Excellence in Research Library Leadership: The Key Virtues

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abstract: This paper seeks to define the qualities of a good research library leader through a qualitative study using the lens of Aristotelian virtue theory. Narrative evidence was collected from library directors in the UK and North America on their ethical identity, how they develop excellence in their libraries, and how they deal with complex problems. A set of virtues are identified and presented in a model of a flow of influence from the leader into the organization, with beneficial effects on character, culture and social impact. The paper provides a unique perspective on library leadership and organization in the academy.

Introduction

What makes a good research library leader? Drawing on Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and a qualitative study of library leaders in North America and the UK, this paper argues that library leaders share attributes or virtues they have cultivated that could shape a useful framework for inspiring improvement in the management of research libraries within the academy.[1] This study, which builds on the author's previous work on library organizational value, proposes a coherent model of library virtue that embodies library values in practice.[2] Little research exists about how library leaders develop their ethical identity, how they manage their work to facilitate library excellence, and how they overcome the difficult and complex problems arising in the academic context. This study provides evidence and a unique perspective toward answering these questions, based on narratives from research library leaders (also referred to in this paper as library directors) demonstrating the deployment of a range of virtues to improve the character and performance of their libraries.

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The work of the Research Library Leader

Political, economic, environmental, societal and technological changes all substantially affect the contemporary academy. Pressure from these trends seems to have intensified over the past ten years to create a climate of uncertainty about a positive future. Divisive conflicts about how to respond to these changes are a feature of institutional life, as universities wrestle with competition, inequality, lack of diversity, and neo-liberal managerialism and measurement systems.[3] Academy leaders have not always found a successful route through these challenges.

Research libraries are particularly under threat in this context, with local competition for resources within the institution exacerbated in the library by rising content prices, increasing expectations, and growing alternative information sources. A declining status within the university is coupled with less certainty of identity and of the library's value proposition. These issues provide leaders with a challenging set of intersecting cross pressures to negotiate.[4] Libraries are also emerging from the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the significant personal demands and impacts involved.[5] In spite of all this, the expectation is that research library directors will continue to sustain excellent libraries and do so both rationally and sensitively. This context suggests that library leaders will have valuable experience to share about how they accomplish this.

Research library leaders usually inhabit three relational settings:

- Serving as the chief executive officer of the library as a professional service,
- holding a formal university office that places the director as a strategic leader within university institutional leadership hierarchies and groups,
- and representing the library in association with external professional and collaborative groups and activities.

Library directors have considerable power to control affairs within the library, through a legitimacy built on conferred role authority and successful role performance. Most directors currently distribute their power within the library by allocating authority to their senior staff, and onward to their teams on the basis of professional, technical or managerial expertise. In their interactions with the broader university hierarchy, senior faculty assume power, and professional leaders on the edge of this academic hegemony must successfully navigate forums in which the university's strategies and resource allocations are made.[6]

This complex institutional context demands more from library leadership than simply excellent service management and performance. Most leadership decisions are now entangled with matters of ethics; any encounter with others can become ethical in nature.[7] Ethical leadership is described as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision making."[8] A central feature of the academy is the influential power of rhetoric, and library directors require a repertoire of rhetorical language to perform as the library's advocates on different stages to varied audiences. The leader of a research library must define, model, convey and promote what good work and ethical conduct is to all their stakeholder networks.[9] This paper provides insight into how library leaders do this in practice.

Literature review

Library leadership is much discussed in the profession and many courses and workshops are delivered in the hope of fostering strong leaders, but the professional literature appears lacking in investigating the lived experience of senior strategic leaders, and in the application of wider leadership and ethical scholarship to the profession. Two substantial recent works do provide broad surveys based on leader experience. Patrick Lo et al. offer a contemporary voice to a broad worldwide sample of library directors, providing some useful ground and context, but this work does not attempt in-depth analysis or a resulting synthetic model of leadership.[10] Margaret Weaver and Leo Appleton also bring together reflections from an international range of experienced leaders in their collection, with a focus on recent disruptions.[11] Both works lack overtly ethical content, and the assumption of rational virtue that might lie behind the second title concept of "bold minds" is not elaborated on or synthesized. The appeal for more empirical research on ethical leadership in libraries made some time ago by Adele Barsh and Amy Lisewski seems to have gone unanswered in the intervening years.[12] Mark Winston's recommendations on the development of educational programs to include ethical leadership have not been heeded either.[13] This seems in stark contrast to business school teachings, as well as to character formation initiatives in other professions including education and health care.[14]

The standard texts written for library professional ethical formation are slanted toward information ethics and present a limited range of cases. Organizational ethics and the ethical foundations of good work are rarely covered, and although virtue ethics is occasionally mentioned, specific application to libraries has not been investigated.[15] There is a growing literature responding to Luciano Floridi's work that presents a broader ontology for information ethics. These authors call for inclusion of the moral rights of all information materiality, but this has not yet provided a coherent consensus for application to library practice.[16] Ethical discourse in the research library professional literature currently reports work on individual research library responses to specific ethical hot topics such as decolonisation of collections and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).[17] While these papers and initiatives may draw on theory relevant to each issue, they tend to reinforce the sense of ethics as something to be considered only when periodically required, rather than as a foundation for day-to-day practice. The current EDI literature also does not seem to appreciate previous research library streams of work and accompanying data related to organizational climate and culture.[18]

