

CHAPTER 7

Solidarity in Isolation

Shared Pandemic Experiences of Medical and Academic Middle Manager Librarians

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While not at all an easy time to start and develop as managers and leaders, the pandemic did in fact prove to be a training ground for leadership in many ways. This was a lesson in tenacity.

Introduction

Transitioning to a leadership role can be difficult in the best of times. Internal or external turmoil increases the difficulty of the transition. With more time on the job, and more experience as well as stronger relationships with stakeholders, the means to confront and respond to a crisis are clearer. However, these tools are not available to all entering leadership roles. This chapter takes a, perhaps, unusual approach by having librarians reflectively interview themselves; the five librarians authoring this chapter are in leadership and middle management roles, and most had been hired or promoted to that role not long before the COVID-19 pandemic. The structure of the chapter is in two sections: First, two librarian-authors in library director-type roles at hospital libraries reflect on the pandemic's effects on their role and work (both positive and negative), on communication, and on



operations at their libraries; then three librarian-authors placed in middle management roles shortly before the pandemic reflect using a questionnaire posed to middle managers in the nursing field with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic as outlined in a 2021 study.¹ This structure allowed the authors to respond to the same queries and concepts. The chapter discusses the similarities and themes in varied experiences while confronting aspects of uniqueness in each circumstance. While these experiences are a small sampling of a larger population, they present a lens into library leadership during an unprecedented, exhausting, and change-intensive time.

Hospital Library Leadership during COVID-19: Two Leaders Share Their Experiences

When considering the concept of library management during a crisis, solo librarianship within a medical or hospital library presents a unique opportunity for reflection, analysis, and discussion. Within this section, two medical library leaders document their experiences, one a medical librarian at a community hospital and the other a librarian director at a leadership institute and hospital library. Both librarians began in their roles relatively recently: the former in 2016, and the latter in the summer of 2019. They both reflected on their library's functions, priorities, and operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and the overall effects that COVID-19 had on their work.

Overview of the Libraries and Staffing

Penn Medicine, Chester County Hospital, is Mokonyama's 129-year-old community hospital library that serves the biomedical and health-care research needs of physicians, nurses, students, and the community in the region. Since 2016, Mokonyama has been the sole medical librarian at the hospital, and he has assistance from one part-time volunteer. In addition to performing his daily tasks and library management at the hospital, he provides services to patrons in the hospital, collaborates with about twenty other librarians in the health-care system, and represents the library on numerous hospital and system committees. The other librarian-author, Bogino, a hospital library director who started her position in summer 2019, has a small staff—two full-time assistants and a part-time reference librarian in addition to her own director role—and three locations to serve. When Bogino accepted her role as director of the library just a little over two years ago, she too had set out in her mind a plan for getting to know the library, the organization, and the staff; for fine-tuning the library resources and offerings; and then for expanding out to internal and external neighbors to try to establish the medical library as a health information resource for the medical professionals and also the local community. Little did she know that, on top of trying to accomplish these goals, she would encounter a worldwide pandemic that would change everything. Everything from the resources her

library had to offer to the way her team worked together and their library patrons would need to be examined and changed. Reflecting on the question “In what ways did the pandemic change how I thought I would be working as a new manager?” provided her with the opportunity for retrospection.

Leading with Compassion and Empathy

During her first year as a manager, Bogino looked for guidance for her new role as a manager director and discovered James Downton’s idea of transformational leadership, which notes that the transformational leader can inspire others by their vision or personal mission.² This idea of a mission-led leader was enlightening for Bogino, and it provided the guidance she needed to help her lead her library and staff because it allowed her to use her personal mission statement to guide the work of her team and what they tried to accomplish.³ For Bogino, within libraries, she had learned that her mission was to support others with the information within the library. The way she knew to best support others—including her staff, their patrons, and their partners and stakeholders—was with communication, accountability, and compassion. With the onset of the pandemic, she was able to see the vision of her personal mission come to fruition. Though the pandemic brought about change quickly for the entire world, it also helped establish the refinement of Bogino’s personal mission as she encountered the varied and widespread changes caused by the pandemic.

During the pandemic, Mokonyama’s library continued to provide research services to health-care practitioners and hospital management as well as providing health information to the public. Mokonyama in particular helped health-care professionals with locating current COVID-19-related research in line with each professional’s specialty. The library saw an increase of about 20 percent in the number of reference questions asked by patrons. The difficulty level of the searches ranged from medium to complex. Many of the more complex, COVID-19-related questions were made more complex simply by the lack of readily available information about the virus itself. COVID-19 questions were also complex due to the rapid speed with which information was changing as additional COVID-19-related information emerged in various medical fields. In addition, some of the library patrons from minority groups (e.g., African American, Hispanic, etc.) were more interested in COVID-19 information as it specifically related to their ethnic and racial groups. Such information was not broadly available at that time. Overall, Mokonyama’s patrons’ common COVID-19 searches were focused on diagnosis, treatment, infection control, PPE (personal protective equipment), testing, vaccines, adverse effects and safety, and transmission. Providing responsive and supportive reference services can be essential during and immediately following a crisis—whether the crisis is environmental, such as a hurricane, or natural, such as a pandemic. Information that is relevant and accurate is paramount at such a time when individuals in crisis need to support each other.⁴

Indeed, taking center stage in Bogino’s personal mission of supporting others through library information and resources was the idea that it must be done with compassion and empathy for others. During COVID-19, the need to acknowledge that we all are human and require a little grace and compassion was made even more evident.

