The Library Workforce: What Deans/Directors Need to Know

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Abstract
Under the conference sub-theme of preparing the workforce and skills development, this paper identifies and discusses some key human resource (HR) drivers for the academic library workforce of the 21st century. The value of strategic workforce planning is identified, and strategies around learning and development, appreciation and celebration, relationship building and collaboration, and conversation and communication are discussed. Case experiences from the University Library at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) provide practical examples for the consideration of dean/directors and other library leaders charged with the responsibility of preparing the workforce and skills development.

Keywords: library workforce, human resources, case study

Introduction
For centuries, the traditional image of the library has been depicted using images of books and buildings. However, then and now the library profession and the library workforce have always been a critical and essential component of the academic library. Library workplaces are where library and information service professional practice is applied and where it evolves. The library workforce is the critical component in this evolution, which is required if libraries are to continue as relevant to the teaching, learning, and research missions of our universities. In today's academic library, time and attention paid to the workforce is time and energy well invested and makes the organisational change required in library and information service professional practice achievable and sustainable.

Workplaces are changing dramatically. Library leaders, especially deans/directors, need to pay increasing attention to developing within their workforce an ever increasing and complex mix of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and, to equipping and empowering the workforce to positively respond to changing professional times and institutional contexts. The day when deans/directors can leave to others the responsibility for HR leadership is long gone. The library workforce is critical to the application and evolution of the practice of professional skills. In the 21st century, perhaps more so than ever before, there are many challenges facing both those that work in libraries and those who lead and manage the library workplace – be it a small, medium, or large academic library.

The challenge for library leaders
There is little doubt that we live and work in a very complex and dynamic information environment. At the same time, the pace of societal change is relentless, making it a challenging time to be a library leader. Given this context, how as library leaders do we lead and manage our workforce and our workplaces? Based on leadership experience, research, and professional practice over the decade 2006 to 2016 at the U of S, the following 12 HR matters have emerged as deserving of the time and attention of library deans/directors.

In relation to HR matters, deans/directors need to:
1) Know the dynamics and composition of the local workforce. Using workforce demographics to inform HR strategy development is a necessary first step.

2) Monitor national workforce trends and sector reports. This will help to identify, verify, and validate if those emerging trends are evident locally.

3) Appreciate the role of the specialist HR professional. Having recourse to specialist HR expertise, support, and guidance, either within the library or the broader university, means you are not alone.

4) Formulate a people plan (or strategic HR plan). Your employees will be more ready to commit and support new directions if they get to create or influence future directions and priorities.

5) Use workforce planning to drive decision making. Such planning will help to readily identify when to buy, borrow, build, or a combination of these three approaches to ensure your library has the right people, in the right place, at the right time, and at the right cost.

6) Invest in developing the workforce. Acknowledge and accept that as a learning organisation, investment in organisational learning and development is a core (not optional) cost of library operations.

7) Allocate resources in alignment with priorities. This will mean resourcing priority areas and disinvestment in non-priority areas.

8) Appreciate and celebrate employee contributions. Saying thank you to employees means a lot.

9) Build relationships and collaborations. You do not have to do things alone; others can help.

10) Communicate strategic directions clearly and frequently. Having everyone singing from the same hymn book (or having a shared and common understanding of strategic goals) helps employees to understand the big picture and to see where their contributions make a difference.

11) Build leadership capacity. Empower others to lead from where they stand.

12) Measure success along the way. Identify some key performance measures and use them to inform decision making and on-going strategy development.

These 12 are not the only HR matters that deans/directors might need to pay attention to. For example, those deans/directors that work with a unionised workforce need to pay attention to collective agreements and employment terms and conditions. Legislative and legal requirements, such as occupational health and safety law, are also deserving of time and attention. At the same time, emerging workplace 'hot topic' issues (such as the impact of technology on privacy and workplace behaviours) have the potential to eat into the time and focus of any dean/director. However, these 12 HR matters are interrelated, interlinked, and all are critical to the success of deans/directors as workforce and workplace leaders. Taken together as prime HR strategies they help to build employee engagement.

