manuscripts* 31, no. 1

the United Kingdom, the *Journal of the Society of Archivists* (titled *Archives and Records* since 2013) similarly offers little, although it has also profiled a range of archival leaders in its obituaries.¹⁷

The journal *Archives* publishes the research preoccupations of the francophone archival community in Canada¹⁸ but also shows little interest in archival leadership. The head of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec contributed a fine account of leadership in the context of an art gallery in 2003.¹⁹ An article by Jacques Grimard on program evaluation appeared a few years later.²⁰ Senior leaders at the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec have since contributed some rare exceptions: A decade ago, Normand Charbonneau outlined key elements in successful leadership.²¹ Subsequently, he published on the public policy priority of decolonization and reconciliation at LAC.²² And very recently, François David and Hélène Laverdure examined archival leaders in Québec over the period 1920–80.²³

(2003): 10–13; Editorial Team, "Robert G. Neale," *Archives & Manuscripts* 32, no. 2 (2004): 10–14.

- 17 For a partial exception, see Nick Kingsley, "Perspectives and Priorities: The National Archives Vision for Sector Leadership," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 33, no. 2 (2012): 135–47. One such obituary is Andrew McDonald, "John D. Cantwell (1924–2015)," *Archives and Records* 37, no. 1 (2016): 125–27.
- 18 Le Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique (GIRA) in Montréal has published proceedings of its "Symposiums en archivistique" from 1990 to 2020. Nothing on leadership appears in these proceedings.
- 19 John Porter, "L'art de réinventer une institution nationale," *Archives* 34, no. 3 (2003): 73–88.
- 20 Jacques Grimard, "L'évaluation de programme: modèles multiples et caractéristiques souhaitables pour une application en milieu archivistique," *Archives* 37, no. 2 (2005–2006): 73–98. With his three articles on program evaluation, Grimard is a noteworthy exception to a pervasive neglect of leadership issues in the archival scholarly literature.
- 21 These elements were (1) simplifying the user experience, (2) adapting to the context, (3) focusing on the client, (4) practicing self-confidence as a leader, (5) innovating, and (6) associating and collaborating with others who can teach you. He also outlines characteristics of archival leadership in the context of critically important partnerships: (1) familiarity with partner organizations and individuals, (2) open and transparent sharing of information, (3) recognition of the right to make mistakes, and (4) "générosité" as well as continuity, confidence, and respect in the relationships. Normand Charbonneau, "La longue marche dans de nouveaux territoires," *Archives* 43, no. 2 (2011–2012): 5–16.
- 22 Normand Charbonneau, "Décolonisation et réconciliation, les rôles institutionnels et personnels," *Archives* 48, no. 2 (2019): 137–48. Library and Archives Canada was formed in 2004 through the amalgamation of the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada.
- 23 François David and Hélène Laverdure, "La longue route vers la reconnaissance: le rôle des conservateurs (1920–1980)," *Archives* 50, no. 1 (2022): 7–29.

In contrast to other archival journals, the *American Archivist* has published more on archival leadership, even if this subject constitutes a very small minority of that journal's contents. Articles there have addressed a research agenda for the management of archives,²⁴ leadership skills,²⁵ management training,²⁶ the management of an archives,²⁷ and organizational development at a state archives.²⁸ However, apart from articles addressing equity, diversity, and inclusion, those indicating an interest in leadership have been sparser in recent years.²⁹

Among these *American Archivist* articles, George Mariz et al.'s "Leadership Skills for Archivists" offers an especially engaging account of archival leadership.³⁰ One contributor, Donna E. McCrea, lists the qualities of leaders: they are "self-aware," understanding their strengths and weaknesses. They seek a range of frank feedback and take a broad view of the environment. Creative, they can manage ambiguity in developing strategies. They seek a diversity of evidence in decision-making. They work well with others in developing a "rich diversity of

24 Paul McCarthy, "The Management of Archives: A Research Agenda," *American Archivist* 51, no. 1–2 (1988): 52–69. McCarthy called for "the development of management competency models for archivists; the study of institutional culture, organizational effectiveness, and change management; the analysis of management education needs and delivery; and the evaluation and development of guidelines and standards for archival programs."

25 Mariz et al., "Leadership Skills," 102–22.

26 Susan Davis, "Development of Managerial Training for Archivists," *American Archivist* 51, no. 3 (1988): 278–85. Davis affirmed the need for management training while observing that there was no consensus within the profession on its contents or delivery method.

27 Robert Bahmer, "The Management of Archival Institutions," *American Archivist* 26, no. 1 (1963): 3–10. While more an opinion piece than a research article, it outlined key management functions and affirmed that, because archival managers *had* to have a deep understanding of archives, they *must* be (former) archivists. (6.)

28 Loretta Hefner, "The Change Masters: Organizational Development in a State Archives," *American Archivist* 51, no. 4 (1988): 440–54.

29 See Ellen Engseth, "Cultural Competency: A Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Archival Profession in the United States," *American Archivist* 81, no. 2 (2018): 460–82; Alex H. Poole, "'Be Damned Pushy at Times': The Committee on the Status of Women and Feminism in the Archival Profession, 1972–1998," *American Archivist* 81, no. 2 (2018): 394–437; Chris Taylor, "Getting Our House in Order: Moving from Diversity to Inclusion," *American Archivist* 80, no. 1 (2017): 19–27.