The pandemic experience brought about continued exposure to trauma for everyone.⁵ The need for the library as a workplace to also be a psychologically safe place for employees was crucial to maintaining a sense that all was going to be OK as they worked together through the pandemic. Kahn introduced the idea of psychological safety in 1990 and defined it as the act of allowing a person to feel safe in expressing themselves and to be themselves without a fear of punishment or retaliation.⁶ The library could play a crucial role in providing supportive resources for employees, while also providing instruction and research support for its patrons and organizational support for its own employees. Bogino's library worked to create this type of environment for the library team on a weekly basis with the support and wellness training provided by hospital administration. Building this trusting environment involved Bogino conveying to the team that they, at any time, could come to her to ask questions, express their concerns about work, or even discuss the current environment the world was experiencing.

Mokonyama noted that challenging questions arose at his library, including ones about the efficacy, efficiency, and side effects of the vaccine, especially regarding pregnancy and fertility. In addition to doing research as a regular job for the hospital community, he found research questions to be personal because five of his colleagues had contracted COVID-19 while treating patients. He had two pregnant coworkers who were in search of credible information, and three of his friends had lost the battle with COVID-19. The biggest challenge was to sift through a spectrum of opinions and circulating misinformation about COVID-19. It was important for him to provide information that would not hurt the user. The biggest challenge was knowing what the evidence was behind the information being provided. Another challenge involved determining how the information might be helpful to the user's well-being and decision-making process. Mokonyama wanted to provide the best available information to help users and for the administration to use the information for making good decisions.

During the pandemic, Mokonyama's library experienced a 15 to 20 percent increase in the number of patrons who requested searches on stress, mental health, physical fitness, and self-care. He reasoned that perhaps many of the patrons were feeling the stress and fatigue caused by living through a pandemic. Health-care professionals specifically may have unmet information needs concerning their own self-care; it is necessary to be more proactive in providing information resources to this population.⁷ Prior to the pandemic outbreak, Mokonyama completed a workshop at the hospital entitled Verbal Judo. In this workshop, he learned about self-care methods, mental health assessment, and applying Verbal Judo to influence others to come around to your way of thinking. He perceived a need for a light community-engagement event, and so he started a pleasure reading library book club, with Jodi Picoult's novel *Plain Truth* as the first selection. Initially, he expected to enroll twelve to fifteen book club members. Surprisingly, over 100 employee-patrons had joined by the third day of book club enrollment and the library needed to pause sign-ups. Fortunately, Mokonyama was able to modify the format of the book club to accommodate all patrons enrolled. To make the book club run smoothly, he recruited five other hospital staff members (a nursing informatics specialist, a physical therapist, the chief financial officer, a quality analyst, and the manager of interpreter services) to help

with the book club facilitation. Based on patrons' input and discussions in the book club meetings, Mokonyama communicated with the department of human resources about the potential need for self-help training and workshops. Within a short time, human resources planned workshops and sessions on various topics that related to self-care, and they were all well attended.

Transitioning to Off-Site

Due to the lockdown, many of Mokonyama's university partner libraries were closed and not offering document delivery services. Other libraries scaled down their document exchange services. Library service changes slowed borrowing and the efficiency of information-sharing processes. The changes were fueled by different factors such as staffing, concerns about the spread of the virus, and uncertainty as to whether the shared physical resources had been disinfected or sanitized properly. Mokonyama's health care library at Penn Medicine, Chester County Hospital, also restricted materials that could be loaned out to other libraries. Only requests for periodical articles were processed; no books were allowed to be circulated from the middle of March 2020, and the policy is still in effect.

Beyond materials, practices also needed to change to accommodate the pandemic; Bogino's staff relied on open and clear communication to maintain the same level of services and accessibility for their patrons throughout the pandemic, as well as to maintain a bond between coworkers. The medium-size hospital library currently has three branches, two that support the clinical staff and one consumer health library to support patients and the larger community. Maintaining adequate coverage at each of these sites became instantly difficult with the onset of the pandemic, given the strict closures and restrictions on access to the physical campus. Staff worked through varied remote schedules ranging from completely off-site to a combination of on-site and remote. The latter involved rotating among each of the locations to ensure coverage. Throughout all this change, their daily e-mail and telephone call checks-ins and weekly team video calls helped them maintain their level of service to their patrons and to ensure accessibility. These communication efforts also helped Bogino and her staff maintain a sense of teamwork and commitment to the library patrons and to each other, increasing their flexibility for scheduling coverage of the library sites and handling the various library tasks. Bogino was proud of the team's all-hands-on-deck approach to managing and accomplishing the daily library tasks.

For Mokonyama, the library stayed open on a regular schedule (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), and he shifted from in-person work to a hybrid remote-and-in-person work model. A library volunteer came to work in the building on the two weekdays Mokonyama worked remotely. During the pandemic, the library continued to receive literature search requests via regular methods (e-mail, phone, walk-in, and the literature request form). Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the library has opened a Zoom account. In addition to the regular methods mentioned, the library's Microsoft Teams and Zoom accounts have allowed it to conduct virtual meetings, reference service, and patron literature search consultations.

