Succession and Workforce Planning in Small to Mid-Size Academic Libraries in the United States

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Succession and Workforce Planning in Small to Mid-Size Academic Libraries in the United States

A Dissertation

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

By

Kaci Resau

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Dedication

Dedicated to my mother and father who have always provided unconditional support for my educational pursuits.
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Abstract

This study sought to explore the use of succession and workforce planning in small to mid-size academic libraries in the United States. Utilizing Paula Singer’s 2010 definition of succession planning, sixty-three library leaders from across the United States shared their knowledge and expertise in one-tone interviews on the library’s efforts to create “continuity in key positions, develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement.” The study uses the traditional model of public administration, new public management, and new public service to explain the findings. The participants’ perception of succession planning was positive. Though not all participants were seeking to make changes or participate in this type of planning, they acknowledged its usefulness. The findings of this study aim to assist small to medium size libraries with shaping internal policy and processes that outline a consistent transfer of knowledge, clarify job duties, create mentorship opportunities, provide internal promotion opportunities, and decrease the amount of time spent in crisis mode following abrupt organizational transitions.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Succession planning is often referenced as a corporate strategy to ensure a seamless transition in managerial positions, with the intent to identify, train, and move potential employees into internal leadership roles to provide organizational stability (University of Washington HR, 2022). Corporate organizational structures, and to a certain extent, governmental structures, lend themselves to this type of planning. For more complex or smaller organizations, like non-profits, small local governments, and libraries, the process can look more complex. The organizational structure of many libraries, specifically, prevent upward movement into leadership positions because there is simply no position to move these individuals into, to start. Much of the time, small to mid-size academic libraries are flat; there are few middle managers in this type of structure, leaving little differentiation between the workforce and high-level managers. High-level leaders then lack time and funding to put succession planning into action. Despite that, small to mid-size academic libraries are interested in this type of work to help alleviate pressures of turnover, knowledge management, and professional development gaps.

In the private sector, succession planning aims at identifying internal candidates (or sometimes external) who have the leadership skills to move into higher level management positions within the organization. This practice is most prominent with CEO or other leadership level positions that would benefit from a smooth transition. An example of this would be when Goldman Sachs identified and trained their next CEO prior to the departure of the incumbent (Tao & Zhao, 2018). Once an employee is identified in a succession plan, they receive training and development to support knowledge building and individual advancement. This leads the organization to have continuity in their key positions without falling into a crisis mode due to
turnover. In smaller organizations like small to mid-size academic libraries, succession planning can be difficult due to the lack of organizational structure, time, budget, and institutional/political constraints. Additionally, unlike many professions, librarianship lacks a workable theory to address issues of management and organizational structure. The most closely related theories would come from education and public administration. While there is no consensus on which theory should be used, connecting librarianship to public administration makes sense; libraries strive to serve their communities by creating policies, programs, and resources that greatly impact the welfare of individuals and society.

**Research Question**

This research sought to fill the information gap on succession and workforce planning in libraries by speaking with library leaders about their ideas surrounding the concept of succession and workforce planning, current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities for a more formalized process. The study answers the following research question: *How do libraries utilize workforce and succession plans for organizational management?* The population for this study was library leaders from small to mid-size academic libraries with less than 40 full-time staff. The research in this study has practical implications that can be applied within various library structures and settings. In addition, this study demonstrates how libraries can benefit from some aspects of workforce and succession planning, if not all of them.

**Research Question Significance**

Libraries of all types are often tasked with doing more with less by serving their patrons and communities with limited staff, time, and resources. The impact of this type of service is not unique to libraries, it also happens within the public sector, non-profits, and local governments. Finding ways to embed succession and workforce planning into these smaller organizations can
help to alleviate the strain of turnover, knowledge gaps, and create pathways for individual advancement in otherwise flat organizations. Progressive practices can mitigate the strain of crises including budget, workload, and catastrophes (environmental or health related) and can assist leaders with greater flexibility in planning, structure, and employee advancement.

Theory

This study utilized an interpretative stand qualitative approach through one-to-one interviews with library leaders. The focus was to encourage leaders to have both intellectual and practical perceptions of issues that they were facing related to succession and workforce planning using meaning-making leadership (Lim, Brower & Berlan, 2021). Additionally, this study used triangulation, or the application of different theories to the data to explain succession and workforce planning in libraries. Triangulation is used in public administration to help understand phenomena (Patton, 1999). By using triangulation, this study was able to leverage various theories and models of public administration against the interview results on succession and workforce planning. The traditional model of public administration, new public management, and new public service were used to explain the findings, detail the historical state of library structure and management, and provide suggestions for improved practices in workforce and succession planning.

Approach

This study used qualitative and a purposive sample to gain more detailed knowledge about the way workforce and succession planning is used or understood by library leaders in small to mid-size academic libraries. Potential participants were identified using the library portion of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) survey. The purpose of using IPEDS was to identify libraries with a full-time staff of less than 40, who fell into a small
to medium size Carnegie Size Classification (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, (n.d.)), and only institutions that were Title IV funded were included. To locate contact information for library leaders, public facing institutional websites were used to identify e-mail addresses, job titles, and leadership positions. An initial 466 candidates were randomly chosen to participate in the study and 63 completed the interview process. It was determined that the 63 interviews allowed the study to reach saturation and additional candidates did not need to be interviewed for the project. The interviews were semi-structured, 30–40-minute interviews conducted over Zoom. The interviews were transcribed, and pre-determined structure deductive coding was used for this project. The research provided significant insight into succession and workforce planning in academic libraries and explained how the ideas, examples, and public administration theory can help guide library leaders to create workforce and succession plans for their organization.
Chapter II: Literature Review

In organizational management, succession planning refers to the strategies developed to transition leadership roles from a departing employee to a new employee. Often, succession plans will identify internal candidates within the organization who have leadership skills and the potential to excel in leadership roles. Those employees are trained and developed by the organization, and then are moved into the role after the leader departs. Succession plans in libraries are similar, but less common. This chapter discusses succession planning as a strategy in the corporate and public sectors, the benefits and challenges of this type of planning, and the theories of public administration that can help to explain succession planning and workforce planning practices in libraries.

For that corporate world, Rothwell (2015) describes succession planning as a strategy that allows for effective performance in the organization’s top level to ensure that business can continue when key people need to be replaced. For Rothwell, succession planning by itself is not a strategy designed to touch everyone, but instead workforce planning is the rule of the thumb for the organization. Rothwell (2008) describes succession planning in the government sector as more difficult due to the rules and regulations, and/or bureaucratic red tape. Besel et al. (2021), discuss succession planning in non-profit organizations. The work on succession planning in this sector is certainly being done, but it does not mean that the board is involved, or that the board thinks that work is useful.

Wolfe (1996) sees succession planning as a way to identify important leadership-level positions, provide opportunities for advancement, and have those leaders prepared for those key leadership positions, which then allows the company to function with ease. In Section 4, Wolfe does indicate that not all positions that are deemed “key” are at the highest level, but, because
decisions are often made at those high levels, it becomes important for a succession plan to exist in those instances. Wolfe argues that other positions within an organization can be considered “key,” and those are positions that may be at any level, but, if left unstaffed, would impact the company at the service or production level. Hanson (2012) argues that succession planning is generational. In looking at turnover in government sectors, succession planning became useful as technology the scope and dynamics of a position.

Fayol (1916) is one of the earliest scholars to look at succession planning via the 14 points of management. For a succession plan to be successful, individuals must be prepared for those management roles and, if they are not trained or do not have experience, the stability of the organization is threatened. Carson & DelGrosso (2021) modernize Fayol’s approach by looking at the five categories of position within an organization that should be strategically planned, and they include “administrative, financial, information technology, legal, and professional.” This approach does make sense. Not only does it focus on key decision makers, but it also looks at individuals who keep an organization or department running.

Many organizations use this corporate model of succession planning. The United States Postal Service (2014), for example, created a succession program to address the large number of executives that would be retiring. The purpose of the program was to create continuity in positions by identifying leaders who could be moved into higher management roles. While this program had buy-in from some management, others worked too slow on the program or did not identify potential employees by the deadline. Like all succession plans, not everyone is going to feel comfortable looking for the talent that will eventually replace them. This program went further than some succession plans and did identify early career, high performers who could be placed into a longer leadership pipeline.
Succession planning takes a lot of work, and a lack of succession planning is derived from poor planning. Fernandez Araoz, Nagel, and Green explain that poor succession planning can lead to employee turnover, even before those employees were expected to depart (2021). Typically, succession planning is an internal leadership pipeline, but sometimes, succession plans may include outsiders or individuals who are recruited, or at the very least identified, as a potential successor. All employee development has costs, but the authors argue that excessive turnover and outside recruitment have a higher cost than creating a succession plan within a leadership pipeline. In addition, based on their research, external searches bring in leaders that lack organizational/institutional knowledge. While these outsiders may look great on paper, they are more likely to be part of turnover than internal hires. Still, this article focuses on those high-level executive leadership positions.

A broader look at organizational planning is outlined by Kent Myers (2021). Using the example of the City of Fredericksburg in Texas, Myers looks at the succession plan built by the local government. In this example, the city identified potential future leaders and provided training that included internal and external classes and leadership training. While the city started with a higher ranked position, the program expanded across the organization. The goal was to look at structural planning and to determine if employees would respond better to such a plan and show more commitment to their organization. Myers determined that employees who worked in organizations with succession plans tended to have higher levels of commitment than those who did not. An interesting note about this study is that “31% of respondents were unsure whether their employer even had such a plan” (Myers, 2021). This is an important note to consider as employers look to tap employees for a leadership or succession pipeline. If not, all employees know of the existence of such a program, leadership may be missing out on talent.
Other corporate endeavors look at succession planning as a way for a business to continue. For example, a 2020 article in *Chiropractic Economics* looked at how succession planning can help to provide a successful turnover for private practice when someone retires or is unable to fulfill that role anymore. In the article, Stevens (2020) points out that succession plans in this case are more akin to disaster management. Stevens notes that plans can not only help to ensure a successful transfer to a new owner, but also that key positions can remain filled. While this is a corporate focused article, it is interesting to look at from a library perspective. Libraries, like small private practices for law, healthcare etc., have a limited number of employees who serve core functions. Succession planning then becomes an integral part of risk management for the organization. The author notes that key positions can include assistants or administrative professionals in the office. Since smaller organizations tend to have less executive function, the plan is more akin to organizational planning. ALTamimi, Agarwal & Hammer (2017) note that government organizations are looking to not only streamline revenue streams and ensure continued service, but they also want to ensure continuity and loyalty within the agency.

Succession planning can also lead to more opportunities to diversify the workforce and provide more equity and inclusion (Bullock, 2021). However, a 2001 study on succession planning in 128 companies with less than 50 employees, showed that no female successor was chosen for any of the existing leadership roles (Martin, 2001). More recent research shows that succession planning includes plans to honor diversity and inclusion (Walker, 2020), (Sanchez-Rodriguez, 2021). By diversifying succession planning, it becomes possible to expand the talent pool and improve processes (Greer & Virick, 2012). The Manitoba Government utilized succession planning in 2013 that was occupation-specific by incorporating internship placements designed around mentorship, diversity, and inclusion efforts across all levels of the organization.
(Profiles in Diversity Journal, 2014). Other state and local governments’ mentoring programs have also been built into succession plans including the Delaware State Personnel Office Mentoring Program, New York State Mentoring Programs, Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, and Wisconsin City/County management Association. (Reeves, 2010). Noting the baby boomer retirement that is occurring, and the need for diverse recruitment, succession planning allows for organizational contingencies and training. Gudweich (2012) considers the role that mentoring can play in succession planning in smaller federal agencies. Through research, it was determined that for succession planning to be successful, there needs to be strong ties to mentorship and higher rates of employee morale. Flynn (2006) notes that for succession planning to work as a support to government, it must also include different actors within the agency that can influence decision making. Moffitt (2007) looks at the City Management Institute (CMI), a program in Sacramento, California that created a succession plan that provides training and developmental opportunities for supervisors and managers in the city.

