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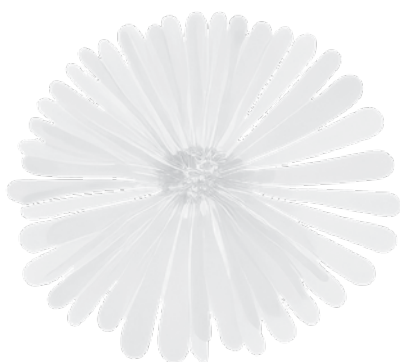
Cook, Dani Brecher

Kirker, Maoria J

Smothers, Diann

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Introduction

**Dani Brecher Cook, Maoria J. Kirker,
and Diann Smothers**

As midcareer librarians in managerial roles, we recently looked around and realized how many of our friends and colleagues have left the field. Many of these librarians were dedicated and passionate about the work, and their career shifts felt like significant losses to the field. Why was this happening? The rationales we heard from administrators ranged from the Great Resignation to the graying of the profession to workers demanding more flexible work arrangements. The literature reveals a different story: people leave libraries because of managers and administrators (Heady et al., 2020). Often managers—and academic library managers in particular—operate within structures that may encourage or enable poor managerial practices. We hope to shine light on a different path forward for the field, one that focuses on the people who work in libraries. After all, libraries are about people: the people we work for and the people who do the work.

When we started the Conference on Academic Library Management (CALM) in 2020, we found a large community of academic library managers with whom the idea of person-centered management practices resonated. However, although the concept spoke to library management practitioners, we found a complete lack of definitional work that described

person-centered management in a library context. This book seeks to define the concept within our discipline and to provoke conversation about what management in academic libraries could and should be.

DEFINING PERSON-CENTERED MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

Significant literature on person-centered management exists in other care professions, such as health care and teaching (e.g., Freiberg & Lamb, 2009; Tellis-Nayak, 2007). These studies often tie performance (e.g., patient satisfaction or number of classroom disciplinary problems) to the implementation of a person-centered management framework. It is generally accepted that the concept has its genesis with Carl Rogers, the midcentury psychologist and founder of the humanistic psychology movement. Rogers (1951) developed the framework for person-centered therapy, which hypothesized that meaningful personality change is possible only through authentic human connection, and that therapists needed to accept people and their experiences as they are to have a successful therapeutic relationship.

According to Rogers (1957), these are the three key conditions for a successful person-centered therapeutic relationship:

- **congruence**—The therapist presents their authentic self, including positive and negative feelings.
- **unconditional positive regard**—The therapist withholds judgment from the client's experiences.
- **empathy**—The therapist understands a person's emotional responses without taking them on themselves.

One important distinction of Rogerian therapy is that the client is considered the expert on themselves—the therapist's role is to listen closely and carefully, and not to position themselves as the expert with all of the answers.

Later in his career Rogers applied this same construct to the field of education, challenging educators to establish congruent and empathetic relationships with their learners (Rogers, 1969). The person-centered

framework has been applied to many educational settings, including library instruction (Klipfel & Cook, 2017), and positions the student as the expert on themselves. In the 1990s person-centeredness began to be applied to the concept of leadership, positing that teams can work effectively only through a focus on the individual (Plas, 1996). Rather than focusing on traditional management skills, such as job control and discipline, Plas (1996) proposes that “necessarily . . . words like *heart*, *caring*, *needs*, and *feelings* are no longer ignored in the workplace—they move to center stage” (p. 3).

Interestingly, person-centered leadership never really caught on as a concept in the United States, being subsumed by related leadership theories such as participatory leadership, human relation theory, and servant leadership. These theories share an emphasis on process, increased agency of workers, empathy, and inspirational leadership. Each of these theories divides organizations into general categories of *leaders* and *workers* or *followers*, without acknowledging that each of those categories is composed of many different individuals with different life experiences, motivations, and needs. Person-centered management centers the unique characteristics of each individual and guides managers to explore the tension between workplace demands and individual worker needs.

For the present work, we offer this definition:

Person-centered management is a management philosophy and practice which explicitly acknowledges that we are unique individuals who bring our experiences, preferences, and needs into the workplace with us. To successfully create environments where people can fully succeed at work and participate in functional teams, the needs of each individual must be surfaced and authentically considered.

Our definition builds and expands upon Meulemans and Matlin’s (2019) work on servant leadership in libraries, where they call for library administrators “to lead by listening, to walk away from a singular vision of what ‘should’ be done, and to be guided by aiding library workers in realizing the mission and vision of a library” (p. 3). The positioning of the library worker as the key to unlocking the potential

for library excellence is at the heart of our vision for person-centered management in libraries.