Ethical codes exist in many professional library contexts internationally, and in North America professional values are presented through the American Library Association (ALA) Core Values and Code of Ethics.[19] These include commitments to excellence and to the public good and contain mention of some practical virtues that might be involved in their attainment. This research sought specifically to understand whether and how these codes influence research library leadership practice. Ethical codes provide necessary ideas and definitional frameworks, but they are not sufficient to fully guide action at all levels of practice. Local organizational values are common in universities, and many libraries develop their own sets, which seems to the author to be the most practical scope for capably agreeing upon commonly espoused beliefs. The author has reported the experience of developing values in this context previously, in a study involving all

library staff levels.[20] The author's impression is that there is a general lack of understanding of the difference between values, policies and the behaviours of people that might constitute virtues within the profession. There is a gap between valuing something and actually doing it. Virtues are the behaviours focused on taking actions informed by value beliefs. Virtues require practice to become habituated, and usually encompass an aim directed toward the common good. While virtues may seem elusive, they are experienced and observed in practice, so consequently open to empirical research within organizations in a way that theoretical values ideologies are not. This paper uses Aristotelian virtue ethics to extend understanding by investigating what values drive library leaders and how these influence practice.

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Virtue is defined as a disposition toward goodness and excellence and assists a person to act reliably. It is not a passing mood or attitude but has to be acquired through habit (but not simply as a routine). The person becoming virtuous will also become more intelligent in their performance in the process, hence its applicability to learning and development in professional practice, administration and therefore libraries. Virtue is composed of a number of different individual virtues forming a unity, which shape overall personal and organizational character. Virtue requires a commitment to value and therefore must be strong enough in practice to enable criticism of contexts and institutions on the basis of this commitment.[21]

This paper draws mainly on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics from which much of the contemporary stream of modern virtue ethics discourse in philosophy, business, organization and education flows.[22] There are also virtue traditions in many other cultures and societies throughout history and across the world.[23] Aristotle's philosophy could be said to be concerned with formation rather than information, given that his ethical works are considered to be a set of lecture notes used to prepare young men for public administration in the Athenian polis.[24] Ethics for Aristotle was the preparatory philosophy essential for political service and leadership and, consequently, intended for practice and action rather than disconnected contemplation.

The important facets of Aristotelian virtue theory are *arete*, a term which encompasses both excellence and virtue; *eudaimonia,* which conveys the idea of the end product of virtue being human flourishing, although this is often reductively interpreted in our contemporary world as a narrow personal 'happiness'; and *phronesis*, a practical wisdom used to combine other virtues into the ability to make good judgments and take sound actions.[25] The term 'excellence' as employed among and within academic institutions is polysemic, and can be used in limited, reductive or corrupted ways.[26] To Aristotle, virtue and excellence were synonymous. In this paper excellence is used to reflect a range of assumptions. Universities assume themselves to be excellent (or leading or elite) based on league tables, reputation, or performance in particular aspects. Research libraries may consider themselves excellent on the basis of being within an excellent institution, but also with regard to inputs, scale, longevity, and their own performance quality measures. Human and leadership excellence is assumed to be based on aspiration and commitment to goodness in practical action as well as outcomes contributing to broader goods.

Elizabeth Anscombe's 1958 paper on modern moral philosophy provided a fresh impetus to virtue ethics, and it is now considered to be at least an equal third system of Western ethical philosophies alongside Kantian deontology and Utilitarianism.[27] Alastair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, first published in 1981, gave a prominence to virtue ethics that resulted in its application to fields beyond philosophy. MacIntyre suggested that the language and understanding of virtue has fallen away in modernity, in the face of rationality and scientific thinking. Among MacIntyre's broad contributions, the distinction in "goods" between institutions and the practices within them is important here to research libraries within universities, as is the recognition that virtues can help sustain a quest for "the common good."[28] Terry Cooper in 1987 was among the first following MacIntyre to seek application of Aristotelian virtue theory to the sphere for which it was originally designed—the practice of public administration.[29] Cooper focused on management practice as distinct from, but supportive of, professions in achieving standards of excellence within and beyond hierarchical organization. He also recognized the complexities of predisposition, hierarchy, and loyalty in professional leaders attempting to balance institutional demands for survival and growth against both practice internal goods and ethics, and wider public interests. Five years later Robert Solomon, in a foundational text, laid out Aristotelian parameters for co-operation and integrity in business, linking ethics and excellence with a framework of virtues for the corporate self: friendliness, honor, loyalty, and shame.[30]

Ron Beadle's early cautions about misappropriating MacIntyre's work for management and business have been largely ignored.[31] Virtue theory discourse in management, organization and education has developed in the last twenty years from a stream into a broad river, with focuses on professional character and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) of relevance to libraries and their leadership.[32] Organizational virtuousness has been linked to improved performance and organizational culture and is recommended as particularly relevant as a management framework for contemporary entrepreneurial organizations.[33] MacIntyre's work has been used subsequently to gather empirical evidence and support for mapping the virtuous organization, and highlighting his distinction between institutions and the practices that work within them.[34] This has relevance for libraries as receptacles for a range of linked practices within university institutions.