Many of these 12 HR matters as they have played out at a Canadian academic library (at the U of S) have been written and spoken about in other forums and publications. For example, leadership development (Williamson, 2013; Crawley-Low, 2013; and Mierke, 2014); and, the role of the HR professional (Mierke, 2016). Therefore, given the parameters set for IATUL conference papers, this paper takes a broad overview of these 12 HR matters, through the broader lens of employee engagement. The paper overviews briefly some selected aspects of the 12 identified HR matters that are important and deserving of the time and attention of deans/directors. Practical experiences and examples from the U of S are used to suggest possible actions a dean/director might take within their workplace.

Employee engagement
In an increasingly complex landscape, which some are now referring to as the library ecosystem, focusing on employee engagement can make a difference in times of change.

Employee engagement goes beyond the basics of employees feeling positive and satisfied in their jobs. Indeed, in your workplace you may have employees who are satisfied and disengaged. While satisfaction is about being happy at work, engagement is about commitment and fulfilment. It is a higher-level measure of action, accountability, and commitment by employees to their library. More

engaged employees make for better service delivery as employees more readily adapt to meet new challenges, strive to improve services, and ensure that their library delivers continuous quality.

What is an engaged employee? Research by leading HR companies can help library leaders understand this. In Canada, Hewitt Associates (AON Hewitt Consulting, 2015) define engagement as 'employees striving to do their best, saying positive things about the organisation, and staying to learn, grow and develop their careers'. Such employees are worth having in an organisation and they make a big difference to the organisation. Leaders that pay attention to employee engagement will be successful leaders.

Gallup (2006) has developed the 'Gallup 12' questions to measure employee engagement. They are:

- Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- Do I have the materials and equipment I need?
- Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
- Does my supervisor, or other, seem to care about me as a person?
- Is there someone who encourages my development?
- Do my opinions seem to count?
- Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
- Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
- Do I have a best friend at work?
- In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
- This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

Hewitt Associates' research shows that once an organisation does the basics well, then leaders leading and managers managing are the two key elements to improve engagement. Through regular employee opinion surveys, it is possible to calculate an employee engagement baseline score, and then track progress over time. Having an employee metric around engagement can also help library leaders assess the success, or otherwise, of specific initiatives or programmes.

At the U of S we have tracked employee engagement for over a decade, and from that metric we know that the various initiatives in our strategic HR plan (our People Plan) have been successful at growing the level of employee engagement, rising from a 2005 baseline of 54%, through 65% in 2009, and in more challenging economic and institutional circumstances maintained it at 71% in 2013. In 22015 employee enagement registered at 76%

Local workforce demographics
Knowing the makeup of your local workforce is an important foundational step for deans/directors in workforce planning. Workforce planning is "an analytic, forecasting, and planning process that connects and directs talent management activities to ensure the organisation can execute its business strategy by having the right people in the right at the right time, at the right cost" (Young, 2009, p.3). Workforce planning takes a long-term, whole of library perspective, and helps to avoid the pitfalls of short term, isolated workforce recruitment. Workforce planning allows for a serious and strategic consideration of fundamental questions and it forces deans/directors to consider alternative options rather than just doing things the way they have always been done.

Local workforce demographics can be invaluable in helping a dean/director to know their workforce. Understanding the make-up of your library's workforce is an important first step to longer term strategic workforce planning and development. Collecting, tracking, and reviewing local workforce data over time also helps to identify changes in workforce composition and will likely highlight areas where intervention and strategies for development are needed.

At the U of S we have tracked local workforce demographics over the decade 2006 to 2016. We know from that data that our workforce composition is changing significantly. We have, for

example, noted a shrinking of the baby boomer cohort due to retirements. The associated recruitment of a number of beginning graduates as new faculty recruits has changed the mix between tenured and probationary librarians significantly. This means a greater amount of time and effort to move the new cohort through securing tenure. It has meant a focus on mentoring and a recognition that for those faculty to build their required program of research and scholarship for tenure it will take time away from the immediacy of some service demands. It has also required an organisational investment in research support and facilitation.