This framework for person-centered management aligns with the Rogerian trifecta of person-centeredness: congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. In the rest of this introduction, we explore each of these concepts and suggest what they might look like in practice for library managers.

CONGRUENCE (BE AUTHENTIC)

Rogers (1957) defines *congruence* as being “freely and deeply himself, with his actual experience accurately represented by his awareness of himself. It is the opposite of presenting a facade, either knowingly or unknowingly” (p. 97). In other words, congruence is the state of being genuine with oneself, or authentic. In an interpersonal relationship, congruence is achieved by creating space to have feelings about the other person, acknowledging those emotions internally, and considering their effect on interactions. It does not necessarily mean acting on or showing feelings but rather bringing internal attention to feelings about other people.

For managers, authenticity in relationship to employees might look like honesty. Honesty can take many forms, ranging from transparently sharing processes to being frank when providing feedback. As you will encounter many more times in this book, “Clear is kind” (Brown, 2018). Congruence in the workplace involves genuinely expressing your thoughts and needs, within the bounds of workplace norms (e.g., it’s okay to share with someone that you disagree with their idea, but it’s not okay to say that you hate them personally). This may require practice and deep reflection on the feelings that are purposefully tamped down to make getting through the day easier. It may also require a safe space outside of the manager-employee relationship to feel and work through big feelings—trusted relationships with colleagues and friends are critical.

In recent years, workplace messages like “Be yourself at work” or “Bring your whole self to work” have become more and more prevalent. However, we want to acknowledge that, depending on an individual’s identities, the concept of being completely authentic at work may not

feel safe or possible to achieve. We also want to acknowledge that it is perfectly fine to choose to maintain a boundary and not “bring your whole self to work.” Authenticity in the sense of congruence is relational, where genuineness is about fairness and transparency and not necessarily sharing personal details. Although an organization may aspire to offer a workplace where both managers and employees are equally clear and transparent with one another, the only piece that an individual person can control is themselves.

The end result of congruence is the building of trust and psychological safety. When managers consistently act and speak with authenticity, employees are more likely to see the internal consistency of decisions and reactions. This may then also build a feeling of safety because employees can generally predict the scale and tone of a reaction based on a consistent pattern of behavior that reflects the manager’s true feelings.

UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD (BE CURIOUS)

Unconditional positive regard is the idea that a person should be valued simply because they are a fellow human, and that no action makes them intrinsically more or less worthy of regard. This may seem counterintuitive in a workplace setting where a significant role of the manager is, in fact, to judge employees via the performance review process. However, we believe that there is still value for managers in the generalized concept, which relies on taking an approach of curiosity about other people.

Managers are often confronted with behavior that is unexpected, out of character, or just plain bizarre. Rather than rushing to judgment, a manager using a curiosity-driven approach will stop to consider, “Why did this person do this?” Finding the answer might mean asking the individual about their motivations, which are more likely to be shared with a manager who is curious rather than angry. Getting to the root cause can position the manager to partner with the employee to solve the problem, as opposed to their immediately assuming adversarial positions.

This approach can also be a useful tool when people have creative ideas that may not align with organizational realities or values. Rather than shutting down an idea, a curiosity-driven manager can open the

door for novel solutions that meet the base need. For example, an employee may request a budget line to take faculty members out to coffee, which may strike a manager as fluff. However, a curious manager might uncover that the request is evidence that there is not enough support in the library for relationship building with community members.

All this being said, curiosity and unconditional positive regard are not necessarily limiters on managing performance; indeed, that is an important part of any manager's job. This framing simply invites managers to explore and investigate the root causes of why things aren't going well instead of moving directly to disciplinary action. Getting to that truth requires the development of trust and belief that the manager will help mitigate challenges, if they are able. Ultimately, person-centered managers strive to create the conditions where it is possible for the individual to succeed, but it is up to the employee to follow through.

EMPATHY (BE OPEN)

In the past ten years, *empathy* has become a trendy word in leadership and management. Rogers (1975) defines empathy: "to be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another's world without prejudice" (p. 4). It remains an open question whether any human can truly achieve this, and we certainly can never fully understand another person and their lived experiences.

That being said, we can be open to other people's experiences and accept their experiences as valid. When people share how they experience something and it does not align with our personal experience, the default move is often defensiveness, but this is actually a moment for learning. Similar to unconditional positive regard, openly approaching a variety of experiences offers us the opportunity to ask questions and understand another person.