30 Relevant books have also been published in the United States. See Michael Kurtz, *Managing Archival and Manuscripts Repositories* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2004); and Bruce Dearstyne, ed., *Leading and Managing Archives and Records Programs: Strategies for Success* (Chicago: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2008). Both examine leadership and management in an archival context. More recently, the Society of American Archivists published Peter Gottlieb and David W. Carmicheal, eds., *Leading and Managing Archives and Manuscripts Programs* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2019).

relationships and inspire trust through integrity and competence.”³¹ Leaders are both learners and effective communicators.³²

The article also raises two other key points: First, as McCrea affirms, leadership can come from diverse members of staff. Leadership is not simply the purview of those in management positions; a healthy organization encourages leadership by all.³³ Second – and this observation by George Mariz et al. makes even more egregious *Archivaria’s* neglect of archival leadership – “if archivists do not assume a substantive leadership role, they will be led by others.”³⁴

Do we, in Canada and elsewhere in the English-speaking world, who think about archives, who practise the archival profession, take leadership for granted? This is certainly not true. Missteps at LAC at points in recent years led to wide professional and public outcry that targeted its leadership. Or do we prefer to acknowledge leadership only retrospectively, in the security of obituaries? Perhaps former Deputy Archivist of the United States Robert H. Bahmer best expressed the view of the archival professional many years ago when he said that archivists, like others “of scholarly inclination . . . are prone to look on management as a bit vulgar, to regard it as highly overrated in importance – as something to be endured rather than taken seriously.”³⁵

In this brief counterpoint, I propose to take a small step toward filling this large and perplexing gap in the archival literature. The claims made here draw selectively on the enormous general scholarship on organizational leadership as well as on the limited discussions in the archival research literature. They also reflect a lengthy career at LAC, including over 20 years in a diversity of leadership positions. Colleagues familiar with other archival settings can judge the

31 Mariz et al., “Leadership Skills,” 106.

32 Another contributor also outlines leadership’s key features: it is active not reactive, creative, and responsive rather than “directive or managerial.” It builds bridges, places an organization in a broader picture, communicates widely the relevance of archives, and takes responsibility for its actions. See Mariz et al., “Leadership Skills,” 103, 105–6.

33 During my first years as a manager of a team of archivists in the mid-1990s, I was struck by the fact that it was the section’s one archival assistant who would appear in my office most regularly to say, “I think there is a better way we might do A or B or C.” This fine employee consistently refused promotion over a lengthy career: they exercised strong leadership where they were.

34 Mariz et al., “Leadership Skills,” 102. This point raises the question of what constitutes an archival background. For the purposes of this article, it means significant experience over several years as a practising professional archivist or a leader in an archival institution and assumes advanced knowledge of archival practices.

35 Bahmer, “The Management of Archival Institutions,” 4.

extent to which the observations on archival leadership made here are pertinent to their institutions.

Organizational theorists have used the label *organizational culture* – what Henry Mintzberg called “the soul of the organization” – to describe the pattern of shared beliefs, values, and assumptions that inform thought and action within an organization.³⁶ Beliefs are the understandings of relationships; values, the stable, long-lasting convictions about what is important; and assumptions, the taken-for-granted notions about how things should be in an organization. This culture is taught to new staff, providing them with an identity, nurturing their commitment to the organization, and shaping their attitudes. It strongly influences organizational behaviour. Leadership decisions should bear culture in mind; any major new strategies or innovations must either come to terms with organizational culture or risk being upended in collisions with ingrained views and practices. In other words, successful archival leadership is exercised with sensitivity to the distinct culture of archives.

This counterpoint focuses on two central questions: What does leadership in an archives look like? and Does this leadership differ at all in key respects from leadership in other institutions? In other words, do archivists have to be managed differently because the culture of an archives is sufficiently distinct from those of other workplaces?

These questions will be addressed using a framework developed by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS), whose mandate within the federal bureaucracy focuses on how the government spends money and how the federal public service is managed. This second responsibility includes setting policies for a range of administrative activities within the federal bureaucracy: finance, human resources, contracting, office accommodation, etc. It also includes the “talent management” of senior Government of Canada leaders. In meeting this last responsibility, TBS has detailed what it labels key leadership competencies – six personal qualities and behaviours for which senior leaders are to be

36 These points on Mintzberg and organizational culture are taken from a lecture by James Kendrick and Maryan-tonett Flumian, “Cross-Cultural Leadership Issues,” at the University of Ottawa on January 22, 2008. The classic Mintzberg text is Henry Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management: Inside Our Strange World of Organizations* (New York: Free Press, 1989). As Schein and Schein observed, “cultures always limit what defines leadership and what individual change agents will be allowed to get away with.” Schein and Schein, *Humble Leadership*, xiii. It should be observed too that poor leaders, given sufficient time, can greatly damage organizational culture. See also Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016).

hired and their performance assessed. These are “Create Vision and Strategy,” “Mobilize People,” “Uphold Integrity and Respect,” “Collaborate with Partners and Stakeholders,” “Promote Innovation and Guide Change,” and “Achieve Results.”³⁷ Any discussion of leadership risks becoming jargon ridden very quickly, and these TBS “competencies” are susceptible to that accusation. So, while I will use these categories in organizing this reflection on archival leadership, my aim is to do so using everyday speech. For each of these six aspects of leadership, I will offer a very brief description, illustrate it with examples both of good and poor behaviours, and suggest how archival leadership might differ from that in other organizations.³⁸