Annually for some years we have taken stock of our workforce demographics and this has helped us to understand the make-up of our workforce and thus to design and implement suitable strategic human resource initiatives. Over time, trends have emerged and the changing nature of the workforce has become more obvious. It has informed workforce planning. We have shared our workforce demographics with our employees, used the information in the orientation of new employees, and built workplace programs for training and development based on the information.

When local data is linked to and viewed alongside of national and/or sector-wide HR trend reports your local data becomes very helpful for longer term HR strategy development and implementation.

National workforce trends and sector reports
In Canada, over the decade 2005 to 2015, we have been fortunate to have two landmark workforce studies completed. These studies, which yielded a large amount of information about the Canadian academic library workforce, included demographics and trends. Consequently, the member libraries of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) know a lot about their individual and collective workforce. Over the years, CARL deans/directors have used this information to both inform local planning and strategy development; but also to work collaboratively to build workforce capacity and capability across the research library sector, through initiatives such as the CARL Research Grants and the Librarians' Research Institute (LRI). *The 8Rs Study* (2005) and the *8Rs Redux Study* (2016) have been influential drivers in shaping the Canadian research library workforce.

Locally, at the U of S we viewed our workforce data against the backdrop of these two national sector studies and other workforce and trend reports to help inform workforce planning and local decision making on workforce matters. Local workforce data was first gathered in a systemic way to inform a newly appointed dean who wanted to know the demographics of the workforce. Local data told us we had an aging workforce dominated by baby boomers all of whom would likely retire en masse in or around the timeframe of 2009-13. In addition, the *8Rs Study* confirmed a likelihood of a national trend with baby boomer retirements playing out nationally. What could we do to head off this trend or to be responsive to it by working with it and not being caught blind? Strategic workforce planning helped us plan ahead and mitigate the impact of such a large scale retirement trend at the local level.

Sector-wide, the *8Rs Redux Study* tells us that the workforce employed in CARL member libraries over the decade of 2005-2015, retirements, alongside the hiring of younger librarians and the restructuring of some roles and the attrition of others, have resulted in a noteworthy turnover of CARL library staff and a slightly larger and younger librarian workforce. Many librarians are learning new tasks in challenging and interesting roles that increasingly encompass specialized skills and that engender comparatively high levels of job satisfaction.

Furthermore, although librarians currently comprise a slightly smaller share of CARL's professional and paraprofessional staffing complement than they did in 2003 (down from 56% to 52%), their overall numbers increased by 3%. *Other* professionals now comprise a slightly larger share of all staff (up from 9% to 14%) and grew by 72%. Librarians are twice as likely to be members of visible minorities as 10 years ago (11% compared to 5%), and they continue to be predominantly female (comprising about 7 in 10 librarians). The gender profile of *other* professionals, however, has shifted from being predominantly female in 2003 (51%) to predominantly male in 2013 (56%).

The librarian workforce is younger now than it was in 2003, due to the hiring of new and presumably younger recruits, as well as the retirement of more senior librarian staff. On average, however, all types of staff are still older than the Canadian workforce (20% of whom are over the age of 55, compared to 30% of librarians, 25% of *other* professionals, and 39% of support staff). Compared to 2004, librarians, especially female librarians, are less likely to be working in middle management (down from 27% to 18%), a finding that partly reflects the elimination of these positions as librarians retire or as their positions are not renewed due to budget restraints. Evidence from the research to support this notes nearly one-third of retiring librarian positions were not replaced. Given the growth in the number of *other* professionals, and the additional finding that nearly 50% of retired librarian positions were replaced with external candidates, it may also be possible that the reduction in middle management is partly due to a shift in some of these positions from within the ranks of librarians to within the ranks of other professionals. Since just 7% of *other* professionals were hired into restructured positions, however, this would account for only a very small number of lost librarian middle-management positions. In contrast, whereas in 2004 male librarians were more likely than female librarians to be working in senior administrator positions (22% compared to 12%), gender parity is now observed (15% of both male and female librarians are senior administrators).