Bogino too used virtual meeting platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom to maintain a sense of team for herself and her library team members. The physical access point of her office door turned into virtual access points via weekly Teams meetings and daily e-mails to keep communication flowing as if they all still occupied the same working space. This helped maintain positive morale for the team, which faced, like everyone in the world, days of uncertainty about health and security. As would be expected within a hospital, the work never stopped, though Bogino and her staff members had commenced working off-site. Introduction of the virtual tools mentioned ensured their patrons would continue to have the ready presence of a library staff member even if that person could not be there physically. With these tools, their reference and library instruction, research assistance, and interlibrary loan services continued allowing the library team to provide seamless support even from a distance.

Mokonyama's library was fortunate to have off-campus library access to research resources prior to the pandemic. Before 2020, the library had been providing online services that included article, book, and media content as well as e-mail and chat reference. The remotely accessible resources were essential in keeping the library connected to its patrons. Patrons were given access to temporarily free and open electronic resources as well as links to subscribed e-books. During COVID-19, health issues became one of the key concerns that Mokonyama considered regarding patrons; library safety upkeep was important to protect library patrons and staff. This became a concern because the library was potentially more vulnerable than before the pandemic to contamination from resource exchange and high foot traffic. To address the health issue, Mokonyama regularly disinfected high-volume library space; furniture and books were quarantined upon return before items could be checked out to the next user. He focused on infection prevention by following the CDC guidelines of handwashing, mask wearing, and using sanitizers and disinfectants. The library was able to open for in-person assistance five days per week (Monday through Friday).

The pandemic taught Mokonyama three things about library workflows and working off-site. Prior to the pandemic, the public view was that library work can be completed most efficiently and effectively inside a library's physical confines, such as the building. He learned, to the contrary, that work can be just as efficiently carried out remotely. Second, he discovered that it is easy to do both short-term and long-term projects when working remotely, prior to this time it was a challenge to focus on long-term projects—short-term daily activities and service fulfillment efforts were too time-consuming or distracting. Being on-site actually often makes it harder to switch tasks around on one's list of short- and long-term projects due to the nature of in-person work. One is more frequently interrupted when on-site; other priorities may take precedence over what one had in mind for the day. When working on-site, Mokonyama's practices had been to focus mostly on short-term, day-to-day operations and patron requests. Longer-term projects and planning were frequently shifted to the back burner, or they became summer projects. When he was working off-site, it became apparent that he could spend the time and attention needed for concentrated planning and focus for long-term projects. It was easier to focus on long-term projects because there were fewer interruptions and unexpected visits, and

he could closely follow the daily checklist. Finally, the pandemic taught Mokonyama to be open to trying new things. For example, using Zoom for consultations proved to be helpful to patrons *and* to Monkonyama himself. While Mokonyama believes that on-site work is optimal for relationships and in-person support and that it will continue to thrive, he is also convinced about the need to be more flexible in one's schedule and that working virtually as an individual and with colleagues and patrons may be needed at different times and under different conditions, not just as a reaction to a pandemic.

Setting Up Expectations and Accountability

As part of working through her personal mission of supporting others with the information within the library, Bogino knew accountability for her actions would be paramount as she worked to set an example for the team members she led (and continues to lead). With COVID-19 invading the way everyone now had to work, the idea of accountability had spread to the way Bogino had to manage her team, the library budget for which she is responsible, and the way library instruction sessions were provided, shared, and taught.

With the normal workflow occurring completely off-site, it was imperative to create a flexible schedule that met everyone's working restrictions while also maintaining access to library services and resources for patrons. This required effectively communicating the organization's work ethic standards for working remotely and enforcing them, which proved to be a challenge. At the start of the pandemic, the library quickly pivoted to a completely remote schedule for support staff. This move required the creation of additional workflow process checks—such as listing the individual tasks each staff member could perform in a virtual environment—to ensure that the remote working schedule could be justified. This quick move to remote working also required Bogino to introduce special longer-term library work projects, such as electronic resource link checking and cataloging tasks that could be performed in the library service platform.

Bogino's original thought, when taking on the manager's role, was that she would have an opportunity to focus on learning about the resources the library had to offer. The pandemic changed this focus completely. With the costs associated with remaining open and serving the community increasing at the hospital because of the pandemic, nonessential or less essential budget items were eliminated. This caused Bogino to look closely at what could be maintained within the library offerings while also working with a smaller budget.

The expectation within a teaching hospital is that patients continue to receive care and care providers continue to learn how to best provide it. With thirty resident and fellowship programs, and visiting undergraduate nursing program students rotating through the hospital, the library is a busy place and is an integral part of supporting the educational programs. The library instruction sessions staff conduct—teaching about the library resources and how to use them—had to make a quick pivot from regularly scheduled, in-person classroom trainings to online, whenever-needed sessions to accommodate the changing patterns in which the students and residents would arrive back on the hospital campus during the pandemic. The undergraduate nursing students were not permitted

on campus during height of the pandemic, and the medical residents, though on campus, had limited availability in their schedules for library instruction; all of this was dictated by the changing rules of engagement for addressing the pandemic. This was a lesson in tenacity for the small staff of research librarians, who also juggled an on-site/off-site remote working schedule.