What do leaders do? First, they operate within a context: the mandate of their larger organizations and their specific responsibilities within that greater mandate. They are provided with resources (whose extent they can attempt – generally unsuccessfully – to negotiate); they define (and are often given) priority activities and are asked to do the best they can with the resources they have available to them to meet their area’s ongoing and priority goals. They also have authority to hire, develop, organize, and assign work to staff – and to evaluate their performance. Leaders must ensure their staff have the necessary workspaces, work procedures, digital systems and applications, equipment, and supplies – in the jargon of the federal bureaucracy, “the tools they need.” They also have to interpret their areas of responsibility within and outside of the organization through diverse communication activities.

37 See Government of Canada, “Key Leadership Competencies,” accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/professional-development/key-leadership-competency-profile.html>. A few years ago, I sat on a hiring committee for new LAC executives, where we were to use these six criteria in our evaluations of candidates. I remarked to a colleague on the committee that I found it odd that judgment was not among the TBS criteria. Their response to me was, “If they hired us for judgment, half of us wouldn’t be here.” I trust they were joking.

38 With examples of effective behaviours, the Treasury Board Secretariat also provides examples of ineffective behaviours at various executive levels. Government of Canada, “Key Leadership Competency Profile and Examples of Effective and Ineffective Behaviours,” accessed September 5, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/professional-development/key-leadership-competency-profile/examples-effective-ineffective-behaviours.html>.

TBS labels the first behaviour among its various aspects of leadership “Create Vision and Strategy.” This is a clumsy way of saying that any organization, any archives, or any organizational portion of a larger archives must know its *raison-d’être*: what it is aiming to do and how it intends to do it. In the language of TBS, “Leaders define the future and chart a path forward.”³⁹

Many archivists who have been subjected during their careers to various group exercises in creating vision or mission statements may recall vigorous eye-rolling.⁴⁰ But any healthy organization is dynamic; it needs to have an idea as to where it is heading and how to get there. There is a striking scene in the Walt Disney film *The Jungle Book*, from 1967, where vultures perch on trees in a desolate landscape, saying to each other, “What we gunna do” and “I don’t know, what d’ya wanna do?” Leaders are responsible for ensuring answers to the vultures’ questions.

All archives need to reflect on and document how to most effectively discharge their mandates. They will each take steps to define a goal: what they want their institution to look like in two, five, or ten years. One LAC head used to underscore the need for “a compelling vision.”⁴¹ John Porter called for “une vision institutionnelle prometteuse.”⁴² Any archives also needs strategies (or procedures) for how best to conduct its business. These strategies and procedures will detail workflows and priorities for achieving institutional aims. Generally, answering these questions is best done collaboratively with staff – and most organizations make some effort to do so. Failure is inevitable when senior leaders themselves, or with a handful of intimates, identify new organizational blueprints and/or means of operation and tell staff to make them happen.

Especially in larger organizations, reorganization is a frequent response to new visions and/or strategies. At times, new objectives and strategies do need new organizational structures. More commonly, a new structure is simply a poor leader’s response to their inability to set reasonable new objectives and strategies. (They are groping for a way of being seen to make an impact.)

39 Government of Canada, “Key Leadership Competency Profile and Examples.”

40 This reaction was exacerbated by the fact that, typically, no sooner were such statements developed than they were shelved.

41 Comments from LAC personnel remain anonymous here to retain the confidentiality of the original communications.

42 Porter, “L’art de réinventer,” 83.

Are there different ways of creating vision and strategies in an archives (as opposed to in another kind of organization)? Archivists are hired for their critical skills. They do not hesitate to demonstrate these skills in speaking their minds, especially when major new strategies are under development. They are self-confident. A telling comment came decades ago from a National Archives of Canada executive, who said that every archivist in the organization felt competent to lead the archives. Archival leaders must demonstrate respect in the face of these challenges, which come from knowledgeable, intelligent, and engaged staff who care about their organizations. This kind of continuous constructive challenge, expressed directly to management by individual professionals, is characteristic of archives.⁴³

The second leadership dimension is titled “Mobilize People.” As TBS observes, “Leaders inspire and motivate the people they lead.”⁴⁴ A very experienced director at the National Archives observed many years ago that leaders must also look behind themselves from time to time to make sure people are following.

A basic fact of leadership is working with and through other people.⁴⁵ The larger the organization, the greater the number of people involved. In very large organizations like LAC, directors general (DGs) with responsibility for large program areas like archival acquisition and description, preservation, or public services and programming typically oversee a hierarchy of directors and managers between them and the many dozens if not hundreds of working-level staff.⁴⁶ This requires transparent and consistent communication through many channels.

⁴³ Richard J. Cox linked this characteristic to archivists’ “strong sense of personal mission, especially one with ideas of the accountability function of records.” Richard J. Cox, *Archival Anxiety and the Vocational Calling* (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2010), 14. One senior leader at LAC observed repeatedly that archivists publicly challenged what they said in staff meetings. Other staff would come quietly to their office the next day to question what they had said or would just question it privately among themselves.