**Traditional Model of Public Administration**

Libraries lack a theory to truly ground their work in and, by incorporating public administration organization models and theory into their work, academic library leaders can mitigate some of the issues related to succession planning. Historically, libraries could most often be linked to a traditional, or classical model of public administration. Max Weber believed traditional forms of public administration to be the most effective way to run government. Weber’s focus was on the behavior and individuals in social situations and contexts and provides six principles of bureaucracy: rationality, hierarchy, expertise, rules-based decision making, formalization, and specialization. In looking at how the bureaucracy worked, Weber noted that officials completed specialized tasks that helped the mechanism, or government, work. Without
the official completing those tasks, the mechanism could not move forward (Weber, 1946). In the case of specialization, librarians may wear many hats, but often specialize in a particular aspect of librarianship. While a cataloger may work the public service desk, their main skillset in cataloging makes them an important piece of the library mechanism. Without the cataloger, patrons could not discover resources and information, and the library would be wasting funds on items that would never be discovered. W.L. Guttsman pointed to specialization in 1973 when looking at the University of East Anglia’s library. Librarians were hired based on academic background and those individuals were made subject specialists in their field of expertise (Guttsman, 1973). This practice still exists today. In some libraries, this is called a library specialist and in others, library liaisons. The modern-day liaison is tasked with moving beyond collection management decisions based on academic specialization, and instead forming relationships with departments, units, or students across an academic institution (Crumpton, 2015). Liaisons often operate within the reference or instructional unit within the library. They are required to have some subject expertise so that they can assist students, faculty, and staff with projects, resource navigation, collection development, and potentially be embedded into courses (Moniz, Henry, & Eshleman, 2014). Guttsman describes librarians as a working team and that individual achievement cannot be isolated from the library. This directly aligns with Weber’s idea of officials as a cog in the wheel. Librarians have traditionally held this same role. Interestingly, Guttsman points to the same problems in workforce and succession planning that exists in libraries today, including job satisfaction, individual advancement, and knowledge gaps. Despite this, Weber understood that this time of administration could limit the potential for individuals and create a routine that becomes repressive (Fry, 2014, 23), something that can be seen in present day library organization.
Luther Gulick believed that large scale organizations needed to have a division of work among employees, and that division of labor saved time. Gulick argued that dividing work according to ability allowed for specialization and saved time, as the individual only focused on their task and not the product overall (Gulick & Urwick, 2003). Gulick explained that proper governance included the ability to appropriately plan, organize the unit, make smart staffing decisions, assign managers who could direct the work of the unit, coordinate across units, report back on the progress and failures of the unit, and to maintain a budget (2003). Not much has changed overall in the way that academic libraries structure themselves, though the work has evolved with technology.

Frederick Taylor focused his work on the management of organizations and looking at the individual worker. His approach of scientific management looked at how productivity could be impacted by putting in place proper procedures and incentives. His work can perhaps best explain the way most libraries are organized. A 1969 dissertation on library organizational structure by PH Spence shows that not much has changed. Spence explains that libraries specialize in units of work like cataloging, electronic resources management, reference, circulation, serials etc. and divide work between professional and non-professional staff (Spence, 1969). Professional staff often hold a Master of Library Science (or similarly named) degree, whereas non-professional staff do not have a formal degree. Work is divided based on unit (i.e., Public Services, Technical Services, Reference/Instructional Services, and Archives/Special Collections) and within that unit, professional and non-professional staff have varying, but specialized, tasks. Among professional staff in an academic library, there may be additional distinctions between tenure-track and non-tenure track (Hartnett, Arant-Kaspar, vanDuinkerken, 2019). Within the same library this can create confusion, as often the labor produced by both
types of employees could be considered the same. In looking at how to streamline library services, Dougherty noted scientific management as the way in which libraries specialize (Dougherty, 2008).

**New Public Management**

Other types of public administration models can be seen in aspects of library management and organizational structure. New Public Management (NPM) looks at how borrowing from the private sector can improve organizational management. Dwight Waldo contended that the government should be designed to serve the people. In order to do that, two things must occur: the development of policy and the workforce planning that dictates how that policy will be implemented (Otenyo, Lind, & Jones, 2006, 130). Waldo goes on to describe the Scientific movement as a series of generalizations. NPM theories use a variety of contracts and outsourcing methods that are designed to promote efficiency, effectiveness, and cost savings (Ward, 2007); something that libraries rely on. NPM has particularly played a role in Higher Education, and academic libraries have followed suit. The goal of NPM in education is to shift towards privatization, automate, and create a more intentional agenda (Hood, 1991). Geyer (2002) noted that libraries are tasked with serving different populations and how those populations are served is influenced by broader institutional leaders. Researchers in libraries have noted the changes in service models from the typical classical public administration to NPM’s more patron-focused, on-the-go style of service (Nicholson, 2019). This type of service has been called the “McDonaldization of libraries” (Quinn, 2015), “Order-to-Go” (Boedigheimer, 2020), and “Just-In-Time” or “Just-in-Case” (Nicholson, Pagowsky & Seale, 2019). To meet the demands, outsourcing of services has been part of libraries for years. Outsourcing provides shelf-ready materials, thereby eliminating some or all traditional technical
services related work (Tomlin & Kandarasheva, 2014), (Wilson & Clover, 1997), (Dunkle, 1998), (Emery, 1998), (Crump & Carrico, 2001) and provides services like reference, access, and circulation through commercial vendors (Matsuoka-Motley, 2011), (Renaud, 1997), (Romanos de Tiratel, 2001). Ward (2003) noted that public libraries have also taken on the practice of outsourcing public library management to private firms. While this is not prevalent in an academic library, it still presents the point that in some cases, libraries are no longer run by professionally trained librarians, and may be managed by someone in a different unit with little to no library experience. Merging libraries with information technology departments was popular in the mid- to late-2000’s to streamline services (McKinzie, 2007), (Mitchell & Watstein, 2007), (Foster, 2008).

**New Public Service**

The New Public Service provides flexibility in theory allowing for varied approaches. This approach uses multiple tests of rationality, looks at shared values, is citizen focused, designed to serve, builds coalitions through a multifaceted approach, remains accountable, collaborates, and is contributive within society (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Geyer (2002) described the need to re-evaluate what stakeholders need, be it high level leadership at the institution level or at the student programmatic level and find ways to create different service models to create efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries were forced to re-evaluate their service models to meet their new patron needs. Digital technology and service delivery became prevalent and required collaborative, multi-faceted approaches (Agostino, Arnaboldi, Diaz Lema, 2020), launching new digital ways to communicate with patrons through chat service (Nelson Decker & Chapman, 2021). Academic libraries have also shown aspects of new public service when looking at ways to advocate for
collaboration and consultations within the learning environment (Reale, 2018), and improving academic social networks (Chen, 2020).

For libraries, succession or workforce succession planning comes with a variety of challenges, particularly when it comes to the uniqueness of individual organizations. Libraries, like many organizations, are not one size fits all; they vary in standards based on locality and organizational mission. Most literature available is on corporate succession planning, whether it be business, healthcare, or even government. Given the uniqueness of individual corporate entities, a corporate approach to succession planning can fit the needs of a library even though it was created for corporate environments. Carson & DelGrosso described the 5 categories of needs related to succession planning in a corporate environment: administrative, financial, information technology, legal, and professional. In a library, administrative work, or daily operations, often falls to an administrative assistant or is combined with services that are provided by public access staff and librarians, the individuals whose work is necessary to provide daily service to patrons. Financial management is either left to the administrative assistant or to individuals within an acquisitions department as most of these functions have crossover. The tasks of paying bills and acquiring materials or resources are key functions of a library. In an increasingly digitized world, information technology has become a very key part of library service needs; whether public/access services staff are doing that work or dedicated IT professionals, having a plan in place can ensure an ease of transition. For libraries, legal representation is often the attorney or legal advisor that does work on behalf of the institution or parent organization (whether in-house or external). Finally, professional needs fall to the members of the staff that carry out professional duties that are needed to ensure services within the library continue; this could be a myriad of people. From a high leadership role like a director, or University Librarian,
to reference librarians, maintenance technicians, and custodians. Specialized libraries may have different professional duties and needs than a public or academic library. For example, best practices for management, succession planning, and administration in law libraries was outlined by Yemisi Dina in 2015.

Succession planning in libraries must integrate with organizational planning and strategic initiatives (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016). Singer & Griffith (2010) noted that succession planning is an ongoing process, not a one-time thing. To be successful, libraries must identify key vacancies. While the authors include senior-level positions, they also include key positions throughout the organization. Singer & Griffith argue that it is important to not only have one person identified for senior positions, but 1-3 people (2010). In a study of Canadian libraries (2015), Janneka Guise looked to find themes in succession planning. Guise visited six libraries that were members of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) and conducted 89 one-hour interviews. Participants came from various areas of the organization and held a variety of positions. When asked how succession planning is happening at their libraries, many participants responded with case-by-case types of answers. Some indicated the plan was more akin to crisis management, or reactive to a situation that had occurred. When it came to responsibility, all the respondents tended to hold the top-level leadership accountable for this type of work; some, however, included human resources and advocated for a group responsibility approach across all levels in the organization. This shared responsibility approach seems to sidestep many of the corporate programs, perhaps barring the mentorship programs implemented in government programs described in this literature review. The participants were asked about communication surrounding succession planning and the responses ranged from vagueness in communication to no communication at all. A question on professional
development was aimed at determining whether employees were being identified for talent or provided opportunities to train for leadership positions. Most of the answers were that the libraries or leadership did not do a good job of identifying internal talent, and that things like internships, mentorships, or cross-training were not available. Researchers have noted the importance of mentoring as a mechanism for succession planning in order to allow librarians to work effectively in the workplace (Omowale & Spears-Frontin, 2022), (Leuzinger & Rowe, 2017), (Galbraith, Smith & Walker, 2012).

Goldman (2020) looked at how California State University conducted work on succession planning and the perception of planning at the administrative level. In this case, the author identified six deans that were given pseudonyms for privacy purposes. The author noted that two baby boomers were chosen and the remaining four were from Gen X. The author described the rising number of baby boomers reaching retirement and the need to address that through succession planning. Even still, from this study we see that Gen X holds a variety of other leadership positions which means that this problem will be cyclic unless addressed early on.

Siewert & Louderbeck (2019), describes the need for strategic planning, assessment, and succession planning for more technical roles in libraries. Technical services departments in libraries often house the acquisitions, catalogers, licensing experts, and digital and technical troubleshooting personnel. The importance of knowledge transfer planning can help libraries that experience turnover and retirements in this highly technical piece of the organization. Louderbeck, despite trying to study different types of libraries, received survey responses from mostly academic libraries, somewhat skewing the results of her study. In those technical services departments, respondents had been employed between 2-53 years, with most responses coming
in around 40 years or more. This is a significant amount of not only technical expertise in positions, but also institutional knowledge. In these cases, knowledge collection is an important part of ensuring a succession plan or workforce plan is successful. Singer, Goodrich, & Goldberg (2004), described succession planning as a way to smooth transitions throughout the library. One way to do this is to create new soft skills training that focuses on specific leadership elements, to identify critical technical positions, and to create a development plan (i.e., how can you develop the talent you need internally to fill these positions), other researchers encourage leveraging talent (Bugg, 2023).