All of these research findings have strategic HR planning implications. The CARL workforce has become more diverse: there has been an influx of younger professionals (both librarians and *other* professionals), growth in the number of *other* professionals, and growth in the number of new staff who represent visible minorities. Care must be taken to assess the development requirements of newer staff and CARL organizational cultures and structures must be open and receptive to their presence and their needs.

Much of the cohort of newer librarians is still clustered at a non-management career stage. Their career aspirations need to be ascertained and appropriate development and training provided as these librarians will likely continue to be the face of CARL librarianship for the next thirty to forty years.

While middle-management positions have decreased over the last ten years, there is some indication that a greater proportion of male than female librarians has reached middle-management levels in terms of career stage. CARL deans/directors (individually and collectively) need to assess interest in, and potential for, performing in management and leadership roles and ensure that opportunity for advancement is provided on an equitable basis.

Formulate a people plan
While most libraries have established strategic plans, a supporting library HR plan is less common. Having a dedicated People (or HR) Plan that supports the library's strategic plan helps to highlight the value and contributions employees bring to the success of your library. It helps show a direct connection between the work of individual library employees and library's future strategic directions and priorities. It speaks directly to employees and helps to build employee engagement, commitment with strategic directions, and highlights that workplace change is inevitable, constant, and essential. If developed through a highly consultative process, a dedicated people plan will help to ensure that employees support and work to implement those things they get to create.

At the U of S, against the library strategic plan, we identified key themes and then said what single thing could we do to ensure successful implementation of the plan and the answer was to focus on our people (our workforce) and hence the development of a people plan was the logical next step. Central themes in our *University Library Strategic Plan* highlight the critical importance which our people play in all aspects of library service, collections, and facilities development. These themes also recognise the dynamic nature of the information environment in which our work takes place and promote positive relationships and engagement as essential to the realization of the transformation vision. Library employees bring to their work a diverse range of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and they make critical contributions to the success of learners and teachers, and, researchers, scholars and practitioners. Our People Plan identifies ambitious goals for our people (individually and collectively) to grow their knowledge, skills, and abilities; share their expertise;

build relationships and collaborate; appreciate and celebrate contributions and achievement; and, effectively communicate within the library and beyond with our community of users.

Using a broad based consultative processes and a dedicated planning group comprised of library leaders and employee representatives, our planning team developed our vision, and four key pillars. The People Plan sets out a vision that: *We pursue excellence through discovery and inquiry; being exceptional practitioners and scholars; embracing creativity, innovation and risk taking; and, demonstrating outstanding leadership.*

The plan has four core people strategies:
(1) *Learn & Develop*: We pursue opportunities to grow our knowledge, skills and expertise to create a successful learning environment benefiting us, the university community and beyond
(2) *Relationships & Collaboration*: We support and mentor one another by sharing ideas, information, and expertise. At every opportunity we work collaboratively as individuals and teams
(3) *Appreciate & Celebrate*: We value and celebrate the contributions, innovations and achievement of individuals and teams by recognising, appreciating, and respecting one another and our diversity
(4) *Conversation & Communication*: We participate in open and receptive sharing of ideas and accurate and timely information.

The plan clearly lays out the expectations of what will be achieved through the successful implementation of the plan. Annually, priority actions are identified and implemented in alignment with the plan. Some major projects implemented during the life of the plan include the roll out of a library management and supervisory development program for current (and aspiring supervisors); and the development and implementation of a process for personal development plans for library employees, etc.

Conclusions
Complexities abound in our workplaces and deans/directors have more than a full time job. Competing demands on their time, focus and energy come from many, both within the library, on the campus and beyond. Deans/directors who make their workforce a priority recognise the critical and complex realities of their leadership roles and as the experiences of the U of S exemplify, time, focus and energy directed to HR matters pays dvidends.

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