Our Journey of Building Trust: Case Studies of BIPOC Women Leaders in Academic Libraries

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This article showcases the authors' personal journeys of building trust with their teams as BIPOC women leaders in the academic libraries. The article attempts to focus on trust-building with team members through changes either at personal level or at a larger professional context level. This paper elucidates challenges and opportunities that BIPOC leaders are experiencing in their roles in academic library settings as well as how junior and mid-level leaders develop their skill sets to facilitate their effort in trust-building. Literature searches show that study and research in the area of BIPOC leadership in the library context are sparse. The authors strive to contribute to the area, share the experience of building trust in their teams as a leader and invite BIPOC peers to explore possibilities of building trust and advancing their careers in the library leadership path.

Our Journey of Building Trust: Case Studies of BIPOC Women Leaders in Academic Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This article showcases the authors' personal journeys of building trust with their teams as BIPOC women leaders in the academic libraries. The article attempts to focus on trust-building with team members through changes either at personal level or at a larger professional context level. This paper elucidates challenges and opportunities that BIPOC leaders are experiencing in their roles in academic library settings as well as how junior and mid-level leaders develop their skill sets to facilitate their effort in trust-building. Literature searches show that study and research in the area of BIPOC leadership in the library context are sparse. The authors strive to contribute to the area, share the experience of building trust in their teams as a leader and invite BIPOC peers to explore possibilities of building trust and advancing their careers in the library leadership path.

Keywords: Women Leaders, BIPOC, Virtual Leadership, Changes In Academic Libraries, Trust-Building

INTRODUCTION

There is a wealth of literature on the art of library leadership in general; however, very little is written about Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour (BIPOC) library leaders. The authors conducted searches in the library literature and found very few results featuring BIPOC women of colour in leadership roles, in academic libraries. In Google Scholar, a search of "BIPOC women leaders OR leadership 'library'" as titles or part of the title between 2012-2022 generates zero result. A search of "library leaders OR leadership 'BIPOC women'" within the last ten years generates 235 results but unfortunately most of the results are not within the library context. A

similar search conducted in Library & Information Science Abstracts (LISA) generated 411 results with a good amount of them not relevant. LISTA returns 40 search results with some of them irrelevant. Broadening the search in LISTA and LISA by separating out the search components (e.g. women, leader, library, BIPOC), adding synonyms (e.g. BIPOC OR racialized OR visible minorit* OR Black OR Indigenous) and using wildcard operators produced a larger set of search results, but most of the results were not relevant to the library sector and did not showcase the perspectives of BIPOC women library leaders in academic libraries.

In the U.S., 87.8% of the 179,000 librarians identified as white and in Canada, 89% of the 9570 librarians identified as white (Chan, 2020). This lack of diversity in librarianship becomes more apparent in leadership roles. The Visible Minority Librarians of Canada (ViMLoC) conducted a study of racialized library workers in 2021 and out of the 160 respondents, 5% of respondents (n=8) worked in a senior administrator role (e.g. Chief Librarian, Director) and 13% of respondents (n=21) reported working in middle management (e.g. Branch Head, Department Head), while the majority of respondents reported working in non-management (Li et al., 2021). This is not surprising considering the small numbers of BIPOC library leaders working in academic libraries. Statistics show that, of the 33 library directors at the top-ranked U.S. universities, based on 2019 U.S. News & World Report and Times Higher Education, 30 library directors (or 90%) were White and 3 (10%) were African American, with no Asian Americans, Latino Americans, or Native Americans represented (Le, 2021). BIPOC women in library leadership is even more rare, which leaves a large gap in the literature. The authors believe it is important to fill the gap by sharing our own stories which will hopefully inspire peers to explore their leadership potential.

The authors of this paper are all BIPOC women leaders in academic libraries in Canada and the United States. The term BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. There have been various terms used to describe non-white groups, including visible minorities, racialized, as well as naming individual groups such as Black Americans, Chinese Canadians, and so forth. While BIPOC is a concise acronym, there is a lack of consensus in terminology (Harmon, 2021). In Canada, the term "racialized" was recommended as an alternative to BIPOC, as it recognizes that race is a construct and includes a complex socio-cultural process (Ajele, 2021; Simon Fraser University Library Student Learning Commons, 2021). Canadian librarians Allan Cho, Afra Bolefski, Cecilia Tellis, Lei Jin, and Maha Kumaran opted to use the term "racialized" in their panel presentation for the Canadian Association of Research Libraries' Inclusion Perspectives series (Cho, et al., 2022). The terms "BIPOC" and "racialized" are used in this paper, based on the author's preference.