To build a successful succession plan in a library it is integral to have support from top level management, an understanding of the present conditions within the organization, an acknowledgement of the needs of the library, and a commitment to the process (Singer & Griffith, 2010). It is also important that libraries consider hiring internally in lieu of the cultural tendency to look outside of the organization for new candidates (Goldman, 2020). Some argue that such planning begins in library school when librarians earn their (Master of Library Science) degree. Michelle Green calls for the need for Librarian Residencies to be part of succession planning. These short-term residencies are designed to train brand new librarians for positions within the library in anticipation of retirements or employee turnover (Green, 2018). Economic impact trends and budget cuts can also impact succession plans in libraries and limit the opportunity to create residencies or fill vacancies (Blakesley, 2011). Developing buy-in from top level management can help to alleviate some of these challenges.

Creating an environment for growing an internal pipeline is important to succession planning. Singer & Griffith (2010) use the Master of Library Science (MLS) degree as the gateway for progression. This takes away from the practical experience that can be more
beneficial to the library degree and exacerbates the questions around whether the MLS is necessary for library positions. Goldman noted that several participant-deans were interested in planning that would help associate deans move into dean roles. This would be a favorable argument in academic libraries (Goldman, 2020), but so should a plan be created to replace the positions under the top-level management. Other challenges that exist are the roles within the organization and where the reporting lines are within the structure. In Special Libraries (i.e., medical, law, etc.), the reporting line may be within a division or department that performs different activities or services. Workforce planning can be made more difficult when the structure of the organization is too complex (Whitmell, 2005; Bechet, 2008). It can be difficult for employees to think about others who might replace them, or for them to consider themselves replaceable. To combat these fears, Peet (2018) recommends creating room for staff to grow and move around into roles they find interesting. For instance, Peet cites a program at the Sacramento Public Library in California that creates a cohort, or leadership development plan, that included workshops, homework, and self-reflection. The San Francisco Public Library created the Future of Libraries Forum that pulled staff from all areas who could contribute to community engagement, facilities, and technology among other things. Baltimore County Public Library in Maryland created internal advisory groups that were called internal learning opportunities for staff. Those interested could join the advisory group and participate in decisions in those areas. Murray (2007) argues that a lack of succession planning negates strategic planning in libraries.
Chapter III: Methodology

This research sought to understand the role that systemic workforce and succession planning plays within academic libraries. The study took place in the Spring of 2022 and was conducted via audio-only Zoom interviews with library leaders in an academic setting who had knowledge of workforce and succession planning within their library. The goal was to assess factors that could potentially mitigate turnover and create more sustainable organizations. The findings of this research aim to help small to medium sized libraries shape internal policies and processes that allow for a consistent transfer of knowledge, clarification of job duties, provide mentorship and promotion opportunities, and decrease the amount of time spent in crisis mode following abrupt organizational transitions. This study will also contribute to the academic body of knowledge within librarianship and public administration, across all library types, allowing for future inquiry. This research was approached using a qualitative in-depth interview technique with anonymized responses, that included text mining, coding, and document analysis. This chapter will describe the research design used for this project, including theoretical foundations, protocols, and data collection and analysis techniques.

Research Question

The research question proposed for this project is: *How do libraries utilize workforce and succession plans for organizational management?* The research question was intentionally broad to allow practitioners to reflect on succession or workforce planning within their unique library structure. Systematic transition plans create more sustainable organizations by establishing a consistent transfer of knowledge, mentorship opportunities, and increased clarity of job duties. Organizational management typically focuses on succession planning for leadership by taking a holistic approach at workforce planning. Using this, libraries can strengthen their workforce and
decrease the amount of time spent in crisis mode following abrupt transitions. The research question postures to prove that libraries of all sizes and types can benefit from some aspect of workforce or succession planning.

**Qualitative Study**

This study used The Interpretative Strand qualitative approach, utilizing a one-to-one interview with library leaders. This approach focuses on small-scale interactions and subjective experience research to seek an understanding of a particular topic (Hessee-Biber, 2016, 22). In public administration, organizational level problem solving is often left in the hands of executive leaders, and it is up to those leaders to interpret complex issues. This idea of meaning-making leadership (Lim, Brower & Berlan, 2021) requires leaders to have both intellectual and practical perceptions of issues.

**Sampling**

A purposive sample was used in this study to gain more detailed knowledge about succession and workforce planning within academic libraries. Potential libraries were identified using the library survey portion of IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) that included a drill down to the Carnegie Size Classification, and Title IV funded institutions. Library inclusion criteria is as follows:

- Total library FTE (Full-Time) staff = less than 40
- Two-year institutions: Small (FTE*) between 500-1,999 and medium (FTE*) 2,000-4,999 students at associate degree granting institutions.
- Four-Year institutions (regardless of resident status): Small (FTE*) between 1,000-2,999 and medium (FTE*) 3,000-9,999 at bachelor’s or higher degree granting institutions.
- Exclusively graduate/professional institutions: (FTE*) between 500 – 1,999 enrolled students.
- Tribal colleges and universities that are members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, regardless of FTE.

After running a report in IPEDS with this inclusion criteria, 1,717 libraries were identified for potential selection.

Participants and Recruitment

This study aimed to recruit between 10-40 library leaders for one-to-one audio-only Zoom interviews. To locate potential interviewees, the 1,717 libraries from the IPEDS inclusion report (sample) were placed in an Excel file and randomized. It was necessary to obtain the contact information for each library on the IPEDS report and utilizing public facing data on academic library websites, the names and contact information of library leaders (typically called Directors, Deans, Interim Directors/Deans, Associate Vice President etc…) were culled and added to the Excel sheet next to the institution name. In cases where a library leader or their contact information could not be identified on the website, the library was excluded and added to a separate tab within the Excel document. To ease the administrative burden of multiple responses to the call for participation, the initial call for participants included 466 potential candidates who were contacted in seven sets of e-mail contact groups via Qualtrics, staggered over the course of two weeks. The email invitation included a brief description of the study and a link to the Qualtrics form qualifying participation interest in the survey (Appendix B). Library leaders were encouraged to participate themselves or pass the survey to a member of their team that had knowledge of workforce or succession planning within their organization. Potential participants who submitted an interest survey were vetted a second time against inclusion criteria, and then were contacted via West
Chester University’s licensed Outlook application to set up a time to interview. At this time, the
potential participant was provided with a link to the Qualtrics Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). A follow up e-mail was sent 10-14 days after the initial call for participation to candidates who had not responded or had not opted out. The number of invitations sent out per contact group and the number of surveys completed are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants & Recruitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Group</th>
<th>Interview Invitation Sent</th>
<th>Surveys Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 7</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional calls for participation went out over the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. Two potential participants were derived from those calls. These social media requests did not target library leaders specifically, but the library community. However, both participants were leaders in their respective libraries. The interview interest survey linked within the social media call contained the matching questions for the IPEDS inclusion criteria. Both potential candidates met
the inclusion criteria. Since the initial call for participation resulted in interest from 82 potential interview candidates, double the amount of anticipated for the study, recruitment ceased, and no additional library leaders were contacted for participation beyond the initial 466. Candidates who responded to the survey, but did not follow up for an interview, were contacted three times, with a final call for participation two weeks prior to the close of interviews. Of those 82 potential interviews, 63 completed the interview process.

Once the informed consent was received, participants were asked to choose a meeting time using the Calendly Booking system. Calendly allowed the researcher to sync their personal / work calendar and provided real-time availability for participants. Participants could then choose open slots from Calendly without further exchange with the researcher. This system also allowed participants to update or change their desired time slot. Once a time was selected for the interview, participants were sent a Zoom meeting invitation (Appendix D) with a link to the virtual Zoom room provided by West Chester University. On the day of the interview, participants used the dedicated Zoom link to enter the meeting space. This study utilized only the audio feature and participants were asked to keep their camera turned off. The participants were read a scripted overview of the project (Appendix E), informed how the data collected would be used, and given a reminder about the recording of the interview. After the script, the researcher began asking the interview questions (Appendix F). At the conclusion of the interview, recordings were stored on the West Chester University issued Zoom account for the researcher. A transcript from Zoom was provided for each interview conducted. Zoom audio transcripts for cloud recordings included a verbatim transcript that was automatically generated. However, there were limitations with this transcription including misheard words, unintelligible sentences, and awkward spacing and timestamps. To use these transcripts, they needed to be reviewed for accuracy and edited. For this
project, the review of audio records and transcripts resulted in intelligent transcription. Incorrect words or phrases in the auto transcript were revised and, as much as possible, the participants’ words were quoted. In areas where it made sense, sections of the interview were summarized.

**Demographics**

Demographics information was collected at two points during the interview process. The first point of collection was the Qualtrics Call for Participation Survey. Potential candidates were asked to self-identify their job title, length of time in their position, institution size, and location according to IPEDS. The second point of collection was during the interview where participants were asked to identify their job title and length of position for verification purposes.

*Job Titles*

Depending on the academic structure of an institution, the leadership position title in a library will differ. The most common job title of participants were variations of the title Library Director. Additional titles included: Director of Library Services, Dean of Libraries, University Librarian, Associate Librarian, Executive Director, Associate Vice President for the Library, Interim Library Director, Interim Dean of the Library, and College Librarian. Several of the participants’ current roles included combined departmental oversight for Archives, Learning Commons, or Technology units. One participant was a long-serving Academic Librarian.

*Length of Time in Position*

Participants were asked to provide the length of time in their position. This was used to help establish a baseline understanding for time in the role, instances of succession planning, and any related succession initiatives. Identification of employment longevity provided the researcher the ability to account for initiatives that a new or interim leader may want to make but has not been able to due to the recency of their appointment/employment.
Table 2

*Participant length of time in current role*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time in current role</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 6 years</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institution Size and Location

Participants were asked to self-identify their institution’s size and location. The institution size inclusion criteria were FTE between 1,000 – 9,999. Due to pandemic related enrollment factors, some institutions fell below 1,000 FTE at the time of the interview. However, based on their previously reported IPEDS statistics, they were above 1,000 FTE for the purposes of the interview. One institution included online enrollments, which pushed the FTE to over the 9,999 thresholds. After the collection of all data, it was determined that the size of this institution did not impact responses, and therefore it was not excluded.

Table 3

*IPEDS distribution of participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPEDS Geographic Distribution</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Far West</strong> California (1), Oregon (1)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Great Lakes</strong> Michigan (5), Ohio (4), Wisconsin (1)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New England</strong> Connecticut (1), Massachusetts (7)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MidEast</strong> Maryland (1), New Jersey (1), New York (9), Pennsylvania (5)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plains</strong> Minnesota (4), Missouri (2), Nebraska (3),</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southeast</strong> Alabama (1), Florida (1), Georgia (1), Louisiana (1), North Carolina (2), South Carolina (1), Tennessee (2), Virginia (2)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southwest</strong> Arizona (2), Oklahoma (2), Texas (3)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding

The interviews were reviewed in the order that they occurred. The first three interviews were used as a “first pass” at coding for the project. After working with these transcriptions in-depth, it was determined that deductive coding would be most beneficial to the data collected. Many of the demographic and research questions were so clearly related to the definition of succession planning, a pre-determined structure was used to create the codebook. Since the scope of the project was so defined, it made sense to use structural coding techniques for the transcriptions. Figure 1 shows the codes taken from the interview questions were broken up into categories that included IPEDS coding, participant role/organization overview, and succession planning.

Figure 1

IPEDS, Participant & Organization Details, and Succession Planning Codes

Additional categories were derived from the 2010 definition of succession planning in libraries as identified by Paula Singer: “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.” Those categories included continuity in key positions, Intellectual/Knowledge Transfer, and Individual Advancement.