⁴⁴ Government of Canada, “Key Leadership Competency Profile and Examples.”

⁴⁵ Schein and Schein underscore the importance of leaders developing and maintaining trusting, open relationships – as opposed to what they call transactional or bureaucratic relationships. In other words, leaders must focus on relationships rather than roles. See *Humble Leadership*, 33–36, 108.

⁴⁶ Senior leaders in any organization will affirm the importance of strong direct reports (subordinate directors or managers). As Porter points out in “L’art de réinventer” (83),

le dirigeant d’organisme doit impérativement accorder une importance cruciale à ses collaborateurs immédiats. Il doit miser sur des gens forts, complémentaires, déterminés, solidaires, complices, peu enclins à la flatterie, des gens capables de vous éviter de commettre une bêtise ou assez convaincants pour vous faire faire un virage à 180 degrés! Ce petit noyau de partenaires constitue la meilleure protection et l’un des meilleurs atouts d’un directeur général.

There is always a risk of distortion in communicating through an organizational hierarchy, and leaders should never hesitate to convey their messages repeatedly. The tone of communication to staff is critical; it needs to acknowledge organizational strengths, shared ownership, and optimism in the face of challenges.⁴⁷

Staff should never be uncertain as to what they are expected to do. Nor should they suffer from constant shifts in expectations or from changes in priority. One director observed once that their boss had emailed them multiple times one evening, with contradictory messages. While we can assume a certain exaggeration, the point is clear. Another senior leader's behaviour tended to recall the celebrated line from Stephen Leacock's *Nonsense Novels* about riding "madly off in all directions."⁴⁸ Still another would push LAC aggressively in a certain direction, then change their mind and drop these efforts abruptly. None of these behaviours will have engaged the commitment of staff.

Good leaders make it clear that everyone in their organization has an important role in their collective success. They spend the great majority of their time working with staff and ensuring that they understand what they are to do, that they have the needed tools, and that management is confident in them.⁴⁹ Good leaders, in recognizing that goals are achieved by their staff, communicate these accomplishments inside and outside their areas of responsibility.

Mobilizing staff also means giving them sufficient opportunities to make their own decisions, to set their own directions within overall organizational priorities. We are all familiar with the bogey of the micromanager. The more empowered staff feel, the better they will respond to the tasks they are asked to undertake.

Fine leadership means owning failures and avoiding blaming staff. After an error in a reference room led to a journalist seeing confidential private documents and publishing an embarrassing newspaper article about the donor, the archives head got on the phone to the donor offering to resign over the institution's mistake. They owned the error (rather than attributing it to the inexperienced staff member). They showed excellent leadership.

Another LAC head sent hundreds of hand-written notes to individual staff members over their tenure to thank them for particularly noteworthy contributions to the institution. These notes underscored to staff that their work was

47 Porter, "L'art de réinventer," 78.

48 Stephen Leacock, *Nonsense Novels* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1969), 54.

49 Many able leaders, if asked how they spent their workday, will respond, "I talked with people."

recognized and appreciated by the most senior leader at LAC.⁵⁰

There are differences in winning the engagement of archival staff. LAC executives “from away” (i.e., with backgrounds in other Canadian federal institutions) will speak of their credibility issues, noting that because they do not “know” archives, they are in key respects seen by their staff as incompetent to lead in an archives. Interestingly, a retired deputy minister in the Government of Canada, sent to LAC in early 2013 to investigate its challenging circumstances at that time, observed that they found it disquieting that only two of its approximately 12 senior leaders (directors general and above) came from archival or library backgrounds. They felt that at least one-half of the senior leaders in any institution – let alone an archives – should have lengthy careers in that institution behind them.⁵¹ But irrespective of their background, a leader can win the commitment of staff by earning their respect and ensuring their participation in decisions that affect them.⁵²

The third dimension of leadership is “Uphold Integrity and Respect.” TBS explains what this means: “Leaders exemplify ethical practices, professionalism, and personal integrity. They create respectful and trusting work environments where sound advice is valued. They encourage the expression of diverse opinions and perspectives, while fostering collegiality.”⁵³

Fine leaders respect their staff. They demonstrate this by acknowledging people in hallways or elevators, speaking with them, showing an interest in them as people. They work hard at maintaining a healthy working environment where staff members feel they can speak their minds safely. They are quick to respond to instances of harassment or other misbehaviours. They are prepared to deliver

50 The origins of this practice are explained in Guy Berthiaume, *Mes grandes bibliothèques: Mes archives. Mes mémoires* (Montréal: Del Busso, 2023), 57.

51 Another poor leadership characteristic that can be demonstrated by a senior manager “from away” is that their career, not the archives where they are employed, is their priority concern. Others can make clear that they “know it all already” – they have no interest in the opinions of senior archival managers. Still others will show distrust of experienced managers and staff and rely instead on an inner coterie, hired by them, usually ignorant of archives.

52 One of the anonymous readers of this counterpoint put the question starkly: Are archival leaders “from away” destined to fail? As a rule, archival leaders have an easier time distinguishing good advice from bad if they have archival experience. But excellent leaders (and they are rare) make a point of studying and coming to understand organizational culture, engaging their direct reports and staff generally, and listening (understanding the gaps in their experience). Excellent leaders will succeed in any organization.

