Succession Planning Transforms Librarians into Leaders: A Misunderstood Resource for Radical Change

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The Problem
Academic libraries are in need of leaders who are prepared to successfully navigate the challenges and opportunities facing their libraries as a result of a myriad of changes impacting the profession. Some of these changes include:

- Present and projected workforce demographics; multigenerational workforce, recruitment, retention, and retirements
- Trends in higher education such as tight budgets, emerging and disruptive technologies, and increased accountability

A Possible Solution
Succession planning is a strategy that can be used by academic libraries to mitigate the impact that vacancies create and to ensure the tenure of librarians in key positions. Rothwell defines succession planning and management programs (SP&MPs) as “a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure that the leadership continuity in key positions retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future; and encourage individual advancement” (2010, p.6).

Research Questions
RQ 1. Do the leadership styles of academic library deans make a difference in their decisions to implement SP&MPs?
RQ 2. What factors affect library deans’ decisions to implement SP&MPs at academic libraries?

Proposed Study
The questions denote the implementation of SP&MPs as the theoretical construct under study. Library deans are selected because the body of SP&MP literature suggests that for these programs to be effective they require the support of the organization’s leaders. The study:

- Contributes to the understanding of and to the body of knowledge of SP&MPs and leadership
- Theorizes a phenomenon that is under-theorized in the LIS literature
- May help to solve the problem of lack of preparedness by Library and Information Scientists

Method
A mixed method design consisting of online surveys followed by in-depth interviews will be employed to answer the research questions. The quantitative portion of the study is composed of an online survey and the qualitative portion is composed of an in-depth interview.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1990) will be administered online to the 12 deans of the state university libraries in a southern state. Once their leadership styles are identified, in-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the academic library deans.
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Educating information professionals must extend beyond the classroom and post the MLS. Information organizations may find they are woefully inadequately prepared to fill key leadership vacancies if they do not take the steps now to prepare information professionals to assume those roles in the future. Lack of prepared leaders is well documented in the Library and Information Science literature. Succession planning and management programs (SP&MPs) present an option for preparing information professionals to fill key leadership positions from within all levels of the organization, not necessarily just the top leadership positions as is often misunderstood.

Are transformational leaders more likely to implement SP&MPs at their libraries? Learning about the factors that affect academic library deans’ decisions about implementing or not implementing SP&MPs and if leadership style is among those factors, could contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon and provide alternatives for what can be done today to increasingly prepare information professionals for key leadership roles in the future.

The research questions:
- What factors affect academic library deans’ decisions to implement succession planning and management programs at their libraries?
- Does leadership style make a difference?

The research method: A mixed method design consisting of online surveys followed by in-depth interviews. The quantitative portion of the study is the online survey and the qualitative portion is the in-depth interview.

An effective SP&MP at an information organization can be the chrysalis that can transform librarians into leaders who are ready to soar beyond their boundaries.