**Figure 2**

*Code categories of succession planning defined by Paula Singer*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuity in Key Positions</th>
<th>Intellectual &amp; Knowledge Transfer</th>
<th>Individual Advancement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work distribution</td>
<td>Knowledge Transfer</td>
<td>Mentorship Opportunities Formal? (Y/N/Unknown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency Planning Formal? (Y/N)</td>
<td>Formal Onboarding? (Y/N)</td>
<td>Mentorship Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency Planning Notes</td>
<td>Onboarding Notes</td>
<td>Other Areas of Librarianship? (Y/N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Mode Scale (1-10)</td>
<td>Job Duty Training? (Y/N)</td>
<td>Other Areas Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Notes</td>
<td>Job Duty Training Notes</td>
<td>Staff Longevity (Long-serving, new, mix)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Library Formalized Plans? (Y/N)</td>
<td>Job Duty Documentation</td>
<td>Staff Longevity Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Library Notes</td>
<td>Documentation Review</td>
<td>Hiring Practice (Internal, External, Blend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-training / Collaboration</td>
<td>Job Duties(% other duties assigned)</td>
<td>Hiring Practice Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Triangulation**

In qualitative research, triangulation uses varying methods and data sources in order to understand phenomena (Patton, 1999). Additionally, this method allows the researcher to test for validity by creating an intersection of information compiled from different sources (Denzin, 1978). This project focuses on theory triangulation, or the application of different theories to the data. The public administration theories considered in this project are the traditional model of public administration and new public service.
Chapter IV: Findings

According to Paula Singer, succession planning in libraries 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” (Singer, 2010, 1). This chapter will present the study’s findings and explain them within Singer’s defined categories: succession planning, continuity in key positions, intellectual/knowledge transfer, and individual advancement.

Succession Planning

During the interview, participants were asked whether they engaged in succession planning within their library. Participants were read Paula Singer’s definition and were asked, based on that definition, if their library had a formal succession plan. Six participants indicated that they did, indeed, have a formalized succession plan. The remaining participants said no but, with the caveat that many who said “no” to a formal plan did indicate that their library had some informal planning. While initial participant responses were set to be either “yes” or “no,” so many participants indicated that there was an informal plan in place that the final coding included “yes,” “no,” and “informal.” It should be noted here that the “informal” answer indicates there is no formalized written plan, but there are aspects of succession planning present.

Succession Planning – participant response, yes

Six participants indicated that their library engaged in formal succession or workforce planning. However, each library had a slightly different way of planning, so it is worth noting some of the more explicit planning mechanisms in place. The following participants detailed some of their formalized planning: Library BK explained their recent ladders plan for librarians that is used for promotion and to encourage internal growth. Librarians are given a I, II, or III designation and advancement between the pegs on the ladder is fostered. Non-librarian staff are also provided
a separate, but similar, promotional ladder. Library AT has a plan with two parts, first codifying processes and procedures so that all documentation is updated, and second, fostering individual advancement for employees who express an interest in staying or growing into different roles within the library.

Library AA instituted what is seen as a more traditional succession plan. All the leaders and managers in the library are creating a job succession profile for each position in the library as well as higher level leadership positions like the Dean of the college/unit. Each of the profiles has four main components: experience, knowledge and skills, leadership competencies, and personal attributes. After each of the job profiles is completed, the team will create a heat map for each role that has three categories: current status of individual, organizational risk, and replacement difficulty. Each status is given a low risk, high risk or unknown risk designation. For example, the Dean leaving the library under current status of “individual” would get a “high risk.” After this assessment, the team will identify potential replacements and, essentially, the work done will create a scorecard. If the Dean were to leave, and if someone is willing and qualified for the role, they would be moved into consideration. For instance, if the Associate Dean were qualified but didn’t want to perform that role, they would look at the next person to see if they were qualified and willing. This can also serve as an interim appointment solution. “It becomes a high-level look to see which candidates could fill important roles and assessing the readiness.”

Library AI breaks down planning into buckets with a focus on professional development and reskilling. This can be fostered through sending staff to conferences, training programs, and reskilling activities. Additionally, the library has focused on workforce documentation to aid in succession and workforce planning. Library X also uses succession planning as a workforce
planning opportunity to reskill and provide professional development opportunities to staff that can lead to growth internally or externally.

Library T described a workforce succession plan that is not entirely formalized but is starting to be put into place. The plan went into action when two people were laid off and one person retired. The participant noted how much impact that loss of knowledge had on the library. To help with this, they started taking small actions to create a shared knowledge structure and redundancy across positions. These actions included: updating individual e-mail addresses with vendors with a general library e-mail address that pushes into the ticketing system everyone has access to and moving all library workflow documentation to a shared drive. The participant noted that job descriptions were revised and re-written, positions shifted, and cross-training was implemented.

Succession Planning - participant response, Informal

Most participants indicated some sort of informal succession or workforce planning was taking place in their organization. Informal planning means that planning is not a structured or written down plan, but instead, it lives in the heads of the leader or leadership team. For example, Library I explained, “the plan is mostly in my head. If something were to happen to me and somebody else stepped in, I don’t know if they would continue doing things the same way.” Some of the informal practices that have been put in place are the encouragement of better documentation workflows and processes, using a shared system, and creating redundancy in position responsibilities. These ideas were similar to those with a formal plan, but in these informal instances, it was not a requirement for employees to engage in this way, so the application was inconsistent.
Some participants indicated that their informal plans were not consistent or supported within their organization. Library AZ, “I would say we go through times when we’re really good at documentation and then completely stopped, and then we’ll find the documentation and it’s old and irrelevant.” Library BH explained that most of the formal planning has been thwarted by the broader college administration, so creating those more formal plans can be overly time consuming and lead to a wasteful experience.

Other participants indicated that their informal plans were more focused on professional development than succession planning. Library BC has investigated different options for advancement that may not lead to managerial positions. For instance, re-writing job descriptions to allow for advancement and experience growth. Library AO focuses on creating individual professional development plans each year to help employees grow. These plans are part of ongoing professional development and performance assessment conversations. This also gives leaders a sense of where the interests are and how to gauge new opportunities or new positions. Library AF markets itself as a library where individuals come to learn/train and then move on to different institutions. “We give you as much experience as possible. We really try to provide as much training and professional development I can find, so we hire a lot of entry level librarians. For support staff, we try to get them as much training as possible that is free because our funds are limited.”

Several participants were working to incorporate workforce and succession planning into their strategic plans. Library BD noted the need to create mid-term and long-range goals to anticipate the type of positions the library will need in the future, and how they can support those efforts whether through professional development opportunities or hiring practices. Library F noted that they continue to work on a plan but, due to being a small library, what that plan looks
like can change year over year so it can be difficult to plan long term. Library AB explained that their strategic plan now focuses on the organizational culture of the library, which will require reviewing all job descriptions and looking at how individuals are supported professionally. Library N noted building out opportunities as part of their strategic plan for development. This includes identifying individual interests and seeing where those interests can be beneficial to the library. Library AN noted the importance of being conscious of this type of planning, “I’m thinking about how we can be a nimbler organization, partly because we’ve made a lot of changes to the types of positions we have, but also, to look at the upcoming retirements.” Library AU mentioned that as the institution expands, the library needs to make more formalized succession and workforce planning so that they can meet the demands of the projected growth each year.

Some participants noted that the idea of planning became more important through COVID-19 with diminished staff and moving forward with impending retirements. Library BB noted that a leader would be retiring in a few years and much of the workload that they carry is solo-based work so there is currently little redundancy or shared knowledge. The retirement has forced the participant to consider workforce and succession planning to avoid such a gap when the leader retires. Library BE noted that the person that will replace them in their leadership role was someone who showed interest and ability in strategic planning and assisting with budgeting. Therefore, more of a mentorship and training plan has been created to help develop this individual so they are position-ready when the vacancy becomes available. Library AE mentioned the challenges that exist with workforce and succession planning for smaller libraries, “It’s been challenging with cuts to staffing, and every time there is a vacancy, I must rethink about what job needs done, and we can’t always replace it with a like for like match, we sometimes must restructure. And sometimes restructuring allows us to keep individuals and maybe enhance their professional development.”
Succession Planning - participant final thoughts

At the close of each interview, participants were asked to share any final thoughts about succession or workforce planning in a general, open-ended question. Many participants expressed a desire to learn more about what other libraries were doing, and how they could create more plans. Some noted that, due to their size, this type of planning just didn’t make sense, but it was still an interesting topic to explore further. Almost all participants, regardless of whether they were interested in creating this type of plan, defined it as important work.

Library G noted that, as a new director at a smaller institution, guidance on this type of planning can be useful and powerful. Library AU mentioned that planning is harder than they thought it would be. Library X noted a change in the dynamic from a larger library to a small library, “I think it’s interesting at a small library because everyone can do a little bit of everyone else’s job.” Library BJ noted that planning is important but can be a double edge sword. “You don’t want to train someone and have them leave, but then again that’s the reality of being at a small institution with fairly low wages.” Many participants joked that if they were to be hit by a bus, no one would have any idea that they had a succession plan in their head. Participants noted that challenges like time, staff needs, and broader university plans impacted their ability to institute meaningful planning.

Continuity in Key Positions

In public and not-for profit work, continuity in key positions is critical, particularly in instances of rapid or inherent turnover. Interview topics covered in this study related to continuity in positions. This section of questioning was designed to learn more about libraries plan for continuity in key positions. Topics covered included contingency planning, work
distribution after a staff member vacates a position, anecdotal knowledge of historical plans at
other places of employment, and cross-training/collaboration.

**Contingency Planning**

Participants were asked about whether they had contingency planning in place for
emergency or disaster situations. The purpose of this question was to explore positions that
participants felt were critical and consider policies and procedures that could ensure continuity in
those key positions.

*Contingency Planning – participant response, yes*

Six libraries reported having contingency plans in place should an emergency or disaster
situation arise. Strategies varied greatly amongst these participants and included both formal and
informal plans. Library X described the *possibility* of a contingency plan as various individuals
in the library *may* have the skills to cover a lapse in a specific area. Library BK has a combined
IT/Library team and contingency plans existed for IT operations, but not for library operations.
Library AT decided that it would take on the tasks at the leadership level and request assistance
from external library departments, as necessary, so that they could arrange lunch breaks.
Library AA had more formalized plans:

I don't know why, maybe we were just in a really gloomy mood, but we started thinking
about if someone leaves who can step in tomorrow and do that person's position. So, we
have backups so everyone has their procedures documented and was cross trained so
someone could step in. We not only have that for someone's position, but we also have it
for all of our systems. If we have a key person who has, for example, our online ILS, we
have our current administrator for that system, but then we also have a backup
administrator too, and they've been fully trained. We've really tried to build that across
the entire library. As part of the succession planning, we are thinking about who can step
in on an interim basis versus a permanent basis, and making sure that we still have
redundancy in place. Even though this is looking more at leadership level, we also need
to do it for everyone in the library and just make sure we're still consistent with that.
(Library AA)
Library AI focused on the importance of documentation. When a staff member gives notice that they will be vacating the position, leadership begins preparing onboarding documents in Dropbox. The purpose of this is to create a roadmap for the incoming staff member that continuously refers to as a dynamic document; allowing them to add their own notes as the position expands or changes. For the vacating staff member, leadership will verify the documentation prior to the individual leaving, and try to get clarity on anything that presents as a mystery. An important note focused not only capturing the big picture workflows, but also the day-to-day activities:

We had someone leave after 17 years and while they had done an enormous amount of documentation of technical workflows, they had not done sort of the day-to-day things and day to day pieces. Therefore, I asked them to do that. They initially gave me two weeks’ notice, but I was able to negotiate 3 1/2 weeks and that helped a lot. You know, those are just negotiations, it just depends on the person, the needs, and who answers in the building. (Library AI)

Library T echoed the need for documentation and a centralized location for those materials. In this case, they utilize Google Drive and funnel all communications into a main library email address instead of individual email addresses. In the yearly review with the provost and budgetary team, leadership reaffirm the positions needed to ensure the library functions smoothly. Because of those open communications, positions are typically filled rapidly, which helps to alleviate some of the long-term open position issues that exist for other libraries.