53 Government of Canada, “Key Leadership Competency Profile and Examples.”

bad news personally, out of regard for their interlocutors.⁵⁴

Fine leadership requires constructive reactions to proposals put forward by staff. These may not always be accepted, but respect demands an appropriate response. The more care staff have taken in developing and putting forward these proposals, the more attentive the leader's reaction must be.

Do archives differ from other institutions with respect to the adherence to values and ethics? Yes. Likely the most fundamental relates to the potential scope for clashes between ethical codes associated with the archival profession and those associated with employers (at LAC, the Government of Canada). The able archival leader works hard to keep any such conflict to a minimum. And at least one other difference is clear: leaders must beware of unjust distinctions between archivists and other employees in an archives. (There is almost certainly a similar issue to be managed in organizations like hospitals or law firms.) Upholding values and ethics in an archives means that leaders must demonstrate no unwarranted partiality to archivists.⁵⁵

The literature on organizational leadership, including leading in archives, underscores the overweening importance of TBS's fourth aspect of leading: "Collaborate with Partners and Stakeholders." In TBS's definition, "Leaders are deliberate and resourceful about seeking the widest possible spectrum of perspectives."⁵⁶ They recognize that others' participation is necessary to achieving their organizational goals.

Archivists grasp the concept of context. Leaders generally work in a very complex environment where they need others' assistance to succeed. Good leaders cultivate a wide diversity of relationships and manage them well. One senior leader in government remarked once that the hallmark of a very experienced leader was knowing who to call.

Conversely, poor leaders generate negative reactions and unhealthy relationships within the professional community, with institutional stakeholders, and among staff and peers. The difficult leader (capricious, overbearing, unreliable,

⁵⁴ We are all likely familiar with senior leaders who avoid confrontations, leaving difficult discussions or the delivery of bad news to others.

⁵⁵ Apart from the ethical reasons of maintaining impartiality, there are also practical reasons. At LAC in 2020, perhaps only 15 percent of staff were in archivist positions.

⁵⁶ Government of Canada, "Key Leadership Competency Profile and Examples."

uncommunicative) is one that others do not wish to work with or for.⁵⁷

Archives are distinct from other institutions due to the great range of relationships and interactions of the archival leader. At LAC, for instance, leaders work closely with their counterparts, who are positioned elsewhere in the organization. One senior LAC leader who came “from away” remarked once that they had never worked in a federal department or agency where all parts were so closely intertwined and interdependent. The various parts needed each other, and making the archives work required constant negotiation among its various components.

At LAC, senior leaders also interact regularly with their counterparts elsewhere in the federal government – not only to acquire the archival record of government but also to negotiate new funding possibilities; participate in pan-governmental initiatives (e.g., on reconciliation, heritage and commemoration, open government, information management standards, technical infrastructure); and address issues around the application of administrative policies. They must also engage with stakeholders outside of government – for example, professional associations like the Association of Canadian Archivists or the Association des archivistes du Québec or potential funders or partners such as Ancestry.com. They also interact with clients like major potential donors, the Canadian Historical Association, or the provincial genealogical societies. An effective archival leader must manage diverse relationships well.

To “Promote Innovation and Guide Change” is likely the hardest – and rarest – leadership characteristic. TBS observes that “leaders have the courage and resilience to challenge convention. They create an environment that supports bold thinking, experimentation and intelligent risk taking.”⁵⁸ Normand Charbonneau observed, “Le point commun caractérisant les projets marqués par le leadership est la détermination de ses instigateurs à expérimenter et à faire preuve de curiosité en n’hésitant pas à proposer des solutions novatrices.”⁵⁹ This is the aspect of leadership that most distinguishes the leader from the manager.

57 A common leadership assessment tool called a “360” assesses leadership capacities from the perspectives not only of direct reports (the leader’s staff), but also their supervisor, colleagues at the same hierarchical level, and stakeholders from the wider community with whom the leader works regularly. Individuals from these distinct perspectives are asked to anonymously evaluate the leader’s performance.

58 Government of Canada, “Key Leadership Competency Profile and Examples.”

59 Charbonneau, “La longue marche,” 11.

Not that innovation per se is especially challenging – but if misapplied, it can produce a train wreck. LAC experimented about 12 years ago, for example, with reorganizing archival work by breaking it up into a series of separate tasks, from the identification of individuals and organizations of national interest (to be approached for their records) to the completion of processing and description. Archivists were placed at various points along what was effectively a production line. It was quickly apparent that those with “upstream” responsibilities were swamped in coping with numerous unfamiliar donors, and staff with “downstream” tasks literally had nothing to do as no work came down the pipe to them. After a few years, this “innovation” was quietly abandoned.⁶⁰

Innovation and change that demonstrably improve organizations are much harder to achieve. One colleague observed astutely that “fresh eyes” combined with real expertise resulted in innovation. A major change initiative that worked positively at LAC nearly 20 years ago, the integrity of the fonds,⁶¹ marked a sharp change: custodial archivists were asked to assume responsibility for all records with a common provenance. This contrasted with a historical practice whereby media records had been hived off from textual records (their provenance not always preserved) and managed independently by media specialists who worked in distinct media sections or divisions.⁶² Even more critical and comprehensive was the major effort to recast LAC’s government records disposition (acquisition) program in the wake of a highly critical report by the federal Office of the Auditor General in 2014.⁶³ In this case, the leadership of highly experienced

60 In 2011–12, plans were announced to “test a high-level new process model for LAC’s supply chain.” Library and Archives Canada, *2011–12 Report on Plans and Priorities*, 27, accessed January 31, 2024, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/bac-lac/SB1-5-2011-eng.pdf. The abandonment of this plan was unannounced outside LAC. In 2014–15, a plan to “develop and implement service standards to ensure the quality of all processes for evaluating, acquiring and processing information resources” was reported. Library and Archives Canada, *2014–15 Report on Plans and Priorities*, 29, accessed January 31, 2024, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2014/bac-lac/SB1-5-2014-eng.pdf.

