

Who's Next in Line?: Succession Planning Practices of Academic Libraries

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Abstract

As libraries transform and advance, they go through changes in leadership that affect service efficiency, organizational consistency, and alignment of priorities and strategies. Many Filipino librarians in the top-level management are now approaching retirement. Some librarians leave their organizations for greener pastures and better opportunities in other libraries. A few of them consider a change of career. These problems become complicated as there is a shortage of new licensed librarians, huge gap between top-level and mid-level management, and neglect of succession planning in the human resource development. Succession planning, as a tool for organizational development, is a useful technique for academic libraries.

This paper examines the profile of current library managers in academic libraries in the Philippines, identifies their hiring practices, and investigates their current practices in succession planning. It also aims to identify the factors influencing successful succession planning. An online survey was administered to determine the extent of succession planning to identify a range of factors influencing the implementation of succession planning principles among Philippine academic libraries. The results of this study prescribe best practices of successful planning to prepare the next leaders into their future roles.

Keywords: succession planning, leadership, academic libraries, librarians

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Introduction

As libraries transform and advance, they go through changes in leadership that affect service efficiency, organizational consistency, and alignment of priorities and strategies. Furthermore, challenges to the library profession and the library workforce, such as ageing library staff, generational differences, lack of middle managers, lack of qualified candidates, and shortages of skills and experience, among others, put a strain on organizational coherence (Singer & Griffith, 2010; Whitmell, 2002).

Leaders are necessary in organizations to influence people towards a desired direction. When leaders leave, organizations must ensure that there is still constancy and stability in their company. Employers must be ready and set to replace the leaders who left. Singer and Griffith (2012, p. 1) said that “to have the right people in the right place and at the right time only happens when the library has engaged in a continuous process of identifying, assessing, and developing talent to ensure leadership and management continuity throughout the organization.” This is what succession planning is all about. It is about cultivating individual's capacities in organizations, therefore empowering them to take on bigger roles and responsibilities in their work (Singer and Griffith, 2012).

In the Philippines, librarians are also confronted with similar challenges. This is further compounded by the shortage of Filipino librarians who will fill the vacant positions in libraries and information centers (Nera, Ramos and Ananoria, 2012). Library vacancies, especially in the top management positions, cannot be dealt with vacancy after vacancy (Whitmell, 2002). There must be a formal and a clear succession plan that ensures continuity in key positions.

Succession planning, as a tool for organizational development, is a useful technique for academic libraries. In view of this, this paper examines the profile of current library managers in academic libraries in the Philippines, identifies their hiring practices, and investigates their current practices in succession planning. It also aims to identify a range of factors influencing the implementation of succession planning principles among Philippine academic libraries.

Literature Review

Several works have been written and studies have been conducted on succession planning in libraries internationally, but there is paucity locally (Bridgland, 1999; Deards & Springs, 2014; Golden, 2007; González, 2013; Hatcher, 1997; Nixon, 2008; Rutledge, LeMire, Hawks, & Mowdood, 2016; Schreiber & Shannon, 2001; Singer & Griffith, 2010; Singer, Goodrich, & Goldberg, 2004; Webster & Young 2009; Whitmell, 2002). These literature discuss the relevance of succession planning in libraries and the ways to develop people to take on leadership roles.

Succession planning, according to Singer and Griffith (2010), is a “systematic effort by the library to ensure continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement” (p. 1). It is therefore designed to be incessant and owned by management. Singer et al. (2004) believe that for succession planning to work, there must be key imperatives to be fulfilled, namely: commitment of top management; ownership; a vision for the

organization's future; status of present conditions; openness to nontraditional sources of talents; and, a well documented training and development program (pp. 39-40).

In the Philippines, it is observed that there is difficulty for libraries to look for a replacement when one retires or resigns due to reasons, such as, no one from within the organization is qualified to take on the job or no external candidate is applying for the position. The vacancy would sometimes remain to be unoccupied for several months, or years. Moreover, the relevance of succession planning is overlooked by management, resulting therefore to undocumented or non-existent succession plans. For libraries to move forward, they must be prepared for what the future holds.

According to Whitmell (2001), effective succession planning strategies should include, among others, the following: a formalized managerial and supervisory training; job rotation and regular movement between departments and positions; support for training and education; a strategy for individual career movement; formal and informal feedback; formal evaluation periods; mentoring program; management support for employees' career goals; and, open communication among all employees in all levels.