Modern organizations are blemished by lack of virtue, with "instances of dishonesty, lapses in integrity and fairness, shirked responsibility and a general lack of compassion, justice and care."[35] Leadership education involving virtue theory is seen as a route to fully unlocking the potential of organizations for excellence, and this style of leadership practice will transmit to wider shared leadership, fostering organizational learning, empowerment, greater moral identity, stability within change, and improved instrumental performance.[36] Despite much theoretical work, there is still comparatively little actionable research on virtuous leadership in organizational contexts, providing a space for this study and paper.[37] While a need to embed virtues in organizational leadership is clear, the literature is also weak on how education and formation in this area might be achieved.[38] This study entails an investigation of how contemporary leaders in the academy formed and applied their own ethical practice approaches, helping to address this perceived gap in the library and management literature and in professional education more generally.

Frameworks and definitions of individual virtues are offered in the literature. Howard J. Curzer provides a helpful table of the Aristotelian virtues identified in the Nicomachean Ethics.[39] Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman provide a list of character strengths and virtues grouped within six categories, known as the VIA Classification:

- Wisdom—curiosity, love of learning, judgment, emotional intelligence, perspective
- Courage—valour, perseverance, integrity
- Humanity—kindness and loving
- Justice—citizenship, fairness and leadership
- Temperance—self-control, prudence, humility
- Transcendence—appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, zest.[40]

Mary Crossan, Gerard Seijts, and Jeffrey Gands offer a framework of leadership character based on data from approaching two thousand leaders, validated by engaged scholarship, and taking virtue theory into organizational management and governance practice.[41] This resulted in a circular diagram of ten virtues, each depicting several attributes and surrounding a central circle labelled "Judgment." Rosa Chun provides a specific list of six virtues that she found to exist in organizations, defining a measurable "organizational character." These virtues combine to achieve positive emotional performance outputs of distinctiveness, satisfaction and identification:

- Warmth—cheerful, pleasant, open, straightforward
- Empathy—concerned, reassuring, supportive, agreeable
- Integrity—honest, sincere, socially responsible, trustworthy
- Conscientiousness—reliable, secure, hardworking, proud
- Courage—ambitious, achievement-oriented, leading, competent
- Zeal—imaginative, spirited, exciting, innovative.[42]

The author's prior work offered a list of library organizational character virtues to supplement the previous analyses:

- Impactfulness—on learning and research; on all its people; on the common good
- Improvement and Innovativeness—directional, collaborative, creative, momentum
- Integrity—including equity; fair resource allocation; fair dealing; fair witness
- Aesthetic materiality—delivering practical, harmonious and beautiful offerings.[43]

The streams of literature presented here provide a place for research into library leadership virtue, and there is a space for this paper to help fill existing gaps. The profession has not taken advantage of the full range of existing ethical theory in its work, in contrast to other professions and management situations. Empirical evidence of how strategic leaders in all contexts deploy virtue and wisdom is still lacking.[44]

Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate excellence in research library leadership, through inquiry into leaders' values—how these values were developed, what leaders considered to be useful virtues for leadership, and how the values and virtues combined to guide wise judgments in difficult and complex problems. The university research library considered as organization provided the setting and context for the study. The research approach was interpretive, wherein knowledge is viewed as subjectively constructed through lived experiences based on individual interpretations and subjective sensemaking.[45] The author has used the interview participants' responses as the basis for claims about the nature of their work and the personal ethical values and virtues salient in that work.

The sample of 10 leaders included 5 women and 5 men. All were or had been library directors at universities in North America and the UK.[46] The sample was purposive, meaning the participants were identified and selected because they were especially knowledgeable and experienced in the phenomena of interest.[47] Also important to the sample were participant availability, willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. The researcher selected informants in 'elite' universities with libraries in membership of either the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) or Research Libraries UK (RLUK).[48] Individual participants met a criterion of a minimum of five years' continuous director-level experience in the role within a single institution. Most participants were known to the researcher, and while this was advantageous in terms of shared understanding and openness, care was taken to observe ethical approaches for the reflexive and co-creational obligations inherent in this work. Kim Etherington's ethical recommendations for working with known subjects were followed in terms of considering interview power relationships, respecting gender and diversity differences, and achieving sufficient mutual respect and balance in the research dialogue to negotiate confidentiality and define appropriate research outputs.[49] The research complied with the ethical requirements of the University of York; the methodology and approach were approved by the relevant board, and the required informed consents obtained from participants. Anonymity was guaranteed, and data transcriptions were redacted to remove personal and institutional references. Original recordings and other personal information were either stored or destroyed in accordance with the university and UK policies for data protection. The research ethical regulations of each participant's university involved in the study were also scrutinised to ensure adherence to local jurisdictions, although no significant variations or requirements were found.

The research employed autoethnography and interviewing to collect self-observation of a social world of which the researcher is a full member.[50] Ina Fourie recommends autoethnography as relevant tool for library research and it has been used as a method for investigating leaders within the academy.[51] The research met Leon Anderson's criteria for when the researcher is a full member of the setting—that this is visible in any subsequent published texts and that the commitment has been to an analytical research agenda focused on improving theoretical understanding of the broader context.[52] Au-

toethnography was chosen as a source for special insights that other methods could not deliver, and the researcher had prior experience with this approach.

The author conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews lasting about 60 minutes each, yielding around 12 hours of sound files and approaching 200 pages of transcripts. This empirical field work was conducted in 2023. The author asked open questions and probed views around participants' leadership practice and its influence on the organization. Three broad interview questions were used:

- Where does your ethical decency as a leader come from?
- How do you go about making your library good? How do you as a leader influence library organizational character?
- Can you tell me a story about a difficult and complex problem that you have encountered?