With the scarcity of literature on BIPOC women in academic library leadership, we feel compelled to share our stories, in the hopes that this will inspire others to pursue leadership roles in academic libraries. When sharing our library leadership experiences, we considered the significant upheaval caused by the global pandemic, among other changes happening in academic libraries and our individual organizations. We focus on how to develop relationships and build trust with our teams and nurture success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Well before the pandemic, researchers were investigating the state of constant changes in academic libraries. With library collections shifting from traditional resources to digital formats; priorities shifting from collections to services; and the rise of data services as a key area for library support (Aslam, 2020; Koltay, 2019; Owens & Wong, 2021), academic libraries were entering an era of connecting spaces, collections, technology and community with a stronger digital presence, and more intensive data and technology services. Along with the change of business was the changing understanding of ourselves as organizations and teams. At the organizational level, student success and in-depth support for research have become some of the key measures of success. At the team level, equity, diversity, inclusion, and access strategy gained more ground as part of our culture (Owens & Wong, 2021).

It is a two-fold process for library leadership to navigate through changes. First, leaders must determine how changes affect themselves as individuals, and as leaders, how changes affect their teams. Library leaders were tasked to develop skills that would help them adjust to changes and to support their teams through changes. To address these ongoing changes, library leaders need to recalibrate their organization priorities, update policies and procedures, develop new skill sets to keep up with these changes, and invest in training resources within the organization to achieve the organizational goals and vision (Aslam, 2020). Beyond these specific tasks, it is key for academic library leaders to build trust with their teams. Trust building is not only a task for senior leaders; it is equally, if not more important, for mid-level managers who supervise teams. Second, leaders must develop strategies to respond to or anticipate future changes. Newman (2021) argued that in crisis situations, leaders must act quickly and be proactive. While leaders must critically assess information available to them, they must not fear making the wrong decision as delayed actions can have consequences.

The pandemic added a new layer of change for leaders: virtual leadership. Managing a team remotely has many challenges: remote supervision, communication, and wellness were some of the key themes. The perceived lack of supervision was one challenge raised by Larson et al. (2020). Obenauf (2021) stated that a main issue they contend with while working remotely as a manager is "not [being] in the building to witness the day-to-day activities that take place in the library" (p. 2). A similar view was highlighted by Jaskowska (2020) who found that when staff are dispersed remotely and there is a lack of physical contact, directors feel a lack of control. A few authors cited similar communication difficulties when managing a remote library team such as a lack of non-verbal cues and eye contact (Hudson-Vitale & Waltz, 2020; Shaghaei et al., 2022) and misinterpretation of tone (Obenauf, 2021; Shaghaei et al., 2022; Williams, 2022). Additionally, Obenauf (2021) noted that managing staff remotely requires "extensive use of email, streaming video software (Zoom, Skype, etc.), and other digital tools that don't always lend themselves to cultivating an easy rapport with and among staff" (p. 2). The overuse of email is cited in an interview conducted by Spina (2020) as slowing crucial communications. When leading teams remotely, there are clear communication limitations that may lead to difficulties in connecting with staff. This may prevent leaders from establishing rapport with their teams, as they would otherwise be able to do in person. Some common solutions noted to offset this challenge were implementing face-to-face interaction with individual staff members using video conferencing software such as Zoom or Teams (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020; Williams, 2022); providing regular and timely communication using the appropriate platforms (Newman, 2021; Petrov & Tipton, 2020); and

ensuring a formal means of communication is centralized and easy to access for reference (Williams, 2022). As Newman (2021) points out "clear communication helps to build trust and a sense of community and reduces anxiety" (p. 5).