While Mokonyama and Bogino addressed pandemic-induced challenges and changes to their library workflows, processes, and leadership styles, the academic librarians in the next section discuss how the pandemic impacted them. As middle managers, these academic librarians were faced with their own, often similar, issues, opportunities, and leadership development hurdles, yet, in their roles as recently promoted or hired individuals, they also have unique shared experiences.

Academic Library Leadership during the Pandemic: Shared Middle Manager Experiences

Academic librarians and their libraries were also certainly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in similar ways to their medical library colleagues. This section of the chapter strives to address the question “How does a manager learn to lead a new group, from the middle, during a pandemic situation?” by highlighting the experiences of three librarians in academic settings. All three librarians entered middle-management roles in North American academic libraries. For two of these librarians, the leadership role was a promotion within an organization where they had already been working; for the third, the adjustment involved a relocation and a position at an entirely new institution. Cantwell-Jurkovic was promoted from reference and distance services librarian, a nonsupervisory role, to head of access services and outreach, supervising four classified staff, at a regional university located in western Colorado in fall 2019. Smith was promoted from a limited-term appointment to a tenure-track unit head position within the collection services department of an urban Canadian university in early 2020. Prucha left a job as a director at a small Midwestern two-year college in fall 2019 to assume the position of head of collection services at a small four-year liberal arts university in the Pacific Northwest. This portion of the chapter provides a synthesis of their responses. (A complete listing of the nineteen questions to which they responded can be found in the appendix.)

After finding a journal article exploring nurses in middle-management roles in Switzerland during the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors decided to approach this section by using the questions of that survey as reflective inspiration.⁸ Each person independently answered the questions, and the responses were then analyzed to identify common traits. This exercise led to the emergence of several themes, including challenges, pivots, opportunities, and realities. The themes, while rooted in a specific situation, will resonate with the reader in whatever role they currently have or aspire to in academic libraries.

Challenges

It is perhaps easiest to first approach what it was like for recently hired and recently promoted academic librarians to learn to lead from the middle during COVID-19 from the challenges they faced. One important challenge throughout their peak pandemic experience was the difficulty they faced in learning their jobs. As middle managers, all three found themselves in meetings related to organizational planning, some of which were within the typical scope of their job and others of which were solely due to COVID-19's arrival. The plans discussed at these meetings were also impacted by the pandemic, as seen in difficulties with budgets and forecasting. Furthermore, pre-pandemic concerns like the reality that students may be dealing with housing, financial, and food security issues did not vanish. Instead, they had to coexist with social distancing, sanitizing, occupancy limitations, decreased and canceled programming, staffing shortages, furloughs, retirements, stress, and more. Each author had a difficult time expressing what had changed about their jobs, in part because everything about their positions changed radically shortly after they arrived, but also because the changes just kept happening. Campus, local, and federal guidelines, employment and unemployment options: all of it changed as a result of the pandemic and kept changing as the pandemic went on.

The three middle managers faced other challenges when learning their new roles. They struggled to develop a sense of routine, which affected productivity, focus, feelings of belonging, and change uptake. In addition to difficulties setting and maintaining routines, librarians noted feelings of being Jills-of-all-trades⁹ and task derailment, prioritizing the needs of others ahead of themselves, the need to upskill and cross-train, and very much the understanding that their roles were not limited to standard workweek hours. Most of the responsibilities they faced fell into the "other duties as assigned" areas of a job description, and those duties kept evolving as the pandemic progressed. As a result of the additional responsibilities, all three reported a sense of stress related to wanting to learn their new role while also attending to other equally pressing needs. Smith said that it was "evident that the role that existed pre-pandemic was vastly different from what [I] was doing in the early pandemic period." As a result, it took significantly longer for the author-respondents to learn their actual jobs, and they each understood that that adjustment, under more normal circumstances, would have most likely occurred more quickly. A flexible mindset, rather than specific rigid guidelines and protocols, and the value of self-trust, active listening, and addressing and accepting stress, represented the skill set needed for success as newly minted middle managers during a crisis.¹⁰

The employment circumstances of staff who reported to the author-respondents were also a concern—shifting to remote hiring processes for any openings they could fill, followed by remote onboarding efforts; campus and library discussions of staff redeployment or furloughs (voluntary or otherwise); positions vacated by retirements during a time of deep financial upheaval in the higher education context; and issues of accountability during work from home (WFH) as well as potential ongoing WFH accommodations. Overall, taking on a new role and responsibilities—and, for one of these librarians, a new organization entirely—while also supporting others within a pandemic situation created

a wealth of challenges for these individuals. But the situation also created pivot points: moments that fostered change. Indeed, managing during the COVID-19 pandemic was very much about navigating change.