Methodology

Target respondents of this study were directors, university librarians, chief librarians and head librarians from 179 academic libraries in the Philippines. The data were collected in June 2016 through an online survey questionnaire consisting of three parts, namely: (1) characteristics of library managers, (2) hiring practices of academic libraries, and (3) current practices of library succession planning. The survey questions were adopted from the studies of Rosenwald and Wendell (2013) and Galbraith, Smith and Walker (2012). Personalized emails with the URL of the online survey were sent to 85 library managers. Call for participation to answer the online survey was also posted on Facebook pages of some library associations and e-groups. A total of 99 responses were collected yielding a response rate of 55.3%. After excluding invalid responses, 89 responses were analyzed using SPSS.

Profile of Library Managers

Respondents of the current study were asked to indicate the type of organizational structure of their library. Seventy (70) respondents described their library as a flat organization with an average of five librarians per library. Academic libraries that are considered hierarchical organizations employ an average of 23 librarians per library. As noted by Whitmell (2005), the size of an organization can significantly influence its "ability to implement long-term workforce plans" due to time constraints and "minimal in-house capacity" to mentor potential successors (p.135). The library director or university librarian is the highest position among the hierarchical library organizations. The majority of the respondents (58.4%) are master's degree holders while a few hold doctorate or PhD units.

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of library managers in academic libraries. The mean age of top library managers in this study is 47 years; 40 years for mid-level; and 35 years for low-level managers. Consistent with the study of Galbraith et al. (2012), department/section/unit heads are younger than top- and middle-level managers. The

library directors and university librarians tend to be older as they are required to possess more experience in leadership and management. Of the top-level managers, the youngest director or university librarian is 24 years old while the oldest is 68 years old, which is beyond the retirement age. Twenty percent (20%) of the total respondents are 50 years or older and will retire in the next five to ten years.

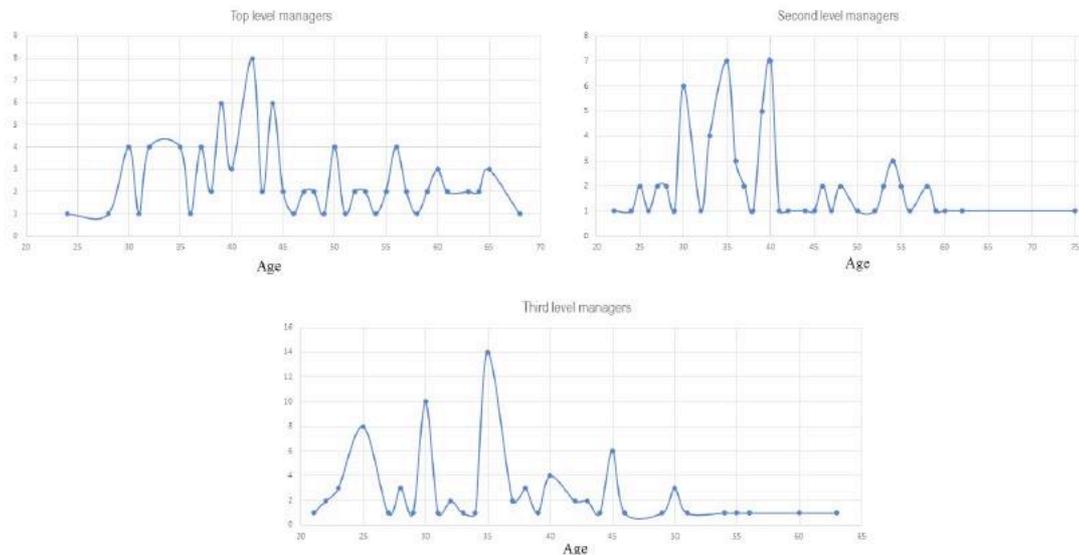


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Library Managers

Hiring Practices of Academic Libraries

As described by Galbraith et al. (2012, p. 222), succession planning involves “selection and training of internal employees for key leadership positions”; thus, it implies that when an organization has a succession plan, such gives a preference to hiring internal candidates. Respondents were also asked whether their libraries have preference to hire internal or external candidates for library management positions. Furthermore, they were asked if they have employed internal and/or external candidates. Figures in Table 1 show that while many respondents prefer to hire internal employees for management positions, they indicated no preference to internal and external candidates in the actual hiring process. Of the 89 respondents, 67 (75%) of them have no written policy that offers a preference to internal candidates. Moreover, 85% of the total respondents do not have a written policy that offers a preference to external candidates. On the average, only 23% of the managerial positions were filled by internal candidates over the past five years. Surprisingly, only 10 academic libraries have consistently hired internal candidates to fill vacant positions. Almost all of these libraries are private organizations and have a flat structure.