To counteract these sentiments and navigate the new landscape of library leadership, several researchers noted the importance for leaders to build social capital or political capital. Social capital is created through relationship building, developing strong networks, and utilizing former colleagues and mentors to collaborate or problem solving (Klare, 2017; O'Bryan, 2018). In the study on "accidental directors", library leaders who had been thrust into senior positions unexpectedly reported that they found success when they drew on their past professional experiences, strong communication skills and emotional intelligence (Klare, 2017). Some good practices recommended in past literature includes establishing structured check-ins with their staff (Jaskowska, 2020; Larson et al., 2020; O'Neil et al., 2020; Petrov & Tipton, 2020; Rysavy & Michalak, 2020; Spina, 2020), sharing their availability to ensure staff can contact them for urgent issues, as well as setting clear expectations (Petrov & Tipton, 2020). Mineo (2014) outlined that the foundation of trust in leadership is organizational credibility, respect, and fairness. Credibility consists of open and accessible communications, efficient coordinating human and material resources, and integrity in carrying out vision with consistency. Respect includes supporting professional development and showing appreciation, collaboration with employees in relevant decisions, and caring for employees as individuals with personal lives. Fairness means balanced treatment for all in terms of rewards, absence of favoritism in hiring and promotions, and lack of discrimination and process for appeals. Additionally, Rysavy and Michalak (2020) noted that supervisors can build trust with their remote employees by ensuring they "over clarify and set specific guidelines" (p. 535). O'Bryan (2018) argued that political capital, the ability to develop and use political connections, especially connections with positional power is key for academic library leaders. In academic libraries, strategies to build political capital can include building relationships with longstanding faculty, volunteering for committee work, and becoming involved with regional, state, or national library organizations in leadership roles. Klare (2017) also noted the importance of being professionally active through committee work and professional programming.

Lastly, the need to ensure staff are supported emotionally was another common challenge. The pandemic posed tremendous stress and great emotional turmoil, including fear, anxiety, helplessness, and in some instances, hopelessness (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021) to many people, including library employees. The disruption of our lives, the loss of normal familial interactions, and the economic and financial fears of losing our livelihoods all became a bigger source of threat than the virus itself (Edmondson, et al., 2020). Edmondson et al. (2020) stated the significance of leaders "to try to invoke or provoke a degree of reflection, spending the time to talk about a shared sense of purpose and core values while also spending the time to emotionally check in" (para. 33) to be emotionally connected to the team and keep the morale up. Leaders need to be attuned to wellness needs of employees (Hudson-Vitale & Waltz, 2020). O'Neil et al. (2020) and Newman (2021) argue that leaders need to display specific soft skills when managing their staff remotely, especially through a crisis. Examples of some of these skills required are leaders' empathy (O'Neil et al., 2020; Spina, 2020), flexibility (Spina, 2020), and high emotional intelligence (O'Neil et al., 2020). Leaders can also implement specific strategies when supporting their staff such as encouraging use of sick time, scheduling in breaks, limiting virtual meetings, creating virtual space for informal chats, etc. (Hudson-Vitale & Waltz, 2020). Larson et al. (2020)

refs to a "two-pronged approach" that leaders can take when providing support to employees in crisis situations, that of "acknowledging the stress and anxiety that employees may be feeling in difficult circumstances, but also providing affirmation of their confidence in their teams" (Offer encouragement and emotional support section, para. 2). When remote leaders actively promote staff wellbeing, they are building trust with their team by showing they care.

CASE STUDIES

Counter storytelling is a research method used to amplify voices historically marginalized. More specifically, a counter story is known "as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, as cited in Dominguez-Whitehead et al., 2021, p. 146) and is grounded in critical race theory. This method acknowledges the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, and values the importance of representation and "demonstrating that those who experience marginalization are not alone" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, as cited in Dominguez-Whitehead et al., 2021, p. 146). This paper uses case studies to highlight the authors' experiences as BIPOC women library leaders working in academic libraries.

The four authors hope to share our personal experience as mid-level library leaders and how we navigate our teams and accomplish success at work. Our work covers from public services to technical services, from subject librarianship to data services. We hope to compare our first-hand experience as leaders with the literature to reflect what does or does not work for our team dynamics as BIPOC leaders. Each case study focuses on a different experience of change and the trust building process. Mai Lu, from the University of Toronto Libraries, shared how relationship building, and communication supported changes throughout her career including transitioning from public libraries to academic libraries. Xiying Mi at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries, discussed her experience as a new manager, leading a team of seasoned library workers. Afra Bolefski, from the University of Manitoba, described how she led a newly created team, born out of a reorganization at her institution. Ximin Mi, at Georgia Institute of Technology, reflected on her approach of leading with trust over authority as her team pivoted to remote service delivery. While each experience took place in a different institution, there were common themes throughout the four narratives. All four authors self-identify as women of color, working in leadership roles in academic libraries. The self-awareness of our strengths and areas for improvement helped us select the appropriate strategy to gain support from our teams and to position our teams for success.