The first sought a narrative life story of the formation of moral identity.[53] The second sought opinions and stories about how good leadership behaviours helped achieved library excellence.[54] The third asked for cases of critical incidents which might fit the criteria of neo-Aristotelian practical wisdom (*phronesis*).[55] Prompts were given by the interviewer where required, sometimes making use of terminology from virtue frameworks.

Analysis

This paper can only offer interpretation of subjects' self-reporting of the importance and impact of values and virtues in their work, how these characteristics were enacted in their own practice, and how they judged the success of these actions. Empirical inquiry about their actual practice within the library—its effects on their stakeholders and staff for comparison with these self-reported views and attitudes—was not part of this research.

Systematic thematic analysis was conducted, but the researcher did not use a specific program for analysis given the manageable volume of data and the iterative nature of the process, requiring constant referral back to the full data.[56] No a priori assumptions were made about the outcomes of the analysis. A first stage of open coding was used to inductively generate a list of individual concepts referring to attributes that participants claimed to apply in their leadership in pursuit of excellence. The next stage considered how these attributes operated in context, given that the stories of application were situationally embedded with 'thick' description usually provided. Sensitizing questions were used to help with comparing and interpreting the different stories in a consistent way, and in establishing understanding of causality. This stage focussed on revealing the existence of shared meanings or identifying common 'interpretive repertoires' in how leaders described working toward being a good library.[57] Similar stories arising from different participants suggested some measure of saturation was achieved.

One emergent framework was the leader as 'influencer for good,' achieved through deploying actions, decisions, and strategies for becoming better libraries. Leaders described this in both a symbolic way, in the sense of the leader influencing by example and decision, but also in realist and pragmatic terms when describing action and performance or in resolving difficult crises and dilemmas. This pragmatic approach is in contrast to a rigidly ideological ethical leadership, although each director had their

own beliefs, values, principles and methods that underpinned their choices of action. Stories tended to hinge on whether deploying virtues in action worked or not, why, and what the organizational and personal consequences were, but always within a sense of what good was in each situation. The analysis also appeared to confirm a paradigm of relationality with different audiences as key to library organizational value.[58] Leaders wished to improve what they called the culture (rather than character) of the library but also to influence essential relationships with colleagues and hierarchies across the institution as well as in wider professional and social spheres. A framework of audience levels was used to ultimately categorize the list of virtues identified.

To avoid predetermination, only at the final stage of analysis were the findings compared back to the existing philosophical and theoretical virtues and frameworks described in the literature review, to further validate the reported concepts as virtues. While there were many exact correspondences between existing virtue concepts and those offered by participants, some new distinctive expressions of virtue were revealed. Most modern lists and accounts seem to underplay or ignore some of the more uncomfortable aspects of original Aristotelian virtues, which were experienced by participants in this study, such as shame, magnificence and right ambition. Further consideration is included in the discussion that follows, wherein the final selected range of virtues relevant to research libraries is identified.

In summary, the key findings and contributions arising from the analysis were:

1. A novel list of distinctive virtues relevant to research library leadership, and accounts of the deployment of these attributes in context,
2. An idea of leadership influence resulting in a flow of virtues from the personal to the organizational and beyond,
3. Leadership influence impacting a hierarchy of organizational and wider social levels,
4. Support for the application of virtue ethics philosophy to management and libraries, and
5. A unique body of empirical evidence from the research library context to enhance organizational and leadership virtue theory.

Limitations

The potential for reproducing this work is clearly possible, although the requirements for an interviewer with either a similar level of experience and familiarity with the role and context, or alternatively considerably more time spent with participants, would present challenges. This study was conducted in mainly anglophone contexts. The potentially sensitive nature of the conversations, and the requirement for probing and interpreting emotional, professional and contextual language and terminology, could not realistically be attempted by this researcher in other languages or different cultures. There were practical limitations in geography and availability in assembling the North American cohort, as interviews took place within a single three-week period in fall 2023. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the project by three years and subsequently limited the qualifying population due to the large number of experienced leader retirements in both North America and the UK during that period.

Discussion

This discussion uses illustrative verbatim quotations from the interview respondents to illuminate the research findings and to present the list of virtues deemed relevant to research library leadership. Quotes are not attributed, nor do they make use of gendered pseudonyms, in order to fully protect anonymity. Other identifying contextual elements have been redacted.

> "You might be really good at performing at one level, but [don't] have the potential to perform at the next level, particularly … managing people."

In the hierarchical academy different capabilities are required for ascent out of professional practice into management and higher leadership positions. Maria Clara Figueiredo Dalla Costa Ames, Mauricio Custodio Serafim, and Marcello Beckert Zappellini's review of wisdom and virtue in the business ethics literature introduced the idea of an "amplitude" of the effects of virtue. This suggested a hierarchical range of influence from micro (personal) through meso (organizational and institutional) to macro (societal) levels.[59] The categorization here develops that suggestion for the research library context. The allocations reflect the salience accorded by leaders to each virtue at each level of application but are not rigid or exclusionary. The data showed that leaders deployed a contingent selection of virtues in combination to face any problem at all levels as needed:

- Human – a set of human virtues exemplified by leaders that underpins the attainment and possession of collective virtues in the library. A leader's constancy and consistency in enacting these virtues provides a critical integration of internal connections between other agents and their behaviors, building meaning, fulfilment and value benefits over time.[60]
- Organizational – those virtues that collectively express library service and ethical culture. These are influenced by leadership embodiment of managerial and professional conduct.
- Strategic – those virtues deployed by the leader in the broader institutional milieu. These were applied to the inevitable debate between library practice goods and institutional governance utilitarian ethics, at best, and vices of power at worst. These vices may "crowd out" virtue and distort character and sense of duty.[61] Achieving a practical and ethical fit between library and institutional strategies and policies seems a fundamental task of professional leadership in the academy.
- Transcendent – Iris Murdoch contended that virtue entails constant movement between the personal and transcendent planes.[62] The author has argued before that excellent libraries will have a transcendent effect beyond the institution, generating capital for individuals and society as a common good.[63] The reputation of the great libraries studied positively enhances that of the parent university in the wider world. A research library moves from good to great in an ethical and practical sense when it achieves a transcendent contribution to society.

Being Human

> "You have to show who you are … show one's emotions and that your emotions are both authentic and true … and be connected, compassionate and empathic."
> "Courage revolves around engaging staff, building trust and being transparent."
> "Trustworthiness comes from honesty."
> "There has to be a balance of care between [the] job and [the] people we employ."

Appearing human was thought by most respondents to be an essential part of contemporary research library leadership. While each leader had their own style, a common core set of personal virtues emerged from the data. These were usually the attributes that were chosen first by participants and suggested as important in establishing a way of working toward a better library, setting the tone for how things were to be done. Most participants mirrored Aristotle's view of courage as the foundational personal virtue, but more specifically as key to achieving leadership credibility. Courage was also expressed as an essential part of accountability and relationality. Courage was evident in examples of crises and challenges; several of the respondents felt they were putting their careers on the line to take an ethical position in resolving difficult cases in which their own principles conflicted with institutional logic. In these situations, courage emerged as a shared positive organizational virtue, engaging not just library staff but also institutional peers and hierarchy. One participant shared, "Courage was not mine alone, but in the end, I had to be the one that's going to stand up and say 'we did this, we want to do better, can you help us'?" Discussion of courage was often followed by a recognition that integrity was also a key potentially active and progressive integrating virtue, representing the good character of the self and the library as part of a holistic excellence. This virtue was also often seen as a corrective influence: "As a leader [I was] moving back into the space of integrity because I realized that I went outside of it," and playing a part as an ethical learning opportunity for staff: "[it] allows others to realize I can screw up and come back to a space of ownership and of owning it." Integrity was described as a "space of learning" and helpful to "broadening a sense of how integrity should be defined as a space for [directional] growth." Accountability was expressed here, and courage and integrity were seen also as foundations for just decision-making, helping to build trust within the organization through example. Respondents viewed openness and transparency as not just surface traits, but as active personal virtues at all organizational levels. These leaders seemed to work hard to open channels in their institutions to gain information and to advocate about important issues. They were open to the opinions and contributions of their own staff. Aristotle would have been pleased to hear expressions that leadership is a balancing act, not just between extremes of vice, but a balance of care between library users, staff and institutional logics.

Most participants mirrored Aristotle's view of courage as the foundational personal virtue, but more specifically as key to achieving leadership credibility.

> "On my character a stain; we had been entirely ridiculous."
> "I put my head down and started sobbing … this is going to test every part of my character."

The other side of the coin of leadership was seen as personally embodying the corporate shame of the organization when things went wrong. Solomon draws attention to organizational shame: "Where there is no shame, there is no honor."[64] Respondents certainly felt pain, sometimes anger and shame, when considering their sense of injustice of being placed in difficult situations by the actions of others. The cases of practical wisdom subjects offered showed that these leaders did not shirk responsibility and were not complicit in institutional desires to hide problems. In many cases leaders exhibited opportunism in unfortunate events; they did not waste a crisis, but usually saw them as routes to improvement and, in some cases, strategic transformation. Equanimity and humility were evident in descriptions of suffering the occasionally intemperate critiques from faculty and students that go with this territory. Resilience was not a word used by many, but it was apparent that this virtue was essential for both research library leadership and the library organization collectively.

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Influencing organizational character

While there was a scepticism from some about the idea of organizational character, there seemed little doubt that the interviewed leaders were committed to positively influencing what they usually termed organizational culture in pursuit of an excellent library. Comments that reflect that notion include:

> "I don't think I ever thought about the library in that personified way as having a character,"
> "Service … is a noble thing; the foundational thing,"
> "We are modelling excellence [and] a benchmarking source for others,"
> "Trying to say every day, if we don't make a difference for the community in which we are sitting and serving, that has to come from the best everyone can give," and
> "If you do that [service] well that gives you space and credibility to work with partners and to lead on certain areas [in the institution]."

All participants seemed in strong agreement with Cooper's suggestion that "the essential internal [organizational] good appears to be the continual enhancement of the standards of excellence with which the practice is carried out."[65] This was achieved through the habit of "honing practice." Innovativeness was also mentioned within these discussions. A directional, continuous and progressive sense toward achieving excellence was apparent: "there's a value that you need to give, and a space and agency to get there." This idea connects to institutional-level credibility. Good stewardship and ethical collection

exploitation were seen as part of this conscientiousness. Said one participant, "We do pride ourselves here on stewardship of resources and how we do that."