As we learn more about the people with whom we work, it becomes more possible for us to imagine what it might feel like to be those people in different situations. Yet it is imperative to not make assumptions about motives in order to prevent misunderstandings. Curiosity and empathy should go hand in hand.

Empathic managers will include in their decision-making processes time to reflect on how their decisions will impact the people around them. Ideally, they will include colleagues in the process so that they make no assumptions about how other people may feel. And still they will sometimes get it wrong. Asking curious questions, imagining how others might react, and taking an authentic position can still lead to decisions that cause pain. No one can successfully live up to the ideal all of the time—that's why it's called a management *practice*, because it takes practice and learning from failure. But even in those moments of failure, it is possible to recommit to the values of person-centered management and own the impact of one's actions. Empathy can be an important piece of the repair process as well, as managers consider outcomes and take action to rebuild trust with their colleagues.

PERSON-CENTEREDNESS AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Person-centered management asks us to recognize that we are all complex people, our experiences matter, and we are all worthy of respect, no matter our history, position, or place within the library. Why is this an especially useful model for libraries? As Ettarh (2018) describes in her groundbreaking work on vocational awe, many library workers view both their institutions and the people who work in them as uncriticizable because of the nature of the work. Belief in the inherent goodness of library work leads to the increased likelihood of individuals accepting low pay or being treated poorly, ever-increasing job duties, and erasure of the authentic self when it does not align with the white, female majority of library workers. Given this context it's especially important for managers and administrators to create spaces where people are able to criticize both the institution and the field, and for those experiences and comments to be taken seriously. Person-centered management practices that create space for criticism, the sharing of lived experiences, and a willingness to investigate and, if needed, make changes to the status quo can be powerful tools for addressing vocational awe.

For most workers, managers are the face of the institution, a manifestation of the way that the values and vision of the institution are

embodied in the workplace. They determine the day-to-day work and often are the most influential in creating library culture. In this way, management's outsized effect on morale and workplace satisfaction can lead to increased library worker turnover (Heady et al., 2020). Managers can make workers' day-to-day life great or actively unpleasant or harmful. Evidence shows that this happens specifically in libraries: Kendrick (2017, 2020) found that the low morale experience of library workers is often tied to the culture created by management, and Weyant et al.'s (2021) synthesis of the existing research in the field demonstrated that a supervisor's relationships with employees was one of two major thematic areas that contribute to low morale of workers within the library. Most people who enter management don't set out to make people's work lives miserable, yet we are seeing an increasing number of library workers who feel low job satisfaction and attribute it to management. The more tools that library managers have to avoid harm and center their employees, the more opportunities they will find to change this trend.

If you are reading this book, then it is likely that you are at least curious about exploring a different framework for management, or perhaps you are looking for community around the difficult work that you are already engaged in to improve workplace conditions. Although our conception of person-centered management focuses on viewing people as individuals, we also believe that this work is best done in community. Many of the strategies shared in this volume are pretty different from traditional management practices, and often they do not have a one-to-one correlation with productivity—person-centered management done well is more a vibe shift than a concrete change. The benefits accrue over years. Within this volume and in conversations around it, we hope you begin to find a community to support you as you try new practices.

This book brings together twenty-four chapters that are divided into six sections which we hope will build the foundation for person-centered management practices in academic libraries. The four chapters in part I explore some of the practices of person-centered managers. This section is not meant to offer a comprehensive list of person-centered practices but instead covers those types of applications which are indicative of person-centered practices in academic libraries. Part II's six chapters examine how managers can influence and shift managerial systems

and processes to center the people they supervise. The five chapters that follow in part III dive into the communication skills of person-centered managers and the multifaceted dimensions of communication in management. Part IV's two chapters apply person-centered practices to supervising student workers. Finally, parts V and VI, which include four and three chapters, respectively, focus on how person-centered managers can take care of themselves as people through boundary setting, reflection, and self-care practices.

Across all of the chapters in this volume, you will see the common theme that it's the people who work in the library who make it valuable. If we want our libraries to grow and thrive, we must ensure that library workers (including managers!) have the support that they need to succeed, both in serving our communities and in taking care of ourselves. We're grateful to all of the wonderful authors who have contributed additional theoretical frameworks, criticism of person-centered management, and concrete strategies. Together we can achieve the potential of academic libraries not only to create and preserve knowledge but to create care and preserve workers' well-being.

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