| | Internal candidates | | External candidates | | No preference | | Not applicable | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|---------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | Preference | Practice | Preference | Practice | Preference | Practice | Preference | Practice |
| Top-level management | 54 | 22 | 15 | 26 | 19 | 41 | 1 | 0 |
| Second-level management | 46 | 7 | 15 | 21 | 21 | 43 | 7 | 18 |
| Third-level management | 41 | 14 | 21 | 29 | 20 | 38 | 7 | 8 |

Table 1. Preferred and Actual Hiring Practices of Academic Libraries

Tables 2 presents the reasons for hiring internal candidates for the top-level management positions. For academic libraries that hire internal candidates or both internally and externally, respondents perceived that the transition would be easier as internal candidates already understand the culture, strategic goals, and values of the organization. A quick, orderly and clean transition could therefore minimize disruptions in the workflow when managers leave the institutions (Galbraith et al., 2012; Hopper, 2011; Trickel, 2015). Likewise, respondents believed that hiring internally improves the morale of library staff and encourages retention of exceptional people. Weare (2015) argued that when an employer gives preferences to internal talents, it recognizes and appreciates the value of the employees. Furthermore, respondents would also hire internal candidates as they have loyalty and commitment to the library and university.

| Reasons | # of respondents | % of 69 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------|
| The transition is easier because internal employees understand the library's culture, strategic goals and values. | 18 | 26.1 |
| Hiring internally is a good way to improve employee morale and retention. | 16 | 23.2 |
| A sense of duty because internal employees are loyal and committed to our library. | 14 | 20.3 |
| Employees are well prepared for leadership opportunities. | 13 | 18.8 |
| When we hire internally, we get the most qualified individuals. | 5 | 7.2 |
| We have a practice of favoring internal candidates. | 3 | 4.3 |

Table 2. Reasons for hiring internal candidates for the top-level positions

On the other hand, 11 respondents revealed that they would hire external candidates “who can offer a fresh perspective or new ideas from other libraries (new blood).” Some respondents claimed that external candidates would be more qualified. Others said that internal candidates who might be qualified for vacant positions often do not apply. More so, library managers would hire external candidate to bridge a leadership maturity gap particularly when the best internal candidate is not yet ready to assume the position and the responsibilities (“Top 10 Reasons to Consider External Candidates,” 2016).

Perceived Importance and Succession Plan

Almost 80% of the total respondents have no written succession plan. The majority of the respondents (52%) believed that succession planning is extremely important or very important (see Table 3). When respondents were asked to describe their succession plan, 39 (43.8%) respondents stated that their succession plan is not very well established. They do not apply succession planning principles, but they provide general training for all librarians. Some respondents (19, 21.3%) have a well-established succession plan wherein librarians were given specific opportunities to develop their leadership and management skills. Few respondents occasionally practice succession planning principles, but not very consistent. Probably, these respondents do not have a written succession plan to guide them in managing succession. Results also indicate that a gap between the perceived importance and practice of succession planning exists.

| Respondents | Not at all important | Low importance | Slightly important | Neutral | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------|----------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Without written succession plan | 6 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 16 | 15 | 20 |
| With a written succession plan | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 6 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 20 | 21 | 26 |

Table 3. Importance of Succession Planning

Planning the Succession of Key Positions

While the primary responsibility for succession planning lies on the hands of top-level managers, the majority of the respondents said that all librarians participate in the succession planning. However, 35 (39.3%) respondents mentioned that “planning is only done after the current director/university librarian/chief librarian/head librarian has announced he/she is leaving or retiring soon.” Moreover, 33 (37.1%) respondents said that planning is done before the retirement/resignation of library managers, and is an ongoing activity. Only three respondents do not plan at all.