> "Friendliness is core for me in other parts of my practice. I read into that friendliness a willingness to be honest or open."
> "Don't play political games for their own sake. Something in my chest just clenches when I see that."

Friendliness within work contexts is beginning to attract attention in the literature, and Aristotle gave this a lengthy treatment in the Nicomachean Ethics.[66] Friendliness was seen by some as a signal toward other virtues. Participants viewed leadership presence that is visible in the library and beyond as a virtuous practice which would have a positive impact on climate and culture. "[W]alking the floor" was an established habit for several respondents. Building relationality and dialogue with stakeholders is not a novelty for the research library leader; this virtue seemed a given among all respondents, expressed by one simply as "conversation with faculty and students."

Other virtues were active in this ability to work with others, with pride and humility needing to be balanced. A former leader was criticized for the vice of "thinking that the Senior Management Team would lose face by changing their mind or accepting a solution proposed by library assistants." A strong antipathy to "internal politics" and the obstructiveness, mischief or vicious habits of institutional colleagues at this level of work were occasionally expressed. For the study group, doing the right thing seemed to take precedence over winning or personal gratification, and it was emotionally difficult for some to see the opposite in colleagues. This is not to suggest that members of this cohort were not winners themselves, but there was a recognition of the bodily costs. Said one, "[Y]ou can win the battle, but you're scarred and hurt." A personal reflexivity was described as an essential habit to improve leadership practice, providing an example toward a broader culture of organizational learning. "None of us are fully formed, are we?" remarked one participant. Many expressed a commitment to a continuously becoming library which is sensitively "evolving and learning" through volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.[67]

Dispensing justice in situations requiring difficult decisions and taking action was frequently described. Justice was seen by some respondents as the test of whether other values commitments and personal leadership virtues became real and evident in library management. Just decision-making was often a point at which leadership collided with the competing ethical claims of people, service practice, and the parent institution. The readiness to share stories of twenty-three instances of wise or unwise decision-making and action showed the concern and interest among leaders to get this right. While some found their universities supportive, flexible and helpful in these examples, others were highly critical of utilitarian centralized human resource administration, especially in some high stakes situations in which livelihood and lives were a risk. Wise decisions-making ap-

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peared to be a critical point where other virtues were focused toward an organizational impact, positively growing a credible internal climate of equity, diversity and care, and making a library that could be seen as having a strategic commitment to enacting fair dealing, fair witness and fair resource allocation.

Delivering Strategic and Institutional Excellence

A task of the academy library leader is to ensure the library is fitting its university. At this level there is a two-way flow of ethical positioning and influence between the research library and its parent institution. The library must respond and balance ethical demands from its users and those from institutional governance. MacIntyre expected continuous debate between practice ideas of good and different perspectives at institutional level. The research found that there were conflicts between these levels of hierarchy, especially at the outset of the pandemic, but there was also evidence in other cases of strong institutional support and understanding of the library's positioning on ethical matters.[68]

> "We aim to provide equitable treatment, as opposed to mere equality."
> "Our values statement is not a formal touchpoint saying these are ethics, but a framework for understanding."

Fairness is a bedrock expectation of research libraries in the academy. Diversity means that the precise expectation of fairness differs among constituents, and special pleading is a feature of the context, particularly in the area of resource allocation for library content. Leaders expected that active virtue was required to realize fairness and equity in practice beyond the principled words in values statements. One subject recognized equality in their local values statement but felt that there was some political calculation in this inclusion, and preferred "equity" as the overarching concept and term, specifically phrased around social justice. This lens was used by that library in integrating decolonized and First-nation primary resources into teaching. Fairness can be a form of utilitarian meanness in contemporary organizations, and subjects were aware of the benefits of balancing this through appropriate generosity. Several North American leaders cited their control over library staff wage increases as an example, taking an opportunity for achieving improved equity and motivation. This option was not generally available to UK leaders.

Leaders expected that active virtue was required to realize fairness and equity in practice beyond the principled words in values statements.

> "There's a very strong sense of tradition here."
> "The weight of those centuries means that things are slower here."
> "Those traditions remain strong today."
> "I am constantly conscious of the past and not wanting to [mess] it up."
> "Being a good library can be engineered by choosing which episodes from its own history that you choose to celebrate, or perhaps the opposite … leadership is what you choose."

Alignment with institutional strategies was considered highly important for some respondents, but there was a less passive view among others, in which the library was

confident enough of its own status to be a consistent leader and influencer through changes in institutional strategies and leadership. Some of the universities and their libraries in this cohort were of very long standing. There was strong appreciation of the virtues required in these contexts, but a corresponding care to avoid the potential vices that might form, as Moore suggested in his 'tradition-awareness' virtue.[69] These institutions require patience and resilience in their library leaders. This was not seen as hampering agency, but was used positively as an opportunity for development. Leaders of these libraries seemed to possess a sense of fit, often at an emotional level. "I love it; I really like it [here]," expressed one library leader. There was a practice excellence of the subjects in achieving a balance of proper ambition to fit their institutions. Although no subjects specifically claimed magnificence as a personal or organizational virtue, and indeed some specifically eschewed it, it seemed clear to the researcher that these leaders ran magnificent libraries, and that they generally sought to display the virtues of proper pride, a right ambition, and careful stewardship in so doing. Probably no library leader believes that they have sufficient resources, but in comparison the libraries studied were among the best funded in the world. The benefits of generous donation streams, large historical institutional endowments, and consideration of the library as a reputational asset can be substantial. This did however present ethical and practical issues for these leaders, requiring difficult decisions around acceptance of donations from questionable sources, inappropriate donor influence, and collection decolonization.