Mai's experience in public and academic libraries: Adapting to change

My leadership journey spans 20 years and includes working in public libraries and academic libraries. In this time, I've learned that change is a constant. Learning to adapt to change - to prepare for changes you can see coming and to handle changes that you don't see coming, is a critical leadership skill. I have found that building and maintaining relationships has helped me immensely in dealing with change, and building trust with my teams was critical for fostering relationship-building.

I started my career in public libraries. My first full time position as a Librarian, was in a branch library, where all librarians had a supervisory role. It was intimidating for me, as a recent library school graduate, to suddenly supervise seasoned library technicians. In my case, my direct reports included the page supervisor, the circulation services supervisor, and the volunteer

supervisor. Fortunately, my team of direct reports were kind and supportive, and they helped me learn how to be a good supervisor. I sought out their perspectives and opinions on issues. I observed how they led their respective teams and asked many, many questions to understand their decision-making and problem-solving processes. In the public library, I progressed from a Librarian to a Senior Librarian, and then to a Branch Manager. With each new position, I gained more confidence as a leader. While developing my leadership skills, I also honed my communication and interpersonal skills, so that I could develop more relationship building. I participated in as many training and development courses as possible, including change management, project management, challenging conversations, how to coach staff, and more.

When the library re-organized and created a new Planning and Development team, I moved out of public services to a Library Business Consultant position. In this role, I sharpened different skills. I liaised with external consultants to shape the library's master plan, wrote business cases for redeveloping the central library, and led a compliance review of cash handling services. In this role, I strengthened my skills around strategic thinking and business acumen. As an individual contributor, I earned the trust of my manager and colleagues by doing what I said I would do, being open to feedback, and sharing the experience that I had gained in my career. I also maintained strong relationships with my network of library workers from my previous positions and relied on their support to help advance initiatives in my new role.

In 2019, I transitioned from public libraries to academic libraries. My first role in academic libraries was as the Head of Public Services at a large public university in Canada. Although this was a different type of library, I was able to use my public library experience to help me adapt to academic libraries. I made an effort to get to know my team members as people, not just as colleagues or direct reports. I joined in June 2019 and in less than a year, the university shut down in response to a global pandemic. My work pivoted from in-person, face-to-face public services to developing contact-free services, remote learning, and virtual meetings. I relied on my branch management skills from public libraries to coordinate the closure and re-opening of the library, to develop curbside pickup services, and to communicate service changes as they occurred to the organization. The successful execution of these changes were due to a unified team effort. I made sure to show appreciation and recognize team members for their contributions regularly. I wanted every member of my team to understand the valuable role they played in supporting student success and delivering high quality library services in a period of constant change.

One of the silver linings of the pandemic is that it allowed me to meet a greater number of academic librarians than I would have been able to pre-pandemic. As my position was based at one of the campus libraries and the main campus was approximately 30 km away, it was challenging to participate in inter-campus committees. Pre-pandemic, if I wanted to participate in a meeting on the main campus, I would have to add a 2.5 hour round trip in my day for commuting between campuses. During the pandemic, I could simply join a Zoom call and virtually meet with colleagues from the main campus. I participated on committees and working groups with members from across the tri-campus university. This increased participation accelerated my ability to meet people, participate in initiatives from across the university, and learn about the different aspects of academic librarianship that were new to me. Building relationships and developing my network of academic librarians helped me adjust to academic librarianship.

Over the course of my career, I was one of a small number of racialized librarians and often the only racialized library manager, or one of two, in the organization. I grew my network of BIPOC librarian colleagues and BIPOC managers by participating in mentorship programs through organizations, such as the Visual Minority Librarians of Canada (ViMLoC) and volunteered to work on EDI-related committees. I try to encourage other BIPOC librarians to consider leadership opportunities, if they are interested, as I have found it very rewarding.

I credit the successes in my career to building and maintaining strong relationships; learning from colleagues around me, including my direct reports, my peers, and my supervisors; and adapting to changes around me, be it as a brand-new supervisor starting out in my career, trying out a brand-new position in a newly created department, or transitioning to another type of library. Building trust within teams allowed me to develop strong relationships and this helped us thrive through stressful times. Learning never stops. I continue to seek out opportunities to develop different skills and meet more library colleagues, and to add more tools to my "toolbox" of skills, techniques, and strategies.

