



In Step with Library Leaders: The Intersection Mindset

“Libraries are more than institutions of information—they are ecosystems of connection. They can become intentional, inclusive, accessible, and interdisciplinary networks.”

Wicked problems like climate change, global health inequities, and economic disparity define our times. These challenges are so complex, interconnected, and multifaceted that no single discipline, institution, or government can address them alone. Wicked problems like these are tangled by nature—addressing one aspect often reveals deeper layers of complexity. For instance, efforts to alleviate food scarcity might increase reliance on industrial agriculture, which depletes water resources, degrades soil, and contributes to climate change, further exacerbating the conditions that drive scarcity.

These challenges call for integrated solutions—strategies that bridge disciplines, geographies, and organizations to create holistic, adaptive responses. I often find myself asking: where do these intersections happen? How do farmers, engineers, policymakers, and social scientists come together not only to exchange ideas but also to build something meaningful?

The answer isn't simply openness—greater access to publications, tools, or data. Nor is it collaboration for its own sake. What feels essential is a mindset shift: a willingness to embrace complexity, adaptiveness, and contradiction while centering the voices of those most directly affected. Knowledge can evolve into a tool of action and empathy. Emergent solutions can be inclusive, shaped by the communities who live with the consequences of inaction. Libraries, I believe, hold part of this answer.

Libraries are more than institutions of information—they are ecosystems of connection. They can become intentional, inclusive, accessible, and interdisciplinary networks. Libraries are places where

disparate perspectives can collide productively and long-term solutions can emerge through experimentation and iteration.

The book *Forces for Good* by Leslie Crutchfield and Heather Grant offers a transformative framework for driving systemic change, grounded in six key practices observed in high-impact nonprofit organizations. Libraries, as bridges between disciplines and communities, are uniquely positioned to adopt these principles. By embracing them, libraries evolve into engines of change—intersections where knowledge, action, and empathy converge to address wicked problems.

Advocate and Serve

Libraries do more than deliver services; they can champion systemic change. From promoting open access to amplifying marginalized voices, libraries can act as facilitators and thought leaders. Combining service with advocacy creates opportunities to influence public discourse and policy toward equity and sustainability.

Make Markets Work

Libraries shape how knowledge is distributed. By curating equitable access to information and promoting open platforms, they foster markets of ideas that are inclusive and impactful. This ensures knowledge flows freely, empowering communities rather than consolidating power among a privileged few.

Inspire Evangelists

As trusted institutions, libraries can cultivate advocates—community leaders, researchers, and stu-

dents—who amplify their mission and extend their reach far beyond library walls. These evangelists embody and champion library values, driving impact across communities.

Nurture Nonlinear Thinking

Wicked problems require systems literacy: the ability to understand feedback loops, interconnections, and emergent solutions. Libraries can offer workshops, programs, and resources that teach adaptive approaches, equipping people to tackle complexity with creativity and resilience.

Master the Art of Adaptation

Libraries are inherently adaptive and can expand this strength by iterating on services and embracing experimentation. Risk-taking and learning from failure keep libraries dynamic and capable of evolving alongside the communities they serve.

Build Networks for Change

Libraries are natural hubs of connection. By linking local efforts to global movements, they amplify impact, creating ecosystems of collaboration that transcend boundaries. These networks connect people, resources, and ideas, enabling scalable and lasting change.

Let's picture what this could look like. Imagine a library at the heart of a city's climate adaptation efforts. Scientists and policymakers co-design green

infrastructure; citizens visualize flood risks in workshops; local artists collaborate with engineers to create public awareness campaigns. This library doesn't just store knowledge—it catalyzes action. Or consider a public library in a healthcare desert, partnering with medical professionals to host free clinics, offer mental health resources, and curate data to inform equitable healthcare policies. A university library might tackle misinformation by convening journalists, data scientists, and educators to create digital literacy programs. Students learn to evaluate sources critically, while community workshops build resilience against disinformation campaigns. Rural libraries could address food insecurity, collaborating with agricultural scientists, local farmers, and food justice advocates to map food deserts, share best practices, and host seed banks. These libraries transcend the mission of providing information—they activate it, empowering communities to solve complex challenges and build systemic solutions.

Libraries hold a unique place in society, bridging disciplines, communities, and geographies. They are more than repositories—they are ecosystems for systemic transformation, where knowledge sparks action and collaboration lays the foundation for progress. While no single organization can solve the world's wicked problems, I believe libraries are places where solutions can take shape. Through an intersection mindset, libraries can inspire people, nurture networks, and offer a model of what it means to build a future that is equitable, sustainable, and resilient.

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