> "The only way out is through … determination's another [virtue] in that."
> "Pragmatism with a sense of hope for possibility [is] a very conscious part of one's own resilience and one's own leadership."
> "I had to keep moving."

Drive and ambition for excellence was universal among these leaders. This was considered a critical personal attribute for overcoming challenges in achieving their strategic vision for the library and institution. This also captured the idea of momentum in moving the library forward through planned change or crisis.[70] A combination of rationality and pragmatism together with an acceptance of the personal demand for resilience were seen as important virtues for the implementation of strategies. These virtues were deployed within the library and also outwardly to institutional peers and senior leaders. Projecting realistic hope was recognized as a key virtue for restoring emotional energy to the library and to institutional stakeholders. Aristotle suggested that a number of virtues combine to achieve practical wisdom, and this appeared to be particularly valid at this level of organization, where the full complexity of the university community comes into play.

Projecting realistic hope was recognized as a key virtue for restoring emotional energy to the library and to institutional stakeholders.

Achieving Transcendent Virtue

> "We're just about the good."
> "Education for citizenship is the aim."

"We are not utilitarian; what we do is for the future."
"The library has a sense of it being a public institution, not a private library for a private institution."

Aristotle's approach to ethics encompassed an implicit directionality toward purpose or goals. Respondents were generally clear that there were purpose and goals beyond the operational and strategic dimensions of the research library and toward greater goods of the flourishing (*eudaimonia*) of humankind. The library, therefore, could also be seen as transcending the institution and, in doing this, going beyond immediate transactions within the university's boundaries.

"I like that word 'thrive.'"
"We thrived in many ways after that [crisis] and corrected a lot of problems."
"Impact … for research libraries is critical."

Several respondents used the term thriving, reflecting the idea of *eudaimonia* both within the organization and in the creation of social capital and happy communities and societies. Thriving was also considered a goal to get back to after overcoming major challenges, particularly after the pandemic. Providing leadership that conveyed the message of a role for libraries in creating better societies and the greater good was seen by some as a key part of the task. There was also understanding that proof of the library's impact was a way in which these achievements might be practically expressed in alignment with institutional logics.

"There's divinity in beauty."
"Libraries are important materially."

Not all respondents immediately accepted the idea of library aesthetics as a virtue, although some inhabited awesome and beautiful libraries, implying a practical commitment to this aspect. Several participants gave accounts about wishing to create additional attractive spaces through donated funds. Although not part of the research, the author's visits to these libraries involved experiencing sympathetic refurbishment and restoration of traditional and historic buildings, innovative and artistic design of library space, and stunning new library architecture. It would seem these leaders either had an eye for beauty as a virtue or were able to provide opportunities for those who did.

Synthesis: A Model

The patterns in the analysis informed by the subjects' reflexive understanding of their role and its impacts at different levels provided an "analytic momentum" toward a model.[71] Other models exist which suggest organizational effect; Edmund Pincoffs's classification suggests some virtues are "instrumental" at agent or group level, and Moore's matrix places seven organizational virtues in a purpose and orientation matrix.[72] The diagram in Figure 1 provides a new idea of leadership personal virtue flowing outward from a core of humanity, directed toward engaging and supporting others within the organization to form a collective organizational character. Some attributes have been collected within an overall virtue heading to keep the diagram simple. The 'host' of potential

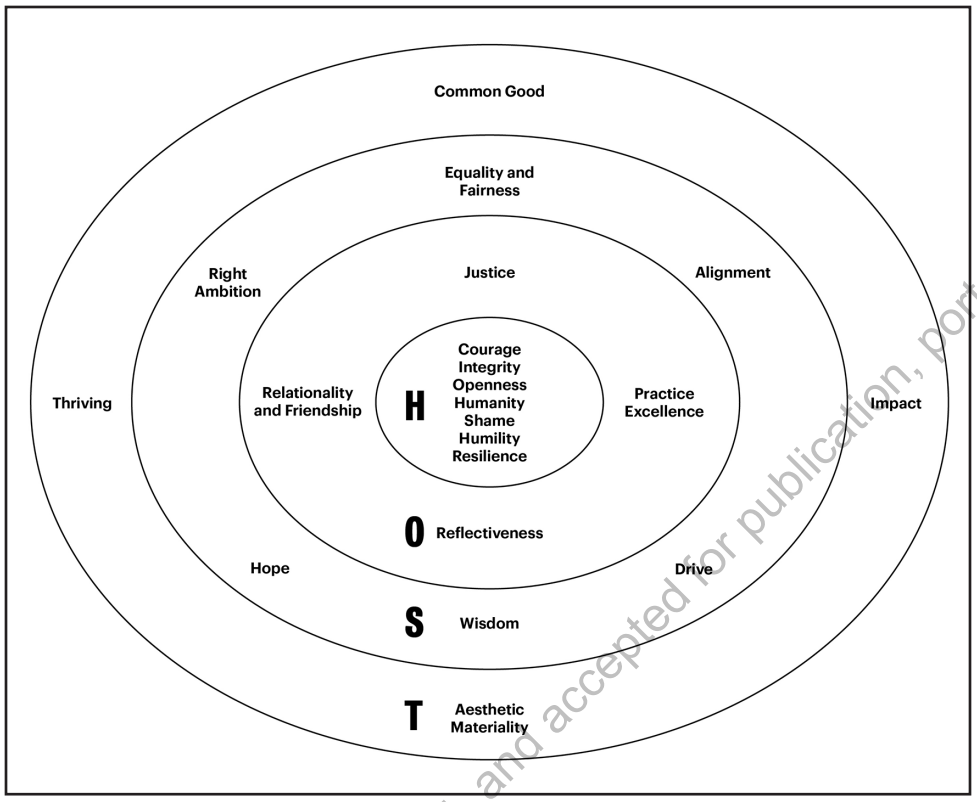

Figure 1. HOST model of Leadership and Organizational Virtue.