Xiying's experience at University of Wisconsin-Madison: Leading a mature department as the new manager

I am currently the Head of the Resource Description at University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. My team has 18 people including myself. I have 14 direct reports and one of them is a manager who has four direct reports. My position reports to the Associate University Librarian for Digital Strategies. The primary tasks for the team are to create access for all the physical, electronic and special collections as well as part of the digital collections on University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, and collaborating with the University of Wisconsin system as well as contributing to the Big Ten Academic Alliance and the Program for Cooperative Cataloging in various ways.

Having recently moved from a young and small team, leading a department three times bigger and composed of more mature team members is a daunting task. Most colleagues on the team are long serving members in this institution. One team member has spent over 50 years here and devoted their entire career to this library. Twelve of them have been in the library for over ten years, some of them over twenty years. Five new members are here under Three years with four completely new hires this year including myself. There are 5 male members and thirteen female members, with 3 BIPOC women on the team. There are 8-9 people on the team focusing on the physical collection. Per library policy, physical materials cannot leave the building without proper process. This group of people have to be onsite most of the time through COVID while a few other people who mostly focus on electronic collections take turns to work from home about 2 days a week.

The challenges to me are at multiple levels. At the personal level, as an Asian woman, I am smaller in physical size and younger in age than most of the team members, I also have shorter professional experience than most of my teammates, not to mention the lack of institutional knowledge. At the institutional level, every team member already has a well-established scope of responsibilities and tasks. What adds another layer of complexity to this is that the department has lost 42% of FTE during the past five years without proper replacement. Yet the workload has not reduced at all with a steady purchasing trend. Beside trying to recruit new members, managing the

current tasks presents challenges. At the professional level, this team covers a wide range of cataloging and metadata services for the library system. I personally don't have the knowledge or experience to direct every aspect of the work.

Understanding the challenges I am facing, building trust and showing respect are my guiding principles towards me as a junior team lead. The first strategy I take is to create an open, accessible, and meaningful communication channel with my colleagues with the hopes that the communication will build my credibility. Although I was offered a hybrid work schedule, I first decided to work on-site full time on top of being available through Microsoft Teams and emails. I want to be able to respond to team members' requests, questions, or even just casual talks to make connections with everyone so that we get to know each other personally. My presence in the office also demonstrates my commitment to the department and the library, which is also vital to win the trust from the team members.

On top of building personal connections, I started to organize monthly department meetings to bring the team together. There were connections that already existed, but they are loose and tasks-driven instead of being organized at the departmental level. One goal that I wanted to achieve through these meetings was to practice transparency and fairness in my management.

The departmental meetings offer a platform for me and all team members to share professional development opportunities in the library, on campus, and externally. At these meetings I also share opportunities to volunteer on upcoming tasks. As the department has lost multiple employees, there are tasks left behind that need to be completed. Instead of assigning tasks, I would invite team members to pick up tasks they are either good at or interested in. In addition to transparent and fair opportunities for professional growth, I also encourage the participation of the staff members in managing the team. To accomplish this goal, I would share the meeting agenda before every meeting and invite inputs so that no issue is left unaddressed. In general, as a manager I try to create a transparent and fair environment so there would be mutual trust in this team and everyone would feel safe to open up on ideas on departmental goals and challenges, potential solutions, opportunities on taking initiatives, and how I can best advocate for this department.

I acknowledge credits and give visibility to team members. As the manager of the team, I am fortunate to have a reservoir of talented people on different aspects of our work and organizational knowledge. When I am asked to present at cross-departmental meetings on the issues related to our department, I often invite my colleagues to join me and share their insights. By doing this, I wanted to show my team that I respect their knowledge, value their inputs, and strive to provide a platform for them to be recognized. Through such activities, I am fostering the mutual respect between colleagues and enhancing the trust-building process.

Working here for about nine months now, I do find myself very supported and well received by my colleagues in the department. There is a long way to build trust and I am well-started on this journey. Most importantly, I have found the best teammates to embark with.