61 This new approach was documented and approved by the LAC Management Board on March 30, 2005. Library and Archives Canada, *Collection Development Framework*, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/003024/f2/003024-e.pdf>.

62 At the time, it transpired that textual documentation from a photographer whose fonds LAC had acquired during the 1980s – 20 years earlier – sat in a photo archivist’s desk drawer, never having been processed because they were outside the mandate of the photo section. A debate on this issue had previously raged in the pages of *Archivaria*, triggered by Terry Cook’s “The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on ‘Total Archives,’” *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979–80): 141–49.

63 See Office of the Auditor General of Canada, “Chapter Seven: Documentary Heritage of the Government of

archivists was critical to achieving success in the form of a thoroughly transformed approach to disposition that was strongly endorsed by Government of Canada institutions.⁶⁴ Fine leaders also recognize that helpful innovation and change can be very limited or local in impact – for example, revisions to a procedures manual or descriptive practices or the allocation of responsibility or small changes in system functionality. Collectively, modest innovations can significantly improve an archives' effectiveness.

The distinct nature of archives here is clear; the organizational culture of an archives can be a barrier to change. This culture is marked by a strong sense of responsibility. Archivists recognize that they have been charged with a great trust: the guardianship of invaluable archives. The seriousness with which archivists treat this task is often misread by others as an unthinking resistance to change. Such a reading is inaccurate. But making effective change in an archives means demonstrating the merits of change and involving archivists. We only need cite the examples above: the unhappy fate of the task-based work process as opposed to the success of new approaches to the integrity of the fonds and disposition.

Leadership ensures that an organization meets its objectives and can effectively demonstrate that it does so. A leader can “achieve results.” This is the basic test of an organization's leaders. TBS describes leaders who achieve results in this way:

Leaders mobilize and manage resources to . . . improve outcomes and add value. They consider context, risks and business intelligence to support high-quality and timely decisions. They anticipate, plan, monitor progress and adjust as needed. Leaders take personal responsibility for their actions and outcomes of their decisions.⁶⁵

Good leadership means setting clear goals for staff and allowing them plenty of flexibility in meeting them by deferring to their experience, intelligence, and ingenuity. But it also involves monitoring the performance of the organization

Canada – Library and Archives Canada,” in *2014 Fall Report of the Auditor General of Canada*, accessed January 30, 2024, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201411_07_e_39965.html.

64 Rebecca Giesbrecht and Jenna Murdock Smith, “Everything Old Is New Again: The Evolution of Generic Appraisal at Library and Archives Canada,” *Archivaria* 84 (Fall 2017): 37–59.

65 Government of Canada, “Key Leadership Competency Profile and Examples.”

and its staff as well as the leader's own performance.⁶⁶ This review can simply involve a brief meeting – in the jargon of the federal government, a “bilat” – to review progress against an individual's or a project workplan. Far less frequently, performance reviews can take the form of written reports or even formal and highly structured audits or evaluations.⁶⁷ While these more detailed performance assessments often feel burdensome, they are critical in justifying current and proposed programs and resource levels and requesting, as needed, additional resources. The reactions of budget controllers are vastly different when dealing with managers who simply claim they need more staff, than with those who demonstrate such a need with well-documented evidence.

Fine leadership means actively seizing opportunities in the environment to strengthen the program and the organization.⁶⁸ Opportunism may not at first glance be seen as a positive quality, but its importance will be evident on reflection. Porter put it this way:

Il faut toujours avoir plusieurs marrons au feu, plusieurs lignes à l'eau. Et c'est ce mouvement perpétuel qui en bout de piste sauve les institutions, assure leur croissance et permet leur pérennité. Au gré des jours, il faut donc être toujours à l'affût, prêt à foncer si une belle occasion se présente et ce, au-delà des processus habituels.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ See Bahmer, “The Management of Archival Institutions” (5):

Instinctively, perhaps, the working archivist realizes that a work plan, once accepted, opens the lid of a Pandora's box of management evils: work can be “costed out,” performance can be measured, and (even worse) performance standards may be suggested. It may be anathema for the professional archivist to think of his work in terms of the cost of its accomplishment, but the realistic manager must think in these as well as other terms. . . . the working archivist ought also to submit to this unpleasant discipline.

⁶⁷ Grimard, “L'évaluation de programme,” 73–98. Grimard presents a history of the discipline of program evaluation and an outline of a range of evaluation techniques that need not be detailed here.

⁶⁸ A very senior public servant in the Government of Canada remarked once that a good idea was not in and of itself good enough; circumstances had to be right.

⁶⁹ Porter, “L'art de réinventer,” 85.