Within a clearly un-ideal situation, the ability of an organization and the individuals within it to pivot—to shift direction, mentally, behaviorally, emotionally, and functionally—is important to facilitating a strong, productive work environment. For new appointees, like the authors of this section, there have been three (at least) phases to their new positions—pre-pandemic, during peak pandemic/emergent circumstances, and the back-to-campus period. These phases are similar for many workers and created especially distinct pivot points in the job learning curve that these new managers faced during COVID-19. While each had the same job, technically, throughout the pandemic, the shifting realities of responding to the pandemic made the nature of their jobs shift within these phases and underscored the difficulties of learning the actual job.

Prucha's expectation prior to arrival was to perform the work of a long-standing previous department head who had retired and to create new programs and initiatives that would build upon that person's work. However, the pandemic quickly derailed these plans as Prucha soon found herself "covering four other positions in addition to learning [her] own [job]." She wrote:

Due to a hiring freeze and furloughs, we lost several staff members. My Collections Technology librarian and I covered those positions. We dropped all other goals in favor of one over-arching commitment: We made sure materials became and remained accessible in a timely manner without inconveniencing our users. This meant that learning my job became second to mastering our staff's jobs. It also meant that my priorities constantly shifted or got pushed to the back burner in favor of everyone else's needs.

Similarly, Smith recalled that

[she had] seen four of the roles in [her] unit vacated by retirements during the pandemic, which ...added more challenges including remote hiring, onboarding, etc. [and that these human resource changes] coupled with the complexities that arose due to the vast changes in Collections [i.e., great increase in more complex e-resource requests] made difficulties multifold.

While there is some evidence to suggest that a silver lining to the pandemic may be the uptick in free or low-cost professional development opportunities,¹¹ the realities of these managers—trying to develop in a new role, grow skills, and establish themselves—reflect the day-to-day challenges of professionally developing *in their jobs*, while *on the job*.¹²

While retirements, furloughs (voluntary or otherwise), and the like are often strains on and for organizations, for new managers they may prove even more difficult; the priorities of the department, its personalities, and its level of flexibility become so significant that each day holds multiple potential pivot points on which the manager may need to adjust. For Prucha, this flexibility also involved being real: she stated that she is not the kind of boss who puts on a fake and utterly cheerful face for faculty and staff, and

[that this outlook allowed others to] ...know when [she is] stressed out and working through backlogs of work. That's when [she realizes] how lucky [she is] because they will step up and say, "I don't want to add any more to your plate" and "How can I help you?"

In some ways, this perspective reinforces the importance of remembering supervisors are humans, too; they, like all members of an institution, have goals, priorities, roadblocks, frustrations, energy boosts, and energy drains. But Prucha's statement also notes a way that she allows herself to find opportunities in challenging situations: by allowing those around her to see her humanity. The transparency she demonstrates also allows others to step away from their own stressors, if just for a moment, in order to show parts of their humanity in return—their understanding, their empathy, and their acknowledgement.¹³ In a similar vein to acknowledging in-the-moment humanity, another mental pivot point uncovered by the authors was that of looking forward. Prucha discussed the fact that

there are still days when I can't see a light at the end of the tunnel, and I worry that I don't have time to do the professional development and planning that needs to be done. Until the summer of 2021, those days were very frequent. Now, I see pinpoints of light as others are able to do their jobs without so much help, or when I can actually spend two hours with a staff member who needs it.

A typical role of a manager involves being forward-thinking and engaging in planning. However, these newly placed managers found planning very difficult not just because of the pandemic situation, but *also* due to the fact that they were also acclimating to their new positions. The struggle of Prucha and others to see the light ahead speaks to the discouraging nature of the pandemic and the need for self-motivation, self-encouragement, and self-care.

Cantwell-Jurkovic's reflection on her feelings and emotions during peak pandemic months and her institution's in-person 2020–2021 academic year involved oscillation between supportiveness and gratitude, and fatigue, overwhelm, and resentment. Cantwell-Jurkovic noted specific feelings of resentment at how thoroughly COVID-related tasks could take over, overwhelm from other job functions and priorities, and fatigue related to the exhaustion of focusing on all the (ever-changing) guidelines, concerns, time lines, and so forth set out by the institution and the government.¹⁴ Like individuals around the world, librarians confronted the same information overload and ever-changing guidelines set by their local, regional, and national governments, which were then addressed and implemented by their organizations. That said, Cantwell-Jurkovic found helpful ways to pivot her mindset stating, that she

could go back to the important reality that [she] was getting to work [her] job, on site, and that [she] was less isolated than so many others and that [they] were trying to stay safe and strong so that [their] institution could *also* stay strong. That was an important motivator and an enduring focal point for [them] all, even on the bad days.