Afra's experience at the University of Manitoba: Leading a team remotely in a newly created role/department as a racialized leader

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, on October 1, 2020, I took on the new leadership role of Head, Social Sciences Division, where I oversaw a newly formed department ("division"), the Social Sciences division, comprised of liaison librarians supporting six faculties at a large Canadian research-intensive university. Unfortunately, unlike some of the other new division heads with similar experience in my library (none of whom were racialized), I was not offered any one-on-one leadership coaching at the onset of my role, something I learned of two years later. Without this coaching, I turned to my background and experience as a racialized librarian as well as my previous leadership experience to be successful in this role. Success for me was to be a facilitator and champion for my team, allowing time and space for the librarians to share their concerns or ask tough questions and bringing those issues forward to be addressed promptly, being empathetic to their challenges, and advocating for them to library administration, individually and as a group. I specifically targeted this aspect of leadership as it was one I felt was most needed for a newly-formed division requiring a lot of navigational support. To do this, I set the foundation early on by ensuring I set a consistent tone for communications both informally and formally, was open and transparent with my availability to respond to messages or take calls and created opportunities for team building amongst a disparate group of librarians. When executed properly, my hope was to become a leader my team could trust. I must confess that I didn't consider the impact of how my gender or race would play a part.

Prior to the library-wide re-organization, the liaison librarians supporting professional programs worked closely with library support staff in their respective smaller unit libraries, where specialized collections and services were set up to support the unique needs of their faculties. Having held this position in the past, I can attest that we had very little contact or collaboration with the librarians housed in the main campus library, many of whom are now in this division. Hence, the new division in effect merged the librarians from these two smaller specialized unit libraries together with the main campus librarians (the rest of the division's librarians) into a new team with very little previous contact and understandably, clear differences in work culture. Building cohesion and trust would be just one obstacle I would have to manage.

The first strategy I used to put this in motion was to utilize Microsoft Teams. By the time I took on the division head position, the university and library system had already set up Microsoft Teams ("MS Teams") as a vehicle to promote communication, collaboration, and team-building due to a lockdown that commenced in mid-March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As staff worked from home, MS Teams was the primary tool used to fill the gap left from not being physically present on campus and one I attempted to maximize from day one as division head. Creating a private MS Teams channel for my division to connect to each other was my first step. I regularly posted messages as a primary way to push out information to the team but also used it informally, to touch base and encourage the team to discuss things on the channel, which helped build rapport amongst members of the team. As a leader, I would also send individual messages or set up one-on-one calls to each on the team, this allowed us to talk more openly and frankly. On a weekly basis, I would have at least three or more calls with individual librarians in the division. Division meetings were set up every two to three weeks and early on, I carved out time to recognize the individual achievements of each librarian. I believe this is an important aspect of being a champion. I also set up 'roundtables' to ensure everyone had an opportunity to voice

concerns or ask questions in a safe space, one without judgment. For those not comfortable with doing so, I would ensure opportunities for them to share their thoughts and I would raise their concerns in the meetings anonymously. This was appreciated as some members of my team were not always comfortable raising their concerns for others to hear, which I knew all too well in my experience as a racialized librarian. Thus, establishing consistent communication in a safe environment was one way I was able to build trust with my team.

The second approach I took was to set up clear boundaries around my availability. For me to be successful as a leader, and especially as a racialized leader, I needed to ensure I had the uninterrupted time to execute on key deliverables. In the context of working remotely, this was done by appropriately utilizing the correct MS Teams availability icons to demonstrate my availability. Outside of attending meetings and performing my own duties, I would largely be available to my team and others, denoting that by using the green circle icon next to my initials. In the event I was not available, I would use the red "Busy" icon. However, in time I observed many on my team not checking the availability icon leading some to calling me during a MS Teams meeting, etc. This then prompted me to be more specific and have a process in place by encouraging them to reach out when they would see I was available, marked by the green "Available" sign, or to expect a delay in response, if the "Do not disturb" sign was up. I also adhered to this process of checking one's status before communicating with the librarians on my team. I found this approach helpful in establishing respect for my time and for theirs. Another practical tactic I used was adding a feature on MS Teams, the Calendar Pro app, which was a second way of being transparent in my and the team's availability while working from home. Each librarian had access to the shared calendar and entered their 'out of office' days so that all on the team could be aware of who was available and when. This feature also ensured we worked cohesively as a team as librarians would consult with the calendar before requesting time off, to ensure there was enough support for the division. Ensuring I was transparent with my availability, mirroring this to my team and providing a means for them to share out, established a respect of people's boundaries and an understanding of the division's needs.