Similarly, David and Laverdure wrote of “le pragmatisme et la persévérance de nos prédécesseurs, voire leur opportunisme (dans le sens noble du terme).”⁷⁰ We must be clear that opportunism is not a valuable leadership quality limited to Québec.⁷¹

Defending the archival mission to achieve archival results means confronting constant challenges to the well-being of archival programs. Particularly in larger government organizations, archival leaders face threats from participants with their own agendas that have little or nothing to do with meeting the organizations’ legislated archival mandates. These participants come from human resources (in particular), accommodation, finance, strategic planning, and audit and evaluation – corporate areas that, in large archives, all too frequently see their principal loyalty to external bodies (e.g., in the Government of Canada, to the Treasury Board Secretariat in particular) and not to the archives that employ them. Internal relationships with managers in corporate services require constant attention from archival leaders, even if their unhelpful initiatives are generally based on inadvertence, not malice.⁷²

How does achieving results differ in an archives? This question can largely be answered by referring to the differences we have already reviewed respecting the five leadership competencies, because achieving results calls on all of them. Another factor is the need for on-the-job experience. Even the best educated or most experienced (in another archives) new hire will need several years of experience at LAC, or any archives, to be fully effective, with a thorough working knowledge of the repository’s records. Churn, or the constant turnover in staff, is not desirable. Experienced archival staff are far likelier to deliver results than

⁷⁰ David and Laverdure, “La longue route,” 7.

⁷¹ On the eve of the deep budget reductions of 1994–98, the then–National Archives of Canada proactively transferred its small conservation research unit to the Canadian Conservation Institute. It was felt that the unit would survive impending federal budget cuts there – and that it would not survive them at the National Archives.

⁷² Following are some examples: LAC’s human resources area decided several years ago that, under TBS job classification policy, senior archivists were too “senior” to report to their managers; they should report instead to the hierarchical level above, that of director. At the same time, Human Resources decided, again citing TBS policy, that archival section managers were overpaid and should collectively be demoted. The responsible archival DG spent considerable energy fending off these unhelpful proposals. Similarly, LAC’s accommodation area concluded at a certain moment that archivists did not need space to process their collections or, if they did, needed far less than they had currently. This push to shrink space at LAC was in response to Government of Canada–wide standards for use of space – standards that of course took no account of archivists’ distinct needs. Again, another bureaucratic battle was waged simply to maintain the status quo so that archivists could do their work.

others. To forestall churn, a career progression framework has been in place at LAC since the 1970s that allows additional salary for archivists who meet specific criteria.⁷³

We started this counterpoint with questions: What does leadership in archival institutions look like? Is it so different from that in other institutions that archivists must be managed differently? Put another way, is the organizational culture of archives distinct? Scholarly literature underscores the need for leaders to grasp organizational culture if they are to succeed in leading within it. It is by understanding an organization's distinct culture that leaders are able to make appropriate decisions and take effective actions.

The dearth of leadership studies in archival journals lends implicit weight to the claim that leadership is generic – that there is no such thing as “archival leadership” – just leaders who happen to be employed at archives. It also buttresses the belief that the organizational culture of archives is not that distinct – that in the case of LAC, senior leaders can come in and manage archivists like they managed staff at Transport Canada or at the Public Health Agency of Canada. After all, by this logic, LAC archivists are public servants like other public servants.⁷⁴

These are claims with which I disagree. Archivists do need to be managed differently, and archival culture is distinct (even if aspects of this culture are shared with certain other kinds of organizations). Six features of this culture come to mind.

- ⁷³ The saga around the suspension of this promotion process in 2012 illustrates the indecisiveness and poor decision-making characteristic of LAC at that time. This process involved an annual call to archivists for submissions (requests for promotion) followed a few weeks later by deliberation by the responsible committee of perhaps eight individuals, a mix of experienced archival managers and senior archivists. In September 2011, the usual call for applications went out, with deliberations scheduled for January 17–19, 2012. Applicants received an email on January 17, 2012, announcing a delay in the deliberations. Another email on March 5, 2012, announced that decisions on promotion submissions would be deferred until September. Nothing more was communicated until an email went out on October 18 telling applicants that the promotion committee would convene shortly. On November 7, 2012, an email announced that the archivists' promotion process would end after the 2011–12 deliberations were complete. On December 12–14, 2012 (nearly a year after originally scheduled), the responsible committee met to consider the 18 submissions received in November 2011. In early January 2013, candidates were notified of the results (14 were successful). The promotion process was reinstated a few years later, under a new librarian and archivist of Canada. Considerable pressure is exerted on LAC managers to provide opportunities to archivists that are recognized by the promotion framework.
- ⁷⁴ An outgoing DG, en route to Health Canada after a two-year appointment at the National Archives as part of a Government of Canada leadership development program, spoke of archivists in exasperation, exclaiming that they did not even think they were public servants.

First, an archives is a research institution. Archivists necessarily undertake considerable research to do their jobs, not only in judging potential acquisitions but across the spectrum of archival functions.⁷⁵ Researchers are distinguished by a certain cast of mind that includes, notably, critical intelligence, independence, and self-confidence. This has its effect on organizational culture and leads to a dispersal of influence within an archives that derives not just from hierarchical position, but also from professional credibility and expertise.