When respondents were asked if they could identify someone as director/university librarian/chief librarian/head librarian immediately, the vast majority (72, 80.9%) of the respondents said that they could. On the other hand, it would just take them one to two months to identify a permanent successor. Ten (10) out of 89 respondents answered that they could identify their permanent successor in just one day. Interestingly, nine of these respondents do not have a written succession plan.

Succession Planning Activities

This study also attempted to evaluate the succession planning efforts of the academic libraries being studied. Authors of this study modified and adopted the succession planning scoreboard of Rosenwald and Wendell (2013). A five-point Likert scale was used to rate each of the 10 statements associated with succession planning process

(see Table 4). Of the total respondents, 43.8% garnered scores 35-45, which indicate that these academic libraries should assess the activities with lower scores to determine where to focus succession planning efforts. Scores show that 25.8% of the 89 academic libraries could be at serious risk. These libraries should start developing their succession plans and identify key activities to improve their situations. Only seven respondents yielded scores of 46-50 which means that their libraries are in excellent condition to manage succession.

| Scores | Interpretation | # respondents | % of 89 |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------|
| 46-50 | The organization is in excellent condition to manage succession. | 7 | 7.9 |
| 35-45 | Assess the lower scores to determine where to focus succession planning efforts. | 39 | 43.8 |
| 29-34 | The organization may be at risk of struggling through a potential transition. Determine where it needs to start to create a viable plan for succession. | 20 | 22.5 |
| 28 or less | The organization could be at serious risk. Begin now to create a succession plan and identify key activities to improve the situation. | 23 | 25.8 |

Table 4. Succession Planning Scores

| Succession planning activities | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Frequently | Always |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|------------|--------|
| The top-level management initiates discussions about leadership and succession planning with the middle/low level management. | 16 | 19 | 28 | 17 | 9 |
| The management team explains the process of selecting a successor and rationale to library staff. | 20 | 20 | 26 | 19 | 4 |
| Your library evaluates and manages staff performance. | 3 | 3 | 12 | 23 | 48 |
| Your library makes an inventory of its librarians' skills, experience and career interests. | 10 | 8 | 20 | 32 | 19 |
| Your library identifies potential talent and develops staff at the middle and low levels. | 7 | 8 | 18 | 33 | 23 |
| The middle-level management in your library have access to various opportunities to develop their leadership potential (i.e. mentoring) | 4 | 8 | 20 | 34 | 23 |
| The top-level management identifies interested librarians in leadership and assesses their capabilities. | 13 | 12 | 23 | 26 | 15 |
| Your library has a strategy in place for recruiting, orienting and developing new library managers. | 9 | 11 | 25 | 29 | 15 |
| The top-level management encourages librarians to work in teams to foster knowledge transfer. | 6 | 8 | 21 | 27 | 27 |
| Your library evaluates its succession plan. | 23 | 17 | 23 | 18 | 8 |

Table 5. Succession Planning Activities

As shown in Table 5, more than 50% of the respondents said that their libraries evaluate and manage staff performance. The bulk of the respondents mentioned that

their libraries frequently perform the following activities: conduct an inventory of librarians' skills, experience and career interests; provide opportunities for middle-level management to develop their leadership potential (i.e., mentoring); identify interested librarians in leadership and assess their capabilities; create a strategy for recruiting, orienting and developing new library managers; and encourage librarians to work in teams to foster knowledge transfer. Furthermore, the following activities are rarely performed in the libraries: top-level management rarely initiates discussions about leadership and succession planning with the middle/low level management; the management team explains the process of selecting a successor and rationale to library staff; and, library evaluates their success plans.

Opportunities to Potential Talents

Respondents were further asked if their libraries implement succession planning principles, such as, providing on-the-job leadership opportunities (e.g. project leadership assignments, temporary managerial assignments, etc.) and providing job-specific training (e.g. training specific to job duties, general library conferences, or library webinars, etc.) for potential successors. In general, academic libraries in this study frequently offer on-the-job leadership opportunities to potential successors. This means that there is about 70% chance that librarians could have this opportunity. On the other hand, respondents have about 90% chance that they could have job-specific training. Ten (10) out of the 89 respondents claimed that 100% of the time, their libraries have provided the prospective successor training opportunities to hone his/her leadership and managerial skills. Surprisingly, only 16 respondents said that 100% of the time, opportunities for job-specific training were given to potential librarians. Findings show that academic libraries tend to offer opportunities for job-specific training than on-the-job leadership. Many colleges and universities offer financial support for librarians to participate in seminars, conferences and training. However, most of the topics focus on performing various library functions and too little on developing leadership competencies design for first-line or mid-level library managers.