This is a pivot point with which many supervisors can connect—the institutional, greater-good mindset as a form of motivation and energy and encouragement.¹⁵ While the

authors here highlight the various challenges they had with these transitions, they all found pathways to reconnect their minds and emotions in meaningful, honest, and motivating ways. It is important to note that the authors decidedly did not opt to focus on their lives outside work in their interviews. However, they all expressed an enhanced awareness that, for staff they managed, personal and professional lives were inextricably intertwined during the pandemic. Prucha noted the fact that, given that heightened awareness, managers may also find themselves in positions of negotiating rocky paths with their staff. Though traditional guidance has advised keeping one's personal and professional lives separate, there is much to indicate that managers must strive to understand that staff's personal life can very much, and very understandably, bleed into their professional. Within reason, managers must seek to help their staff through difficult times or help them connect with resources to do so.¹⁶

Remaining change-agile is not always easy, mentally or emotionally, for one's own benefit or the benefit of one's staff. Perhaps one of the ways to maintain a level of flexibility toward change is to lean into the feelings of possibility, of newness, of forward-moving change, of opportunity, and of empathy.¹⁷

Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for many; it has been heartbreakingly polarizing, scary, financially precarious, destructive, and extremely exhausting.¹⁸ But it has not been without opportunity. Libraries as organizations are known for their adaptability to change, as a thing of circumstantial necessity, a quality desirable for managers and other leaders, and a key element of retained relevance.¹⁹ Libraries and their workforces, as service-driven organizations and individuals, were able to embrace a number of changes when faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, and these adaptations allowed them to glimpse through windows of opportunity.

As in many organizations, process adaptations and new technology implementations became a focal point of daily agendas for librarians during the pandemic.²⁰ Cantwell-Jurkovic's and Prucha's organizations had not previously supported remote access to work computers, but, within moments of the WFH order, it seemed, options were put into place that would allow employees to work off-site. All the middle manager librarians in this section experienced expedited institutional uptake and adoption of tools like Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Many already had access to these tools at their institutions, but the degree of use, user permissions, settings, and level of necessity all shifted. From staff meetings and quick messages to programming, outreach, and research consultations, new software came to the forefront of the author-respondents' work. Cantwell-Jurkovic also indicated additional uses of Teams implemented at her institution, which included task tracking for electronic resource renewals, bestseller collection suggestions, and committee project management (such as committee tasks underway at her institution's institutional review board). She is also currently using it as a drafting and source depository for an article she's coauthoring with institutional colleagues.

Many libraries were already collecting resources in electronic format prior to the pandemic. As a result, these libraries were well positioned to focus the remainder of

2019–2020's acquisitions budgets to enhance these electronic collections, which was facilitated by publisher COVID-19 open access offerings. Alongside these investments, libraries challenged with limitations to their interlibrary loan service turned to services like RapidILL, a consortium assisting libraries all over the world (members and nonmembers of the Rapid system) in gaining access to materials. Cantwell-Jurkovic's team was proud to be able to assist so many students, faculty, and researchers and to secure sufficient workloads in their now-limited daily spheres of work (without students and faculty on campus). While working to ensure that staff had a steady flow of responsibilities and continue as many patron services as possible, many public services middle managers also developed curbside pickup process for patrons,²¹ or enhanced book chapter scanning services, allowing students working at a distance to access to print-only materials. At Prucha's library, ILL and collections services collaborated to purchase and send books requested through ILL directly to library users. Physical books were received and checked out as if they had been delivered to the library. Books were due when the library reopened, and when returned, more deliberate cataloging work and physical processing was done with each book. E-books were also purchased based on ILL requests and were made available as quickly as possible to ensure timely access. Some of these concepts will not be new to all libraries, but these opportunities nonetheless demonstrate that libraries and librarians chose not to resist change and upheaval, but rather to embrace the tumult in order to benefit their communities.

And the tumult within library communities was not always on the other side of the service desk—these three librarians who were new to their middle-management positions also sought ways to stabilize their staff during times when in-person meetings were impossible (i.e., while working from home) and when in-person meetings felt less personal than in pre-pandemic times (e.g., using masks, social distancing). But there were now new or more overt benefits to finding ways to meet—meetings proved beneficial for both individual and collective morale. Additionally, meetings now required a new sense of intentionality. According to Smith,

My daily activity was very reactive; we were in a global crisis. However, we were all experiencing this crisis alone, working in a way that was so isolated from each other. The brief, recurring team and one-on-one meetings were not something that existed in our unit before the pandemic, but they are something that will not disappear after it. [They have] helped deepen relationships and make intentional moments to touch base with each other.

For Prucha, being entirely new to her institution, meetings provided an opportunity for new coworkers to get to know her, and her them. For Smith and Cantwell-Jurkovic, meetings offered the opportunity for coworkers to get to know them in their new role while also adjusting to a colleague in a new capacity (alongside all the other newness). Even instances of remote hiring procedures were new, but established an opportunity for institutions in higher education, including their libraries, to step away from the well-established—but time-consuming and expensive—hiring processes that have long been in place within academia. Learning from these experiences, institutions can at least consider alternative hiring process models with many now having experienced alternatives.

Additionally, given the then-recent hires and promotions of the contributors to this section, there were opportunities to mitigate the feeling of upheaval by engaging in cross-training and upskilling efforts. For all these middle managers, this allowed for increased fluency (potentially at a faster rate than would have occurred otherwise) with the daily operations and needs of the staff and services under their purview, and possibly faster buy-in from supervisees given this situation required a from-the-trenches approach to departmental work. In normal times, understanding the work done in one's area or library occurs naturally over time as people work together. Social distancing and remote work meant these newly-hired or -promoted managers did not learn their staff members' positions by working together in-person. However, the managers were able to mitigate feelings of upheaval by engaging in cross-training and upskilling. The professional development opportunities increased their knowledge of daily operations (potentially at a faster rate than would have occurred otherwise) and exposed them to the roles played by the staff they managed in ways that may not have happened before or after the pandemic. Quick upskilling and cross-training resulted in disassembling existing divisions of labor as the managers developed the skills needed to cover other positions under their direction, and sharing the labor may have created a sense of camaraderie between managers and staff that made it easier for staff to respond positively to change.