Overall, takeaways in favor of contingency plans included some level of redundancy across positions and a centralized location for documentation such as workflows, important position-related information, and day-to-day activities. Open communications with external units are strongly encouraged. Not only will they help when the library is in a pinch, but they also provide context for the importance of positions and library staff.
Contingency Planning – participant response, no

Most participants did not have a contingency plan in place or did not advocate for that type of planning. A theme amongst these libraries was that the institution itself did not engage in contingency planning and that lack of planning trickles down to the library. There was an institutional mentality to sort out responsibilities on the fly and absorb the work as best as possible. Library AZ noted the leanness of libraries in general and, while their library did not have a contingency plan, it was important to at least document and codify what individuals are doing.

The uniqueness of situations makes it difficult, however, to truly plan for everything. Several participants mentioned that while they did not have a contingency plan in place, this type of planning could be useful, especially for specific roles. Library B noted that the Electronic Resources Librarian position would be a good position to have a contingency plan because “the rest of us here just don’t have the technical skillset to dig in and do that work well, we can keep things running, but it’s a duct tape and chewing gum sort of thing.” Library Y discussed the Systems Librarian as an important position that could benefit from planning because there is a large gap of knowledge within the staff right now. Library AX mentioned that the acquisitions technician, who is currently the only person authorized to make purchases, as well as two division leads were important positions for future contingency planning. Library P pointed out that losing the information services director, who manages the part-time staff and the reference desk, would create a large hole that would be difficult to manage. Library I noted unfortunate events such as death, a hurricane, and the pandemic as recent stressors they have had to manage. They utilize a shared instruction calendar so they can ensure coverage for classroom instruction, an important service-centered strategy for planning. Other participants, like Library E, mentioned
the importance of good documentation, but did not worry so much about contingency planning as a unit, thereby leaving the library director to find a way to keep things running. Building a team that has enough willpower to create good documentation and create strong relationships will help mitigate the issues that typically arise when an individual leaves the library unexpectedly. Library AP also dug into using documentation to circumvent problems with turnover, “We are very intentional about documentation including what could be considered insignificant details.”

Broader scoped strategic planning could benefit from contingency planning for leadership level positions, even though discussions and plans may be uncomfortable. Participants who had longevity amongst their staff were also less likely to have contingency planning in place. Library V spoke to this by saying that while there is longevity and a strategy of hope, if someone were to leave, the library would just have to stop doing certain things. Smaller libraries like Library K would regroup: “I will sit down with whoever is directly affected and we [will] figure out who is going to do the job in the short term.” The participant also mentioned the importance of the job of the College Administrator to advocate for position replacements, manage expectations, and communicate the impact.

When asked specifically about contingency planning, very few participants included themselves in positions that could benefit from such planning. One participant who did, Library AE, mentioned that they have no current plan for their own position, as well as the University Archivist, and creating such a plan, even if only interim, could help create a body of knowledge should something unexpected happen.
Work Distribution

Each participant was asked about how work was distributed after an individual vacates a position within their library. The purpose of this question was to gauge the impact of departures within the library and whether the library prepared for continuity in any positions within their organization. Library AD will discuss the responsibilities of the vacant position at a faculty meeting and divvy up tasks among staff as necessary. For instance, if a librarian goes on sabbatical their liaison duties must be distributed for the time they are away. Library E also distributes reference duties when a librarian vacates the role or is on extended leave; often multiple librarians will fill in with each taking one of the liaison subjects. This helps to prevent overwhelm amongst the staff.

Library AS mentioned that tasks will be distributed based on staff capacity, but also who has access to a specific resource or need. For instance, when a staff member who worked in acquisitions vacated their position, the person stepping in for those duties needed to already have access to the credit card so it limited the staff members who could fill in. Library S will determine the comfort level of the staff members to determine who has the capacity to take on which tasks of the departing staff member. Library BH conducts an exit interview with departing staff members. After that interview, the participant will meet with the immediate supervisor for that staff member and discuss needs, creating an interim transition plan, and deciding which activities can stop. In some cases, the supervisor will take on project work. Library Z will create a spreadsheet of duties that were the responsibility of the departing staff member and then those duties are assigned to different staff members based on their skills.

Participants that mentioned collaboration and cross-training tended to have more stable plans for vacant positions. Library U noted that since they consistently do cross-training in the
library, it allows staff to step in for each other as needed. Library J creates basic redundancy amongst staff to help alleviate any stress related to vacant positions. Library Y cross-trains across departments and tasks are then divided between staff and librarians.

Several participants noted that when a position vacates the task will stop until a new person can be hired. Library V described this as strategic abandonment. Due to the bare bones staff, some tasks will not get completed when a staff member departs. Library AH explained that in cases where the task cannot be stopped, those responsibilities must be delegated to those in aligning positions. This can mean that the staff schedules need to change, and it can create a double workload depending upon the position. Library D will stop non-essential duties. For essential duties, for instance, keeping the library open, they have hired temps to take on that work.

Some participants noted that as the leader of the library they would step in and complete the task until a new person could be hired. Library AX noted that as the library leader they participated in the division of essential duties. Library P and BI also pick up duties and will train people who are interested so that they can also cover the vacant tasks. Library M noted that due to their small staff their plates are already full so when someone departs the library it makes the most sense for the participant to step-in to avoid over burdening the staff.

Crisis Mode

Participants were asked how often they thought their library was operating in crisis mode. The definition of what made a crisis was left open to interpretation, though due to the timing of the interviews, the COVID-19 pandemic played a large role in many of the answers. The Crisis Mode Scale was introduced to participants so that they could indicate how often they felt their library was operating in “crisis mode” on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being all the time and 1 being
none of the time. (Note: The term crisis or time period were not provided by the researcher.) The participant was then able to provide further context to the provided score if they chose. The purpose of the crisis mode scale was to determine how the participants views the current state of their library and function as a critical thinking exercise for succession planning opportunities.

**Table 4**

*Crisis Mode Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Level*</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Level of crisis mode 1 = none of the time, 10 = all the time*

*Crisis Mode – participant response, 1-5*

Most participants chose a crisis mode level between 1 and 5 for their library, with most participants choosing between 2 and 3 on the scale. The context surrounding the scores of 1-5 were often that the library held longevity in staffing, preparations/contingency planning existed to minimize impact, and a conceptual explanation that not every problem is seen as a crisis. Conversely, participants did reveal pain points such as staffing, operating budgets, building/structure issues, and hitting capacity for services. Library AT noted that there is a rush at the beginning of the semester when patrons are trying to use all the services at the same time or during finals when students are attempting to finish their papers, but that overall, they are not operating in crisis mode. Library BB described open positions and staffing issues that cause pain points but still chose a 3 on the crisis scale, explaining that if they have the capacity to take care of students, they are okay, as they are a mission driven unit. Libraries AJ, N, K, AC, and F all noted that longevity of staff, cross-collaboration, and training benefit them when it comes to issues that may arise that affect library services. Libraries K and AJ also specifically discussed
the building structure, as being sound and comfortable, as being a contributing factor to the ease in which they can operate.

Crisis Mode - participant response, 5-10

Participants who selected 5-10 on the scale shared similar pain points to those who selected between 1-4. Budget and the political climate were some of the main areas of strain. Library AV explained that the budget for the library had been cut for 13 years, with only one increase of 2% in that timeframe. In addition to the budget cuts, the political landscape of the legislature impacts how much funding higher education and libraries receive, particularly since the legislature funds libraries with general state allocations. These budget restraints not only impact hiring and retention, but also the resource budget. If the library has limited funding, it is unable to meet the needs of its faculty and students. Additionally, lower enrollments can often mean less tuition and less funding for the library. Libraries AS, AI, AX, AD, BG, L, and O all cited budget related issues for triggering crisis mode.

Higher levels of crisis also depended on the time of year. Participants like Library AY noted that the beginning and end of the year were more likely to present strains on staff and resources. Library AZ noted, “The way I define crisis is stuff that is coming at us that we don’t have any control over,” and that crisis levels are largely in relation to tuition and the number of students that enroll each year. To mitigate crises, Library AZ talked about being more strategic in lieu of reactionary. “Instead of waiting for it to happen we’re trying to talk more about what could happen, how we could handle that to get more flexible, and make more prepared decisions. We’re practicing evidenced based decision making.” Library AF has a safety committee made up of staff and students. They hold safety training a few times a year and log incident reports. This planning helps with crisis intervention, particularly in public services situations when someone is
upset at a bill or a policy. Toxic workplace culture was cited by Libraries BD and AI as a factor contributing to more crisis within the library. Library AI, “There was a lot of communication breakdowns and toxic workplace dynamics, so I knew I had a lot to do there, but the deeper I got into it, the harder it got.”

Staffing seemed to play a large role in escalating crisis mode election. Library Y described the library as being one call away from a major crisis because it is difficult to keep the building staffed daily. Libraries D and BH discussed the demands on the staff, the great resignation following COVID-19, and short staffing as triggers for feeling in crisis mode. Libraries BH and J mentioned that the institution had a retirement incentive during COVID-19 that led to an even greater reduction in staff. Libraries J, AL, AC, and Z also talked about post COVID-19 staffing issues. Participants described staff out on medical leave or who left unexpectedly as factors that led to crisis mode in terms of staffing.

External factors were also explanations for higher rates of crisis mode. Library G discussed how a leak in the roof caused a mold outbreak in the circulating collection of books while at the same time the roof was being replaced. Then, after these building issues were addressed, COVID-19 hit, creating even more strain on the staff. A lack of understanding by the administration was cited by Library AD as a reason for a higher crisis score. Library AH also mentioned administration as a reason for choosing an 8 as a crisis score. “We are always just scrambling, always getting notified about funding at the very last second or learning about new programs that the library is expected to support at the last minute.” Library AU had similar feelings in that trying to keep up with institutional planning can be difficult to sustain, especially when the administration moves quickly when a decision at that level is made. The library then
must scramble to keep up with that demand. Library A also described changes at the leadership level of the institution as part of the reason for crisis mode.

Almost all participants, regardless of the number chosen on the scale, referenced problems that arose in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 created a strain on services, resources, and budgets. Library BD noted that COVID-19 perpetuated trauma with poor leaders and unhealthy library culture. Library V discussed the impact on public services following COVID-19 when staffing the library was competing with individual or personal needs.

**Historical Experiences**

Participants were asked if they had any knowledge of formal succession or workforce planning from work done at prior institutions. Of the 63 participants interviewed, 6 participants (Libraries AM, BF, BB, H, AT, and R) said yes, and the remaining participants said no. Library AM described their experience in other organizations in the past and with smaller teams. Much of the work related to succession planning at those organizations was to ensure that “at least someone has a vague idea of what’s going on in case someone is no longer available for some reason.” Library H noted that in their first professional position, there was an in-depth training program for new librarians that was helpful. Library R mentioned that succession planning was very much a part of management leadership at their prior institution but did not provide specifics.

While the remaining participants all noted that they had no formalized plans in previous positions, Library G noted that even though there were no specific plans, “we always knew who to go to, and we had a fairly high turnover at that institution, so we all just learned what others did and if they were gone you could do that work.” Library A described a medical library being the best at succession planning though it wasn’t formalized. The institution had a library school, which allowed library students to cycle through and train at the medical library and then move up
through career progression. Libraries AY, AJ, K, M, and B all suspected that such a program may have existed, but they were not privy to it.

Cross-Training and Collaboration

Participants were asked about internal collaboration and cross-training within their library. The purpose of this question was to get a sense on whether departments were siloed, if there was room for individual advancement across departments, and if lack of cross-training could potentially influence crisis mode due to lack of functional flexibility across units.