virtues identified in the study provides a convenient acronym for the organization of this model.[73] The model suggests a new way of thinking about how leaders practice their craft in the academic research library and may be used to help current and aspiring leaders interpret their "leader identity" and how this can impact their personal development and management practice and influence their organizations and communities.[74]

Further Work and Applications

Further work will report and discuss the data from responses to the research questions on the origins of respondents' ethical decency and their stories of wisdom in decision and action. All participants were able to describe how their internalized moral perspectives were developed, supporting the view that all had ethical predispositions, and that these were formed from multiple periods, experiences and influences in different life stages.[75] In total, the participants offered 16 cases of potential applications of phronetic wisdom to difficult problems and crises.

Excellence as defined by Aristotelian ideas of virtue suggests a simple chain for application to libraries. Good habits make good leaders, good leaders make good libraries, and good libraries serve the common good. Ideas of virtue and excellence can be applied

Good habits make good leaders, good leaders make good libraries, and good libraries serve the common good. Ideas of virtue and excellence can be applied to all levels of library practice and organization and can help form a positive library culture and character.

to all levels of library practice and organization and can help form a positive library culture and character. This study reveals that the actions of wise leaders are based on years of practicing virtuous habits, consciously engaging them in action, and reflecting on the outcomes. Search committees hiring library leaders would benefit from adding a list of relevant virtues to their requirements, and finding ways to assess these vital attributes in candidates.

An ethical library life contains much practice between formative ethical influences and the ultimate status of a wise leader. At every stage across a career, ethical development to reinforce good habits would also seem to be important. Winston's suggestions of the necessary components for ethical education included undergraduate and postgraduate formal education, but perhaps more importantly internship experiences.[76] Most respondents had modeling stories of good and bad influences from leaders encountered in this context and from their careers generally, but educational programs did not generally offer reflection, theory or development for habituated ethical learning. One respondent talked in detail about how an MBA course, because of its particular structure and embedded approach, had encouraged and offered opportunities for learning from practice in different contexts. Mentoring was mentioned by most respondents, but most experiences were informal and a matter of chance rather than a planned part of development. Exemplary leaders were thought to combine a range of virtuous habits, as reflected in the following:

> "Leaders I've really admired … are able to combine that empathy and that warmth with being quite steely determined people who have vision," and "A genuine interest in people … listening to them … but leading in the sense of vision, the drive to innovation. Combining these is critical."

This range of attributes do not seem to be fully considered or integrated within current educational offerings for senior library leadership.

Library professional education would benefit from a consideration of how to absorb virtue theory and its practice into formal curriculum and formation for senior roles. There was little evidence from this study that ethical modeling from mentors had been developed further through theorizing or codification into a shared best practice for library leadership. Library literature was not mentioned as a source for preparation for ethical leadership. The research also showed that professional ethical codes did not have any purchase in day-to-day thought or practice, even among those leaders involved in their development, as they did not provide clear-cut rules applicable to complex situations.[77] Perhaps this learning can only really take place within context, in situations enmeshed with both library materiality and institutional power dynamics. Library leaders drew on their own past experiential learning to solve difficult problems and take wise actions, and more cases of these critical incidents would be welcome in the literature to help

others develop. Debates about attaining virtue and wisdom are also taking place in the business and professional education literature. There is a view that virtuous habits cannot be learned and developed solely in the classroom.[78]

It would be helpful to see writers on libraries in all sectors turn their attention to an ethics of librarianship that encompasses all aspects of our work. A more unified and improved approach to the current bolt-on single-issue methods of engagement with ethical issues would seem overdue. A recognition that producing value sets or policies does not guarantee virtuous behavior in action and practice would also be welcome.

Conclusions

This research finds that leaders have a strong sense of the virtues required to achieve their role, and that a model for the influence of these virtues on their organization and beyond can be constructed. Virtue theory is a concept that can deepen understanding of research library leadership and provide a distinctive way of giving meaning to both the role of leadership and the research library as organization.

A new theoretical framework of virtues for further research and development and application to leadership practice, formation and education is provided in this paper. The rich and complex picture of the wise habits and actions of the leaders studied and described provides an ethical element missing from current professional discourse and literature. It seems clear that the question of ethics in librarianship deserves wider attention, consideration and action, particularly at a time when libraries are under multiple threats.

This contribution uniquely establishes virtue theory as basis for further study and application in libraries, within the academy and beyond. It also offers a novel model for leadership excellence that is potentially transferable to broader management theory and practice. Perhaps the most important conclusion is that this work provides material hope for the future of research libraries because, in this sample at least, they have been found to possess excellent leadership in which the key virtues are applied in wise action to face current and future challenges.

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