Lessons on Leadership

Despite the challenges faced by these middle managers in order to maintain library services during a tremendously difficult and stressful time, there were some long-lasting impacts from the additional responsibilities undertaken during the peak months of the pandemic. One such impact was the development of leadership styles that may not have been their initial approach prior to the pandemic, but that became appropriate as the circumstances unfolded. During this time, Prucha “learned [that] leadership is about ...[establishing] a path forward and bringing everyone with you” and noted that this “has meant different things to different people. It’s meant firmly insisting that we are a community that works together and that’s why we are back in person when so many are not; but it’s also meant realizing other people bring real concerns that require flexibility on [her] part.”

Similarly, Smith noted that the “pandemic has made [her] more aware of human-centered leadership” to the extent that she adopted what she considers a user-centered design into her leadership practice, where the users would be her staff. Likewise, Cantwell-Jurkovic highlighted the role that dedication and commitment to the library and university played in her promotion and how those relate to her current leadership role:

I also make sure I reinforce that my institution, our library, and my staff and coworkers come first [despite also starting a PhD program in Fall 2020] ...to reinforce [that I am] interruptible and show commitment to them and to [her] ability to prioritize.

While these realizations do not come without challenges, these realizations became opportunities for the authors to grow as leaders, to better understand the needs of their staff and colleagues, and to maintain a flexible, unity-focused mindset. Overall,

the contributors' management and leadership styles became community-focused out of necessity.

In another relationship-building context, the pandemic caused Prucha had to develop a stronger relationship with her dean, while between March 2020 and August 2021 their interactions were wholly online. While Prucha noted uncertainty regarding how exclusively virtual interaction affected her relationship with her supervisor, she found that this "increase[d] her [Dean's] trust in both [her and] the Head of Public Services," stating:

My counterpart and I returned to campus much earlier and were the boots on the ground who ran the library. We communicated a lot so [our Dean] was in the loop, and we successfully shut down and reopened the library.

Not only would these dynamics and dutiful communications have built trust,²² but Prucha also gained appreciation for her dean's leadership both on- and off-site, stating that her library "successfully closed and reopened because of her [the dean's] direction, and because of the trust she placed in us." Smith and Cantwell-Jurkovic found that their previous roles within their respective organizations benefited relationship building with their supervisors and others when the pandemic hit. Cantwell-Jurkovic in particular noted her preexisting, strong working relationship with her supervisor facilitated more frequent interactions when forced to work from home:

We talked a lot over text, Teams, phone, and email—likely daily and often involving lengthy planning meetings and back-and-forth calls and such. I think our faith in each other has already been well-placed, but nonetheless we have maintained a strong working relationship.... I think she [the supervisor] now has a clearer understanding of her limitations and her strengths, and that's allowed her to better leverage staff skills and roles.

The recurring theme of library leaders with strength in planning coupled with the involvement of middle managers in emergency planning efforts created a tremendous amount of work for all involved, but provided an important opportunity for top-level library leaders to train, mentor, and delegate to their middle managers.²³ This provides an excellent learning opportunity for those middle managers, which breeds appreciation, trust, and leadership bonds.

While the peak months of the COVID-19 pandemic were intensely change-heavy, some good changes permeated the frustration, challenges, and losses that occurred. However, independent of the challenges and opportunities caused by the pandemic realities, other challenges and opportunities continued to exist; the human realities faced by the librarian-authors did not stop when the pandemic hit. Prucha, in particular, highlighted the co-occurring social unrest going on in her city during the pandemic. She wrote, "This led to an increased awareness of building diverse, equitable, and inclusive collections"; her library was simultaneously impacted by COVID-19 and a heightened sense of social responsibility. Further, Cantwell-Jurkovic and Prucha were both involved in PhD programs during the pandemic; for Prucha, this meant that "[she] had to make a commitment to ending [her] weekend work in favor of finishing [her] dissertation.

[She] did that at the expense of library projects." She recognized a certain amount of "reverberation" from that choice, but also recognized its necessity. For Cantwell-Jurkovic, the addition of the doctoral program added weight in the form of additional tasks and responsibilities, but she too recognized her role must come first, which made juggling multiple conflicting responsibilities quite difficult. This became especially true as she oversaw staffing of the opening and closing of the building, including all open hours of checkout and reserves services. With three staff managing over ninety building hours each week, Cantwell-Jurkovic recognized that the pace, plans, and goals set for her day could quickly get off track. This challenge, present regardless of the pandemic, became nearly a full-time job in itself.