Cross-Training

Departmental collaboration and training were consistently mentioned across multiple libraries. Participants were asked what role cross-training and collaboration play in the library. Library BB talked about the importance of looking at organizational structure and making suggestions and recommendations based on cross-training and workflows, as well as planning for potential environmental disasters or things like retirements. Library AV mentioned that “in a small library you can’t just have someone sitting in one stagnant role.” The participant went on to explain that during the process of cross-training, it is possible to learn the interests of staff so there can be opportunities for growth and cross-train that way as well. Cross-training also allows the library to remain open when staffing shortages are an issue. By cross-training, Library G explained that any of the staff can open the library and provide basic services, or any of the faculty librarians can step in and teach a course. Libraries BJ, AV, G, U, E, BF, AQ, AA, AX, and L all agreed that cross-training is a crucial component to efficient operations.

Library AZ mentioned that, due to the complexity of librarianship, there is very little that you can do by yourself in the field. “For example, if I pick a book to buy, someone else must make that purchase, and someone else catalogs it, and someone else puts it on a shelf. So,
teamwork is important because you need a group of people who can figure it out and understand the complexity of a problem.” Library H noted that when they started their leadership role, only one person was qualified to do certain tasks with reserves and, since everyone in the access services area essentially has the same job description, they should all be able to cross-train and collaborate on those tasks, or at least have the same basic training. Library Q also noted that everyone in their Access Services is trained on basic circulation, interlibrary loan, and reserves so that anyone can perform those tasks. Several participants, Libraries E and X amongst them, also described the importance of cross-training and that it takes place one-on-one.

Collaboration

Participants were asked whether they engaged in collaboration across departments within their library. The purpose of this question was to gauge the amount of interaction among different units within the library, which could provide opportunities for individual advancement as well as a mechanism to prevent a higher state of crisis within the library.

Several participants described collaboration as occurring through a committee structure or, in Library BH’s case, informal networks of internal communications that are robust and happening without having to force them. Library AW indicated that they “have a lot of projects, initiatives, projects and procedures that touch on people across various departments and areas of work, so there needs to be ongoing communication and committees were developed to help make that happen. We don’t really have a cross-training structure or practice, as much as people kind of learning things cross departmental.” Library AH argued that the committee structure helps because staff are solving problems together and everyone must be on board with those solutions. The most common areas of training and collaboration were budget, technical services, or public services initiatives.
Other modes of collaboration included librarian and staff meetings. Library BI described meetings as a time when everyone submits agenda items a week before the day of the meeting, and then a PowerPoint presentation is created. Everyone shares during the presentation, and this is when casual cross-training occurs. Library AT described collaboration happening mostly through manuals.

Library C described periods of time as being important to considering collaboration, for instance when there is a vacancy or anticipated vacancy, it is more necessary to train and share knowledge of responsibilities. Library K noted that cross-training was emphasized a few years prior but could stand to be re-emphasized again. Additionally, the library has cross-unit teams (i.e., social justice group, instruction, resources and licensing, digitization, and outreach and communications) that are fluid and people can be voluntary members. Library D also described a form of cross unit collaboration so that all librarians can perform basic jobs in other areas in case someone leaves or is unable to come in. “Redundancy means we don’t completely lose the ability to function.” Library AU utilizes Springshare LibWizard to create asynchronous tutorials and training modules along with videos that are posted on YouTube. These efforts, along with working to duplicate knowledge across positions, allows the person being trained to feel like more than a backup.

**Challenges to Cross-Training and Collaboration**

One of the challenges frequently mentioned in relation to cross-training was staffing shortages. Library F mentioned that the institution has downsized significantly so when someone leaves, things get added to job descriptions and, while they try to do cross-training in the library, it is not always something that can be accommodated due to time and staffing needs. Library R described cross-training and collaboration as critical but sometimes difficult, “libraries can often
work in silos and individuals can be territorial in their work, so cross-training becomes difficult to introduce.” Library AL echoed that challenge and that, while cross-collaboration is necessary, it can be difficult to create staff buy-in. Library AH noted that cross-training for electronic resources and technical services troubleshooting was not effective.

Library Z, while encouraging collaborative work, also wanted to be sure that leadership was not taking advantage of staff and having them work outside of their classification, particularly in their union environment. “First, because it may be that they are not being compensated appropriately for it, and second it can create internal grievances among staff members if they are not participating, even if they don’t have an interest to.” The participant explained that a staff member without an MLS cannot work the reference desk because that is reserved for librarians with a faculty classification. Library BH described policy challenges, access to confidential data systems, and the cost/benefit in some areas as being challenges to collaborative training and efforts. Library AN noted that some cross-training occurred at the technician level but changes to the ILS system, in addition to staffing shortages, made cross-training and collaboration more difficult. Library BA also described staffing shortages and being stretch too thin as reasons that collaboration can be hard in libraries.

Intellectual/Knowledge Transfer

One of the most challenges aspects in any organization is retaining intellectual and institutional knowledge when employees move in and out of positions. How knowledge is transferred also plays a large role in preparedness for crisis situations. Interview topics covered related to intellectual/knowledge transfer were staff longevity, knowledge transfer practices, job duty documentation, and the review of documentation.
Staff Longevity

Participants were asked whether their staff were new, long-serving, or a mix of the two. A time period was not provided for what was considered new versus long-serving. The purpose of this question was to get a sense of the makeup of the staff of the organization, and how much institutional and intellectual knowledge is kept by a few versus spread throughout the library. Seven participants said that their staff was mostly new, 38 participants said a mix of new and long-serving, and 18 participants said long-serving.

Staff Longevity – participant response, mostly new staff

Libraries AW, N, and AZ all noted that there had been recent turnover that created an influx of new staff. The reasons for the turnover were retirements and COVID-19. Library L explained that gaps in leadership contributed to turnover within their organization, so most of the staff is now new.

Staff Longevity – participant response, a mix of new and long-serving staff

The participants who chose a mix of both new and long-serving staff experienced similar issues to the participants who chose new. Long-serving staff were beginning to retire, or were given retirement options during COVID-19, and this allowed for new hires. Since not all employees were near retirement or took the retirement incentives, there are still some long-serving staff within the organization. Libraries G, AI, AP, D, BC, AE, BH, BI, AO, BF, E, and AV all mentioned turnover in the past 5 years as specific reasons for a mix in the staff. An outlier for the mixed response, Library X, uses the university library program to cycle students through the workforce, but otherwise has long-serving staff.
Staff Longevity – participant response, mostly long-serving

The participants that chose long-serving explained that organizationally speaking, individuals come into their library and stay until they retire. Library AK mentioned that the library has mostly long-serving staff with some consistent turnover in a few of the access services positions, particularly during COVID-19. Individuals working in public service were often needed to come in and work within the library even during the pandemic. Libraries that offered tenure, like Library AD, saw faculty librarians stay in long-term roles. Library BB mentioned that the library has mostly long-serving staff but because of that, there are likely to be major changes in the next few years due to multiple retirements. Library F noted that when a position opens within the library, it is usually due to a retirement.

Knowledge Transfer Practices

Libraries that had long-serving staff were less likely to have knowledge transfer practices or cited more informal practices than those who had more new staff. The different types of knowledge transfer practices mentioned were shared digital documentation, retirement and anticipatory pre-planning, position specific documentation, informal sharing, intentional practical training, and communication at meetings. Challenges experienced by participants in knowledge transfer are noted at the conclusion of this section.

Shared Digital Documentation

Creating a shared space for storage of important information, statistics, and reports is key to knowledge transfer. Library T funnels information onto a shared drive. One noted example is moving the IPEDS reporting structure and detailed information into that folder. The participant explained, “It’s just really nice to know that if I would leave, the next director could come in and they just have that roadmap right there, so we really tried to lay everything out.” Library BB
echoed the movement of all documentation to a USB or Google Drive. The participant noted, “When I was hired, the previous Director left nothing, so I spent my first six months here not only doing a reorganization and writing reports, but also I finally sat down with the leadership team, handed them a list, and said I want everything on this list in a drive.” Library AC spent time creating a shared space for documentation and facilitating documentation creation and the transfer of knowledge so that it’s not only written down, but people know the information.

Library AQ utilizes more formal training for the circulation area because there are many student workers in need of that training and documentation reminders.

Library AH uses SharePoint to keep documents, meeting minutes, and agendas. Departmental related documents, like acquisitions workflows are kept in Google Sheets. Library AR keeps instructions in a LibGuide that is easily available for procedure-based tasks. Libraries AX and BY keep documentation on the shared network maintained by the institution. Library Y also keeps documentation on a shared drive and makes sure to keep the information up to date. In addition, the library is working on video training tutorials, specifically for student workers.

Library AA utilizes an institutional checklist that includes making sure procedures and documents are up to date, relevant files are available and on SharePoint, and making sure to train individuals for interim job responsibilities. Library BG has all policies written down and available on the website, as well as in a procedural manual. The leadership team participates in updating the manual and making sure it is updated. If a team member needs to make updates, the leadership team passes that along to that individual. Libraries AE, J, and M also maintain information on a shared drive. Library M also has a mixture of old physical binders in addition to the digital resources. Library T creates style guides so that when people create research guides or tutorials, there is a uniform vision.
Retirement and Anticipatory Pre-Planning

Planned retirements and the great resignation also played a role in how documentation transfer shifted since COVID-19. Library D noted that paying attention to planned retirements is important. The library created temporary or permanent succession plans with a transfer of duties for each of those positions. The individuals leaving the organization will then go through their documentation and see what needs to be updated, train people on tasks, and when documentation is lacking, it is created. The participant detailed an apprenticeship model of succession planning:

We had a business manager who was retiring, and the administrative assistant was promoted to manager because of their familiarity with the systems and previous experience working at the library and having budgetary and HR experience. Prior to the retirement, we had both work side by side to get through all the processes. Instead of just having documentation, they were able to learn the job together. (Library D)

Library F also engages in overlap training if there is a retirement, and a member of the staff is moving into that position. Overlapping also takes place if the retirement replacement will be a new hire. The individuals who are picking up the skills until the new staff come on board are trained by the person who is going to retire. Library BE focuses on off-boarding, ensuring the departing employee leaves instructions in the public shared folder rather than personal folders.

For Library AE, if someone is vacating their position, there is a document they fill out that indicates who is going to do what job duties, how, and when to mitigate a stopgap in activities. Library C has started cultivating a practice for knowledge transfer by documenting information as much as possible in case there is an unanticipated departure. The respondent noted that having a team member approach that creates redundancy has been useful during this transition period.

Position Specific Documentation

Some positions, such as interlibrary loan (ILL) and technical services, were often cited as being important for documentation specific knowledge transfer. Library L has documentation
written for certain jobs and Library R has unit-specific procedures and manuals. Library H also mentioned specific information prepared for access services, reference, and instruction. The participant noted, “We have very good documentation of what people are expected to do, specific to the institution. So, if we hire a qualified person with the right subject or operational background, we could have them read things and bring them up to speed with institutional practices easily.” Library AY has manuals for reference, circulation, technical services, and access services. The purpose of the manuals is to ensure that if someone is unavailable, someone else can pick up the tasks easily.

**Informal Sharing**

Many participants described informal information sharing between individuals or units. Library L explained that since staff were located close in proximity, it was easy to ask questions of one another. Library AN noted that having a staff that can get along and share information when needed is important, and much of the information between units is shared informally. Library R recommended having the information centralized by an office manager so that they can distribute the knowledge and standard operating procedures/workflows. Currently, Library W uses the person leaving to train the incoming staff member on the position. However, the desire is to have the supervisor learn the position and pass that knowledge along to the incoming employees. Library AX, in addition to keeping documents on a shared drive, also relies on department leads to share information as it changes. Library BD utilizes Slack to communicate between staff members, and a place to provide feedback. Library AS notes that since the library staff is so small, information is typically shared through the supervisor. Library AG explained, “Most of it is done through information training where the individuals get together. Sometimes it’s a set of meetings, sometimes it’s on the fly because something needed to get done right
away.” Library BI also noted that spreading information by word of mouth is typical for the organization, particularly because it is a small staff.