Literature suggest that libraries should develop leadership and mentoring program for potential successors that would enable them to learn about administrative positions, enhance leadership skills, and become familiar with various leadership styles (Springs, 2014). Leadership experience may give internal candidates a competitive edge when they are being considered for top-level management positions. Potential library managers should have leadership skills in the aspects of accreditation and compliance, fundraising, legal issues and facilities management (Harris-Keith, 2016, p. 315). In addition, job-specific training program must be created to build librarians' competencies particularly in the areas of staff selection, project management, budget planning, crisis management, donor relations, and program evaluation (Bridgland, 1999; Nixon, 2008). Training and development program should be well documented as suggested by Singer et al. (2004).

Barriers to Implementation

When respondents were asked to identify the top two factors that affect implementation of succession planning principles, the majority of the respondents selected "little emphasis on succession planning" (53.9%) and "not a priority due to

other initiatives taking precedence (49.4%). As shown in Table 6, lack of talents and limited financial resources to develop internal talents were not the top two answers. It can be deduced that academic libraries have sufficient internal talents to fill vacancies in the future. As today's top-level managers would eventually leave their posts, library management should start taking all the necessary steps to prepare its future leaders and avoid getting trapped in a succession crisis. While many librarians recognize the importance of succession planning in human resource planning and management, it has not been a priority for them. Galbraith et al. (2012) also concluded that "few institutions have established succession plans that actively prepare current staff for future leadership opportunities" (p. 222).

| Factors | # of respondents | % of 89 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------|
| The executive team puts little emphasis on succession planning. | 48 | 53.9 |
| Succession planning is not a priority due to other initiatives taking precedence. | 44 | 49.4 |
| Succession planning is not part of the library's strategic goals or plans. | 38 | 42.7 |
| We do not have program in place to develop for potential leaders. | 33 | 37.1 |
| Employees show little interest in employee or leadership development. | 21 | 23.6 |
| We lack talents. | 8 | 9.0 |
| We do not have the financial resources to develop internal talent. | 6 | 6.7 |

Table 6. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Succession Planning Principles

Conclusion and Recommendation

Findings show that generally, Philippine academic library managers belong to a flat organization. Library directors and university librarians tend to be older as they are required to possess more experience in leadership and management. While many of the respondents prefer to hire internal employees for management positions, they indicated no preference to internal and external candidates in the actual hiring process. For academic libraries that hire internal candidates or both internally and externally, respondents perceived that the transition would be easier as internal candidates understand the culture, strategic goals, and values of the organization. It is also believed that hiring internally improves employee morale and retention.

Almost 80% of the total respondents have no written succession plan, but majority of them believed that succession planning is extremely important or very important in libraries, even if the executive team or top management puts little emphasis on succession planning. A good number of respondents also mentioned that planning is only done in their libraries after the current head has announced he/she is leaving or retiring soon. While it is believed that the primary responsibility for succession planning lies on the hands of top-level managers, the majority of the respondents said that all librarians participate in the succession planning.

Therefore, although library managers of Philippine academic libraries understand the importance of succession planning in their libraries and that they practice succession planning even without a written succession plan, it is imperative that clear and documented succession plan should be in place as a guide for management to ensure continuity and organizational survival.

Succession planning cannot be dealt with successfully vacancy by vacancy or individual by individual (Whitmell, 2002). Thus, programs on the discussion and understanding of the relevance of succession planning in library and information centers should be on the agenda of upper level management. To successfully manage succession, library management should start incorporating succession planning into their strategic goals and objectives. Moreover, implementation of succession planning should be encompassing all levels of management to “create a surplus of talent” (Bridfland, 1999; González, 2013, p. 413). Instead of asking “What if we train them and they leave?” library directors, university librarians or chief librarians should ask “What if we don’t train them and they stay?” (González, 2013, p. 413). Thus, a change of perspective may change the future direction of academic libraries in the Philippines. Finally, training/workshops on creating a good succession plan for library managers and librarians are also recommended.

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