Beyond external factors, at least two of the mid-level managers voiced new anxieties with their new roles and responsibilities. Both Prucha and Cantwell-Jurkovic noted feeling that they must constantly stay connected to work communication during the pandemic, with Cantwell-Jurkovic noting that "no matter how tired [she] may be, it is critical that [she] check texts and emails during [her] wake-up process each day, and before the lights-out process each night," and Prucha described the anxiety in the hours when she is not with her team:

I find it difficult to stay asleep. I wake up with rushing thoughts about everything I need to do and everyone I need to email. I sometimes feel dread, particularly on Sunday evenings because I don't know what is going to hit me when I get back on Monday morning.

While issues of insomnia have been documented among health-care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic,²⁴ clearly this issue arose in other industries as well. Smith, too, acknowledged a strong mix of anxiety and fatigue, even outside of work, despite having historically strong work-life separation abilities. For her, too, these feelings have abated, but, in her terms, due to "finding that balance" and, now, "after many months of practice [she has] been more or less successful keeping outside-of-work emotions separate from [her] work." These emotional ups and downs identified by all three author-librarians compounded overall anxiety, stress, and fatigue during the pandemic, with the additional factors of new jobs, new responsibilities, and complex, awkward learning curves.

The staff managed by the three librarian-authors too were tasked with coping with their own internal and external realities, and this added a layer of complexity to the management of these individuals. Prucha noted that staff exhibiting tendencies toward introversion "flourished" in the COVID work environment,²⁵ stating,

They were less stressed because of the lack of interaction and have become more stressed as we have become required to work together again in our shared space. Other more extroverted people have benefitted from returning to a more communal environment. [Their] productivity and engagement have increased.

Beyond introvert versus extrovert needs and challenges, Smith also began to consider the role of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in staff since the pandemic began.²⁶ She believes that before the pandemic, the needs of her staff would have fallen higher on that hierarchy—for example, self-actualization, esteem, and so on. However, she emphasized that

as “the pandemic shook us all in a variety of ways.... People have been bringing up needs that [now] range the spectrum of Maslow’s hierarchy.” This observation requires a certain amount of emotional intelligence on the part of the manager, particularly in the case of managers who are new to their staff²⁷—not only must they meet staff, get to know job functions, and start building relationships, but in crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, managers must be all the more ready and able to understand the emotional contexts of their supervisees, within and even outside of work.²⁸

Conclusion

In many ways, the overarching themes of managing during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic—and likely other crises—can be summarized by resilience, communication, patience, flexibility, and determination, as well as the value of self-care, listening, and openness. While this chapter is not without its limitations, it strives to share key stories of those who needed to rise to library leadership challenges, particularly within the context of a new position, in the midst of a global pandemic. This chapter also seeks to draw attention to the important roles of library leaders working primarily alone and who needed to do so in a circumstance that created even more aloneness and isolation. Medical librarians have long played a crucial role in providing research information to their constituents. Their role was even more critical during COVID-19 as the pandemic severely affected all human activity, up-to-date and accessible information was paramount, and the activities surrounding information sharing had grown in their complexity.

This pandemic has highlighted the need for librarians to be agile and nimble and to have and provide access to current, reliable, and high-quality research resources. For both Mokonyama and Bogino, workflow changes were made—like the increased need to shift some acquisitions from print to electronic resources, while also supporting the print collections—but such needs and shifts were not exclusive to medical and hospital libraries; all libraries and their staff needed to find pathways toward providing resources and continue outreach to patrons, no matter the context. Thus, more than anything, the pandemic reinforced the need to support others with information, and the strong positioning and commitment of library leaders and staff to providing exactly that support. This was evident across all managers involved in this chapter, not only for themselves but also for their reflections on the work of their entire libraries during the pandemic. While not at all an easy time to start and develop as managers and leaders, the pandemic did in fact prove to be a training ground for leadership in many ways, even if not ideal, as well as a time and space for deep reinforcement of leaders’ commitments to their organizations and, above all, to their patrons.

Appendix A: Self-Interview Questions Used by Cantwell-Jurkovic, Prucha, and Smith

1. Can you tell me what role you have, in what department/context you work, and how many years of professional experience you have?
2. Focusing on this pandemic period and your daily work activity, can you tell me how this has changed from the point of view of the contents of the activity?
3. What has changed?
4. What is new?
5. What is no longer there?
6. How has your forecasting and planning activity changed?
7. What aspects did you find difficult in this period?
8. Thinking again about your daily activity, can you tell me how it has changed compared to the relationships you have with the people you manage?
9. Thinking about the people you manage, have you been able to observe changes in their needs and requests in this last period?
10. What have you put in place to meet them?
11. And with respect to the ways they related to you, has anything changed?
12. If you think about how you relate to them, do you notice any changes in your way you pose yourself during this time?
13. Thinking about your leadership style, do you think it has changed in this period? If so, in what way?
14. Thinking about the management team in which you are part of and its way of functioning, can you tell me if and how the relationship with the different professionals of the team has changed?
15. Have you changed the way you proceed in your daily work? And what about decision-making and planning?
16. Thinking about your supervisor ...has your relationship changed during this period? If so, in what way?
17. If you were to identify a person you are referring to in this period to seek help or to seek someone who will listen to you, who would that be?
18. Now think about yourself during your workdays. Tell me how you feel and what are the feelings and emotions you experience during your work shifts?
19. If you think about the period between one shift and the next and the journey that takes you to your workplace, what feelings/emotions do you experience in these moments?

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