A final strategy I incorporated as leader was to create opportunities for the team to build rapport with each other. A practical way of instituting this was for each to take on a back-up support role for each other. This was crucial as we temporarily 'lost' 1.5 FTE librarian positions on my first day as division head due to a research leave and a vacancy created by my own promotion, requiring a backfill of half of my liaison responsibilities. This created workload issues for a few librarians in the division and had to be addressed by formalizing a back-up support program whereby each librarian was required to support another librarian who had an especially busy portfolio. A few months in and I launched a series of virtual workshops where librarians would provide training on their area of specialty to the others in the division. The areas of focus were on the subject areas that most found challenging or required previous expertise, namely that of Business, Data, and Law. This series helped the division's librarians gain basic knowledge in these areas (especially useful for liaisons taking on new back-up areas) and comfort in handling basic inquiries. These initiatives were also a main way of building rapport within the team by instituting these peer-peer learning opportunities.

Trying to lead a team remotely is no easy feat. Regular and timely communication, demonstrating transparency with my availability, and finding unique opportunities to build team cohesion were initial steps I took to be approachable, transparent, and honest, key foundations to

building trust. I also leaned on my own experience as a racialized librarian to help inform me as a leader which made me more sensitive and open to the individual needs of my team.

Ximin's experience at Georgia Tech: Leading with trust not authority

I started at Georgia Tech Library in summer of 2017 to develop the Data Visualization service. Over the years as the Data Visualization service manager, I grew a team of student assistants and part-time staff members to provide the campus community a suite of services, including instruction, research consultation, space / hardware / software management. Data Visualization service features our hybrid service access that bundles space, technology and staff. The in-person service is crucial as it provides users with hardware access and technical troubleshooting, which was interrupted by COVID.

My first strategy is to keep consistent principles and practice to manage the team and operate the services. I aligned our priorities with that of the library's during the pandemic, which is to continue the services as much as possible while at the same time prioritize the safety of my team members and users. We quickly switched all our services, primarily instruction and research consultations, remote. In the midst of uncertainty, I want to reassure our users of the access to our service to assist their learning and research.

My second strategy is to offer open and easy communication options within the team as well as with our users. Communication is the key for a manager to understand our efficiency and effectiveness internally and externally. To offer users convenient access to the service, we came up with a suite of communication options. Users can reach us through the library's web chat or stop by the Info Desk, they can be referred via liaison librarians by email, or attend our online drop-in hours. This setup requires collaborative support from multiple departments in the library, including IT, Public Services, and Research Engagement. Without authority to these teams, I was able to convince them to prioritize our communication routing among their tasks. As a technology-heavy service, a good number of the consultation questions in the past were to help patrons install software applications and configure their devices to work as intended. Because of the device differences, in the past the team members often needed to get on people's devices to troubleshoot specific configuration. This was made difficult during COVID since we met patrons virtually, and therefore, had no access to their physical devices. To remove the technology barriers, our team quickly researched virtual environment options and switched all instruction and most project support online.

My BIPOC background allows me to understand and sympathize with the various challenges my team members and users face. While trying to our users remotely, I prioritized the safety and emotional well-being of my team members. During a time of disconnection, we continued our weekly team meetings online. During these meetings, I encourage team members to share wins and struggles professionally and personally. For the challenges people encountered and shared at our meetings, the team tried to provide support resources, cover each other's shifts if needed, and offer emotional support. At an extraordinary time like this, our team established strong trust and bonding via exchange at our regular gathering. In a sense, the distance of COVID strengthens the trust and support among team members.

One unique challenge while trying to balance service consistency and caring for the team's emotional distress, is the lack of authority of my position. As mentioned before, my team consists of student assistants and part-time staff members who have another home department in the library. Both groups of people have other priorities at our institution. The question for me is how to get their buy-in on the quickly changing workflow. This challenge holds true to our collaborating departments within and outside of the library. My approach is to be transparent, share my work plan and rationale with all stakeholders, listen to and incorporate their feedback into our workflow so that the plan reflects shared values and objectives.