Second, an archives is also a heritage institution, particularly sensitive to its past. After all, what are an archives' holdings but the embodiment of its past successes? This commitment to the archives' holdings is reflected in a preoccupation to protect them from potential damaging changes by new management practices. At all costs, these records must be preserved. On this count, archivists are often labelled as conservative. Also, archivists, very knowledgeable about their institution's past, consistently find ways of appealing to it. Archival culture is rich in references to each archives' history.

Third, archival culture is marked by archivists' thoroughness, meticulousness, rigorousness, even perfectionism. This can mean they perhaps take too long to finish tasks – or they leave tasks unfinished because they are unable to see how to get them “just right.” This attention to detail is characteristic of archives.

Fourth, an archives is marked also by a strong sense of institutional ownership among staff. It is often populated by “lifers,” individuals who have invested their careers at “their” archives. They see their careers in archives as a calling.⁷⁶ Similarly, they see the fonds and collections for which they bear custodial responsibility as theirs and can be jealous of other staff's intrusions (as, for example, when reference staff add metadata to archival descriptions). They are proud of their archives and its holdings – even if they will never hesitate to point out contemporary institutional shortcomings (perhaps not always fairly) to all and sundry.

Fifth, a successful archives is also highly collaborative; specialized knowledge is widely distributed throughout the institution, and it is in the interest of sound leadership that this expertise be tapped. At LAC, it was not uncommon for

75 Robert McIntosh, “Un aperçu de la recherche à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada,” *Archives* 49, no. 1-2 (2020): 19–36.

76 I am reminded of chapter one, “The Archival Calling,” in Cox, *Archival Anxiety* (36): “The notion of a calling is essential to how we view ourselves, conduct our business, and deal with . . . challenges.”

senior executives, even the head, to contact the professional level directly for information. There was in this manner rapid movement of information both up and down in the archival areas of the institution.⁷⁷ Archivists at LAC also enjoyed easy access to senior leadership; they felt it was their right to speak to directors general when they wished – a very unusual scenario within the Government of Canada. Likewise at LAC, archivists often attended the most senior management committees when decks they prepared were brought for decision. This is emphatically not the case in most Government of Canada institutions.

Normand Charbonneau has pointed to a sixth and perhaps most characteristic aspect of archival culture, archivists' passion:

la détermination et l'enthousiasme animant la profession, cette passion que l'on se plaît à exprimer. Cette détermination enthousiaste est probablement notre caractéristique la plus précieuse et il faut veiller à la maintenir, à la relayer à la génération montante et à la partager avec nos milieux.⁷⁸

Archivists are rare in their dedication to their profession. They are rarer yet – as the pages of *Archivaria* illustrate richly – in the satisfaction they take in reflecting on and debating its various dimensions. In this light, their silence on their leadership is particularly striking.

Like other leaders, archival leaders ultimately must demonstrate their effectiveness: that their organizations generate the results their funders expect and that the organizations for which they have responsibility are stronger and better by virtue of their leadership.

In an archives, leadership success hinges on sensitivity to the unique qualities of *archival* culture in addition to strong generic leadership competencies.⁷⁹ Archival leaders are wise to engage with their staff as colleagues. They are advised to listen to and learn from them – even if leaders will at times be prepared to take more risks or to push further than their staff might prefer. But

77 Of course, to the extent that senior leadership positions are populated by managers from outside the profession, this vibrant exchange does not occur – or occurs much less commonly.

78 Charbonneau, "La longue marche," 6.

79 It is worth stating explicitly that excellence as a practising professional archivist is no guarantee of success as an archival leader. Leadership competencies are distinct competencies.

astute archival leaders will often adjust their plans based on what they come to see as sound advice from staff. Leaders orchestrate positive change with and through their employees.

Successful archival leaders have a genuine passion for archives. They have good knowledge of an institution's holdings, its great acquisition successes, and "the ones that got away." They are familiar with the institutional stories staff like to relate.⁸⁰ They know (or know of) the outstanding archivists of the past who left their marks on their organization. Archivists forgive much of their leaders if they recognize that they too love archives.

One last claim about leadership within an archives: the more invisible it is to staff, the better it is. Highly effective archival leaders are not practising archivists, nor do they stand continuously over those who are, monitoring their activity: instead, they work hard to create and maintain the conditions wherein archival staff succeed in exercising their profession.

Nothing I have written here should be taken to diminish the fact that, at the end of the day, key decisions are taken in an archives by its leaders and managers. They make them, they oversee their implementation, and they bear responsibility for their success or failure. These decisions have major consequences, for good or bad, for the archives where they are employed. In this light, the archival profession clearly has a deep interest in the capacity of its leaders.

I close this counterpoint by expressing the hope that it provokes a reaction, that others will step forward to enrich reflection and debate on the distinct (or not) qualities of archival leadership. After all, archivists being who they are, I expect to be told that I have got it "all wrong."

BIOGRAPHY Robert McIntosh retired from Library and Archives Canada in 2020 as Director General, Archives Branch. He was awarded *Archivaria's* W. Kaye Lamb Prize in 1998 and the Association of Canadian Archivists' Membership Recognition Award in 2007. From 2004 to 2006, he was *Archivaria's* General Editor.

⁸⁰ A study of the workplace stories an archives' staff like to tell – and retell – would provide a worthwhile insight into its organizational culture.