**Intentional Practical Training**

Some participants noted that it is difficult to write down everything that someone does in a single day, and the real-world experience is a comparable mode of training for new hires. Library E noted that intentional one-on-one training, for instance showing them how to do an expense report or activate a collection, is most helpful. Library Q prefers hands-on training where individuals go through the processes together with documentation in hand. The participant did note that some people prefer the written documentation, while others prefer the repetition and practical scenarios. Library P practices intentional training in the interlibrary loan unit to ensure there is shadowing between incoming staff and skilled staff. Library AD utilizes volunteer based working groups to work on strategic planning, policies, and organizational planning.

Library BJ operates in a small space with a small staff, so everyone needs to be able to perform certain tasks like public services and circulation. Everyone in the library is trained intentionally on public services tasks so that they can step in when needed. The participant also noted redundancy across acquisitions and systems so that more than one person could do departmental-related tasks. Library AJ has training across departments so that there is a redundancy of knowledge across the institution. Library AU noted the importance of regular professional development and training. Library AO acknowledged that not much was written down. In the library, there is a general checklist for things that everyone needs to know, and then beyond that, it is an informal relationship-based transfer of knowledge. Library AL does more training on the fly, when needed, for the staff or to fill a need.
Some libraries noted the knowledge transfer experience as 50/50. Library O described formal training with documentation for library systems, but more informal one-on-one training for new hires. Library AZ is in transition from one-on-one training to a team-based cross-training approach. In doing this, it is the team making decisions instead of one person or one unit. Library S described how they need one-on-one, but also write out steps/procedures, whether it be the trainer or trainee.

*Communication at Meetings*

Communication at meetings was also a common response across participants. Library R indicated that they “encouraged all-staff meetings for people to talk about what they were doing, some of their pressure points/where things are breaking down and find ways to work better.” Library AH, in addition to written documentation, has weekly one-on-one meetings and monthly departmental meetings. Library AP has weekly 2-hour long department meetings where there are blocks built in for training and collaborative work. There is also a “learning minute,” which is 10-20 minutes of cross-training. For example, “if my paraprofessional does the cataloging, they will focus 10-20 minutes on something like looking at electronic resources or government documents. They are short learning bites.” Additionally, each week everyone has an hour that they can spend working on something that is a collaborative group effort, like collection development policy revision. Library BF has regular meetings where any alterations to services or processes are discussed within the larger group.

*Challenges to Knowledge Transfer*

There was an acknowledgement among participants that the transfer of knowledge can be difficult. Library A noted their struggle, “We have a variety of different systems into which we can put shared documents and we don’t have a great way of being able to discover those if you
don’t have the link to them. If you have some things in Box, some in OneDrive, and some in Dropbox or WordPress, it can all be very confusing.” Library G shared, “I think we do a poor job of sharing knowledge that isn’t necessarily part of your day-to-day tasks, such as institution wide policies and procedures.”

Other difficulties with the transfer of knowledge when it comes to documentation is making sure the knowledge captured is up to date. Library N, “We try to write things down and it’s been interesting as new staff come in to see some of the stuff we had written down from before and haven’t realized how much it needs to be updated.” Library AC mentioned that “When I came on board, we were dealing with the fallout from loss of other staff during COVID-19. We were just kind of scrambling to find out where files were saved on computers, and what were the most updated policies and procedures, and most of it was non-existent.” The participant also noted that difficulties arose when looking at things that had not restarted after the pandemic and deciding if the library wanted to do things the same way (anecdotally) or change things, and then how to capture those changes and updates.

While technical services were noted as an area by some participants that had good documentation, others considered this unit as needing improvement. Across the board, silos for this unit were a reason why there was a lack of documentation for both institutional and practical knowledge. Cultural complexities can also create tension where knowledge transfer is concerned. Library AM described downsizing in the organization and the impact it had on long-serving staff and their perception of job security. “There are certain individuals who are happy to keep their work and not share out, thinking it will make them indispensable.” Library AW noted that there is an interesting mix of responsibilities at their library, and there several “departments of one”
who are responsible for their own documentation. In this case, the participant also acknowledged
for their own role they didn’t have a lot of written documentation.

Capturing institutional memory before individuals leave is also a cited concern for library
leaders. Library AV, “With people leaving, you lose institutional memory. From that
perspective, you try to get a little bit of a better handle in documenting things so people can be
more involved.” Library BH explained that the biggest challenge to their documentation is that
“urgent often gets in the way of important. We have library users who need services, so we
aren’t working on documentation and internal communications as much as we’d like.”

**Job Duty Documentation**

To delve deeper into the types of documentation maintained in libraries, participants were
asked whether staff were provided job duty documentation during onboarding processes.
Interestingly, some libraries noted having job duty documentation but did not mention that as
part of the knowledge transfer process. This could be due to the way the questions were
formulated during the interview process. Challenges to job duty documentation are noted at the
conclusion of this section.

*Documentation is Available – participant response, regularly reviewed*

Library AR stated that “every time we hire a new person I go through and review the
document and see what needs to be updated. If it is a particular procedure I’m not teaching, then
I ask the person who’s teaching it to review. Before the new person is taught things, we need to
make sure the information is updated.” Library E echoed the importance of job-specific
documentation:

We’re a small operation and we don’t have as much redundancy, so I’m a real stickler on
us having documentation for really all the activities that we do so we can make that
available. It does not replace the interpersonal training that we do, but it’s helpful for the
person who is new to the organization because they’re not going to remember everything, and they can refer to the documentation. (Library E)

Manuals are common job duty documentation tools. Library BJ noted there were paper manuals describing job duties, as well as documentation, maintained in Microsoft Teams. Library X mentioned that vendor documentation is provided for new hires. Library N also utilizes manuals and Library AK requires staff to keep manuals and processes updated. Libraries BF, Y, BK, AX, BH, C, AI, J, BI, AB, BD, T, AY, and Z all noted that they have documentation that is kept in a manual. Library G stated that the process of providing documentation depends on the direct supervisor and, in some cases, there are manuals. However, due to the small size of the library, just like in knowledge transfer, they tend to do one-on-one training over documentation. Library AF also creates manuals that contain the process and procedures for different jobs. “Most of my folks have their manuals in a binder in view. Then once a month, if there is a change, I ask them to go in and make updates to our documentation, job descriptions, policies, plans, and procedure manuals. The document gets updated with a new date and a link to where that document resides on the server.”

Library AV keeps job specific documentation on LibGuides, in small notebooks at the service desk for ready reference, and the “Red Book” for campus emergency procedures. Library AE uses Google Drive as the starting point for documentation and departmental information will vary depending on the job activities. Due to a background in learning design, Library I use a variety of formats such as videos, Canvas classes, and other tools that facilitate job duty learning. Also, at the minimum, they kept step by step procedures. Library AC uses checklists that detail library procedures and then uses the job description as a guide for detailed responsibilities. Library BB noted that as a new leader, they were unfamiliar with and not given instructions on how to use the specific campus software, like Google Drive, and they had come from a Microsoft
campus. So, they have been cognizant to make sure that onboarding touches on those things as well as introduces campus.

*Documentation is Available – participant response, not organized*

Library Q discussed that a former Systems Librarian started a documentation initiative prior to their departure from the library. The librarian created a LibGuide and systems specific documentation. The participant noted that while documentation has been created, it is distributed across platforms or individuals and needs to be organized. Library W has plans for internal documents to pass along but does not currently have a formal process for job duty documentation. Library L explained that over the years it was discussed in the library, but documentation is typically minimal and not always current. “A lot of training for systems or things like interlibrary loan come from training with the software company, so new hires can check external documentation.” Library AQ mentioned that it depends on the task as some things are more formally documented than others. Library AL uses the shared drive, but the participant noted, “It’s much harder to find than if it was a book format because everything is just kind of dumped together.”

*Documentation is Available – participant response, position/department specific*

Libraries AQ and K noted that in their libraries, the position dictated whether documentation was provided, and that staff were more likely to receive documentation than librarian level positions. Library S maintains job duty documentation for cataloging, technical/systems, and circulation only. Library K noted that librarians have a faculty handbook, but that information is more often related to review, reappointment, or promotion. Library AJ described some departments as having better documentation than others depending on whether operations were process oriented rather than intuitive. “The basics of checking out items you can
probably learn with just someone next to you, by contrast, cataloging serials there’s a lot more to
learn so their documentation is hopefully a little better and more in-depth.” Library AN has
specific documentation for interlibrary loan (ILL) and resource sharing. Libraries AS, AW, P,
AG, and D also indicated they have position/departmental specific documentation.

Documentation is Unavailable – participant response, unavailable

Most libraries indicated that they had some sort of documentation related to job duties.
However, Libraries U, AD, F, and B indicated that they did not maintain any job specific
documentation.

Challenges to Job Duty Documentation

It’s hard to know if documentation or a more formalized process would be beneficial. I
think it would help, but I’m not sure if it’s cost effective. If we are hiring people all the
time, even entry level reference, and you put in the effort of documentation and training it
needs to yield a good reward. You never know what background the incoming person
will have, so you never know if the materials you’ve developed beforehand will be cost
effective or not. (Library H)

Library BC uses a local drive for documentation, but noted, “there’s so much documentation on
it. We need to go through it and update it because what happens is things accumulate and then
we haven’t come up with a process for evaluating or reviewing and keeping it clean. We’ll
hopefully come up with a way that we can systematically review and evaluate information and
get rid of old unneeded information.” Library AM mentioned that an employee who departed the
library wrote a book of documentation to give to the next person. The documentation created was
good and in-depth, but as the participant cycled individuals through that position, a question
began to come up as to whether the library really needs to do specific tasks that way, or how can
that work be improved upon. Another challenge is when long-serving employees depart a
position and do not leave behind materials. It can be difficult to play catch up on processes and
procedures and have the time to capture the information simultaneously. Library A noted that
when a cataloger departed, leaving little information behind, the acquisitions staff member in the
library was able to help with cataloging as part of crisis management on campus. Library R also
noted that even if documentation is kept up to date by the person in the position currently, when
that person departs, there is no guarantee that the next person will keep documents up to date in
the same way. Library AI also noted that due to the level of security, there are challenges to
creating workflows for business and finances.

**Review of Documentation**

In addition to the creation and availability of documentation for knowledge transfer and
job duty documentation, participants were asked how often that documentation is reviewed. The
purpose of this question was to determine whether the information made available to staff
members was up to date or useful. Challenges to documentation review are noted at the
conclusion of this section.

*Documentation Review – participation response, cyclic*

Library Y noted that the library tries to review documentation every couple of years but if
there is a new system or procedure, that gets updated in real-time. Library BK reviews
documentation every 8 months. Library AE works to make documentation review an annual
activity but, generally, documentation is reviewed before someone departs a position. Libraries
N and M try to make documentation review part of summer projects. Library P also works to
review documentation regularly, noting there are always changes. For example, “The reference
manual we’ve had for about 3 years started pre-pandemic and of course all the changes that
happened during COVID-19, how to set up zoom meetings etc… had to be updated.” Library O
reviews its LibGuides at least once per year.
The participant at Library BG was new to the institution at the time of the interview. They noted that their goal “is to put ourselves on a one-to-three-year rotation for updating our policies.”

*Documentation Review – participation response, noncyclic*

Library BJ reviews documentation when a new person is hired and whenever there is an incident that does not work out the way they thought it would or was meant to. They then update the documentation at that point. Library BF described an inconsistent review process, “I’m very confident the Systems Librarian keeps their stuff updated all the time. Some other areas I think unless I ask them to, they won’t think of updating it until they have to.” Library AN, “We don’t really have that set up, it more depends on when things get updated and when it is needed.” Library B also noted that it is not a regular part of the workflow in the library, and processes and workflows aren’t always documented well.