While trying to navigate the crisis, our library discovered great opportunities. In 2020, the Library's web chat grew 500% in 2020 and another 200% in 2021, the research consultation went up 28% in 2020, and the gadget checkout soared 600% in 2021. For Data & Visualization, the team discovered great potential of growth in delivering our workshops online. The service hosts a series of hands-on technical workshops on Python programming, SQL querying and Tableau dashboarding. These workshops have always been popular in the classroom. Since the beginning of COVID, we moved the whole instruction series online with a combination of cloud solutions and sharing detailed instruction. Attending classes and workshops online from home saves people time running around campus. The service saw the peak of online workshop attendance of nearly 5,000. Through COVID, patrons have gotten used to online access to our services and demand it to be part of our permanent offering.

The lesson I learnt from this journey is that the most effective way of leading a team is by creating goals every team member agrees and strives to achieve, then building trust and support within the team. Guided by these goals, people see more commonality than differences. Coworkers within and outside of our service team went extra miles to make sure the technologies worked, the collaboration was seamless, and services were delivered to our users at the best quality possible.

DISCUSSION

Our personal experiences as BIPOC leaders in academic libraries echo back to some of the key findings in literature. All four mid-level leaders recognized that improving communication and building relationships with the team and users are some key aspects for creating an effective and strong team. The authors also recognize the importance of drawing from past experience as a racialized or BIPOC librarian and emotional intelligence to understand, facilitate, collaborate with the team. Trust is nurtured and strengthened through transparent communication and strong relationships between the managers and the teammates.

Drawing from past experience

For people moving into new leadership roles, there are usually new challenges and scenarios that can emerge. It is advisable to draw experience from the past to guide decision-making. This is especially true when there is limited mentorship to support new leaders. As BIPOC leaders represent a small percentage of library leaders in academia, we have a unique opportunity to learn from our previous experiences, including challenges, and adopt new approaches to lead our teams to thrive and succeed through change.

Building and maintaining relationships

Effective leaders need to build relationships with their team members. Building strong relationships with the team and users helps with productivity and long-term collaboration and fosters collegiality and respect. Some opportunities to build relationships with the team include learning from team members about the organization and their areas of work, giving recognition for their contributions, and creating a safe and supportive space for members to share their concerns and unique challenges. A leader can also establish a healthy work relationship which sets reasonable boundaries for collaboration and individual work time.

Communication

Communication is another key theme to ensuring successful leadership . All authors emphasized the importance of open, accessible, and meaningful communication, such as casual one-on-one check-ins or regular team meetings. In addition to communicating with the team, it is equally important to offer team members straightforward communication channels to access pertinent services and resources. When library leaders regularly communicate pertinent information in a timely manner, whether it be in person or virtually, their team is better equipped to succeed.

Building trust

Trust is the glue that holds the team together and facilitates team success. The effort of drawing upon past experiences for decision-making, of building strong connections with team members, and prioritizing communication all aim to build trust between the leader and their team, as well as amongst the team members. The authors note that creating shared goals agreed upon by the team helps strengthen its sense of unity and improves morale, especially during challenging times. Displaying respect for team members' contributions and affording them visibility and recognition for their work are effective practices in building trust on the team.

CONCLUSIONS

In reviewing the literature and reflecting on our own experiences, we conclude that trust is the key component of being a successful library leader, and that building trust between leaders and team members amidst change and disruption is challenging but doable. Change is a constant in the library world. Taking on a leadership role in academic libraries requires an open and positive attitude towards change, as well as the ability to adapt to, embrace, and advocate for change. Mid-level managers work on both managing business and help navigating library culture. They cannot succeed without the support and buy-in of their teams. In striving to achieve this, they must foster trust within their teams, namely between co-workers and between the leader and their team. Cultivating a culture of trust can be achieved when a leader creates an open, transparent, fair, and inclusive work environment. A leader earns credibility by being transparent and clear with team plans, goals, and agendas. Lastly, learning from colleagues, respecting them, and supporting their professional growth helps to bring out the best in them, thereby supporting their leaders to build the best teams. We hope that by sharing our experiences, we will encourage more BIPOC women in libraries to explore leadership and share their experiences as well.

We acknowledge that, due to the limited number of cases presented here, and the composition of this group of authors, we are unable to cover all experiences of BIPOC library

leaders. As a result, the findings and conclusions drawn from this study may not fully represent the entire BIPOC library leadership group in the U.S. and Canada.

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