Library Q is looking to move to a more cyclic review of documentation to 1-2 times per year. Currently, documentation is not reviewed until its “breaks” or someone leaves. Library AJ indicated that it would be ideal to review documentation every year, and when it does happen it is typically a summer project when things are slower. Libraries AV and BH indicated that documentation is not regularly reviewed and that they want to change that to at least once per year. Library W echoed that sentiment, noting that they do not have documentation review set up in the library, but hoped to do it at least once a year moving forward. Library BA explained that when there are major changes, like a migration to a new catalog or system, documentation is revised and updated. If possible, they hope to move to a 2-year cycle for documentation review of non-system or major procedure changes. Library AZ didn’t have a sense that documentation was reviewed regularly, but it is something they are looking to build on. One way they hope to
do that is by tying in documentation review as part of the annual review process. The participant also wanted to carve out time that everyone could work on this task at the same time. “It’s something I did at my old job that made sense to people, because it was just like that natural time to look at everything, and because we did it annually you didn’t feel like you had to constantly redo everything from scratch. Instead of waiting for something to get out of date, we were always gradually modifying it, and it seemed to help people feel more in control of their job and that what they were doing and made the processes more of their own.” Library AB is looking to review documentation more, at least once per year. Leadership is currently working on a plan that would establish a working group, and in conjunction with the strategic planning process, identify areas for improved operational efficiency.

Libraries I, AT, J, AP, T, D, and AY all noted that documentation review takes place, but it is inconsistent.

*Documentation Review – participation response, department specific*

Library AS explained that documentation review depends on the person or department, “the circulation department does it routinely and acquisitions tend to do it on the way out the door.” Library K noted that certain departments, like circulation and interlibrary loan, are very workflow driven so they work hard to keep their policies and procedures updated. Other departments like technical services, special collections, and reference and instruction create documentation, but aren’t as organized or diligent as the workflow driven departments. For Library H, reference and instruction and access services review their documentation every year while technical services, archives, and instructional design is still working on getting workflows, tasks, and procedure-based documentation created.
Library C did not have clear insight on document review, as it is left to the departments, but did note that whenever there is a software upgrade, documentation would be reviewed, and technical services would adjust their workflows and procedures. The participant also noted, “I can’t say that we’re on a regular review schedule, but on the other hand, it’s not like it just sits on a shelf and nobody ever looks at it.” Library AK also relies on a department specific approach, but noted that at least once per year, all departments should be making updates to their manuals. Library AC described getting on a schedule and updating documentation every 2 years at a department specific level, “so one year will be our archive set of policies, the next year will be general operating policies, and we will continue to alternate.”

Challenges to Documentation Review

Library G noted that a more systematic review of documentation would be useful, but it is a question of time. “I think it would be good for the library to do it, and I think part of the challenge is my time in coordinating it and it would be just one more thing to ask my staff to do when they’re already burned out.” Library BI also cited time as a challenge to the process. Despite best intentions or planning, documentation review can also be placed aside for competing priorities. Library AI explained that documentation and its review are new to the culture of the institution, so the introduction of this process to the library is also new.

Library AU explained that cataloging and acquisitions are two areas where they still have some work to do in terms of process and procedure documentation. “[T]he people in those positions have been there long enough that they just do it and don’t make notes how they do it.” Library A explained that is likely individual people are working on documentation on their own, but the library is working to identify workflows for new products. The participant went on to say, “the past two years have been crisis laden, so it is just trying to figure out the workflow, creating
new documentation, or using old workflows and processes.” Library F noted that documentation is created per individual, and that documentation isn’t always shared between departing staff and the incoming employee. The participant said, “The information can be so easily out of date and, in many cases, so obviously conveyed, I don’t think I see a huge difference between places where I’ve done systematic documentation review, or an institution that tends to be documentation poor.” Library E mentioned that they have 3 formal staff meetings per year, and documentation review is always on the agenda. “I would say they are being reminded 3 times a year, and I trust they are attending to it.”

Participants who noted that they assume or anticipate their staff are reviewing documentation may run into challenges with staff who are not participating in that type of work, even though it is expected of him. Lack of monitoring may impact the outcomes for documentation review with individuals.

**Individual Advancement**

The final piece to the Paul Singer definition of succession planning, is individual advancement opportunities. Participants were asked a series of questions related to individual advancement, or in the case of flat organizations, position expectations and guidance. This section will focus on: library hiring practices, job duty training, job description review, job duties, and mentorship.

**Hiring Practices**

Participants were asked whether they typically hire externally, promote within, or a blend of the two. The purpose of this question was to determine if there are advancement opportunities for individuals within the library. Of the 63 participants, 2 noted that they typically promote
within, 26 participants typically hire externally, and the remaining participants use a blend of external hires and internal promotions.

_Promote from Within_

Library BJ has “a campus wide posting for internal applicants. They have 3 days to apply, and if there are no internal applicants the job post goes live externally. We do tend to hire and promote from within. When someone is leaving, we try to restructure hours and benefits into existing jobs to make sure that people are improving their jobs, benefits, and enjoying the work that they do.” Library M prefers to promote internally to show employees, who demonstrate a dedication to the students and have good rapport with their colleagues, that they are valued and supported. Library P explained, “I like to hire someone who has potential and then find a spot for them, and hopefully find a succession plan for them. I think it’s safer to hire somebody internal that you think could progress in their position.”

_Hire Externally_

The size and location of the institution played a role in many participants’ (Libraries AU, S, AX, I, L, AK, AW, BG, BI, AC, AH, AP, A, B, and T) decision to hire externally. Library G explained, “I don’t have a lot of staff with and MLS that are waiting for a library position to open, we just don’t have a big pool of people to do that, so we almost always hire externally.” Library K on location, “if there are places that can pay better, or provide more diversity, many candidates will go there, instead of trying to work in a monoculture in an expensive city.” Library X explained that since they are so short staffed, they would need to hire externally. The structure of the organization also determined hiring practices. Libraries BA and BE described a flat organizational structure, so it became a necessity for them to hire externally.
Library K described external hiring as being able to see fresh faces and sets of expertise, “you get people coming in with different sets of expectations about what is possible than people who’ve been in this one environment, especially if this is the only work environment they’ve been in a way.” Library H also felt strongly about their hiring of external candidates, “I feel strongly that we should be looking for people from different kinds of universities. I think a much higher rate of turnover than we’ve traditionally had would be healthy for the organization.” Library AL explained that “we don’t have the typical staff positions or library assistant positions, they are all work study students, so staff members are already librarians in professional positions, so it makes it difficult to recruit.”

Blend of Hiring and Promotion from Within

Library AR explained that for staff positions, internal promotion is considered first. If it is a faculty level position, it must go through a search committee and the individual must meet those requirements, so it is harder to fill internally. Library E echoed that process, “if there is an opportunity to hire from within, we will do that. We have had two occasions where we’ve been able to move folks into a more managerial position. Since we have so few managerial positions, it’s unusual, but it has happened.” In addition, Library AU explained that preserving institutional history is also important and is best reflected through staff retention. Library AS has a lot of entry level positions that turn over quickly, and in those cases, if there is a promotional opportunity it is usually for students who are graduating, and they can move into those entry level positions. “Sometimes we have internal personality conflicts, so we go external.” Library N described internal promotions as necessary for the organization because those individuals know the curriculum and have institutional knowledge. External candidates then bring in a new viewpoint, so bringing in new librarians can help to push the organization forward. Libraries AO,
Q, W, AE, AQ, AT, AI, V, AM, AG, AB, BB, O, AZ, D, R, AY, and Z all echoed the benefits of external candidate perspectives. Library C typically tries to promote from within, but in order to create a more inclusive hiring process, they are looking to create more diverse candidate pools by hiring externally.

Library BF will evaluate positions when someone vacates or retires. If a new position is created, there can be an internal promotion, but it will almost always leave a vacancy, which will require an external hire. Library AU will typically promote internally for staff positions, but for many librarian positions will hire externally. “External hires bring in a different set of knowledge.” Library J also described external hiring “as a way to bring new ideas to the organization, a new way of doing things with a different institutional history can inform on.”

Libraries with unionized versus non-unionized staff (Libraries AJ, AN, AD, and F) have more complex workplace rules that dictate whether candidates can be hired internally or externally. In contrast, Library BH notes that they typically hire externally but if a member of the internal bargaining unit applies for the position, they are given priority consideration. HR practices at institutions also dictate the type of hiring that can take place within the organization, Libraries AA and AV described a national search requirement. Internal candidates are welcome to apply, but they must compete against individuals who are applying externally. Libraries that were part of state institutions had more difficulty promoting from within due to more complex hiring rules. It was less of an internal promotion and more of moving someone into an open position. Libraries Y and BD noted that they typically promote from within, but due to budget restraints most vacant positions have been frozen.
Job Duty Training

For new hires, 49 participants noted that job duty training was provided, 12 participants noted that there may be some sort of job duty training, and 2 participants indicated job duty training would not be provided.

Job Duty Training – participant response, yes

Many participants (Libraries BJ, S, AS, AD, AE, AQ, AI, V, AZ, T, and AY) noted that local practice training would be provided to the new employee. Library AX explained that their training is not provided all at once, but instead is spread out. Library AN also described their process as first providing highlights for the job, and then walking through things more in-depth as the person is in their position longer. Library BC described having local practice training and job shadowing to help the new employee learn who to go to if they have certain questions. Library AT described local and bureaucratic training that shows employees local practices in addition to the “you need to keep your keys with you, where forms are located, and where email is set up.” Libraries P and V both mentioned localized training for tasks as well as consortium level training.

Several participants described training as position specific. Library BF, “for example our access services librarian and the digital services librarian provide training in terms of current practices at the desk or supervision of employees.” Library Q noted that it depends on the department and supervisor what type of training is received. Library H mentioned that it depends on the position and that, for some positions, with low turnover, it would be hard to say what type of training would be received because no one has vacated those positions in a long time. Library AU explained that even though individuals receive training, “we like to keep everyone on staff aware that just because this is the way we do it now, if there’s a better option that makes life
easier, we can change it.” Library AA also took this approach and encourages workflow improvements or updates to areas that could fill a gap. Library BB mentioned the importance of ensuring training is available. Because of the difficulty of hiring someone in the current climate, they are willing to provide more training than they have in the past. “[W]e is almost making sure we have professional development dollars for that position because there are pieces of that job that no one is going to be able to help them with for training, so we want to make sure they can develop the skills that are needed.”

*Job Duty Training – participant response, maybe*

Library G provides training based upon what the incoming employee already knows, so pre-existing knowledge is a factor. Library E echoed this method, “if we hire a librarian that has experience with the catalog, or OCLC Connexion, there will be some local practices I need to train them on, but we won’t have an in-depth training on those systems.” Library Y noted that training depends on whether the candidate is unionized or non-unionized. For specialists in the union, “they have to meet certain prerequisites in that job before they would be considered to fill it, so they would be trained differently than someone who is non-unionized without the prerequisites.” Library K mentioned that “in my experience my team has been extremely allergic to hiring entry level positions, especially for librarians. They really want you to have 3-5 years of experience or more because they don’t feel like they have the bandwidth to do intensive training job training. So instead of entry level training, we try to give the person the freedom to make the job their own.” Library AW said that training may be provided depending on the department and supervisor. Library AM talked about the way that budget constraints impact the ability to provide training, “earlier career people are most likely to come in with less of their own ideas and experiences and probably need more attention and help getting through internal processes. So,
we will show these individuals more in-depth than we would with someone who is more experienced.”

*Job Duty Training – participant response, no*

Library L described institutional training rather than library specific training. For library specific training, it’s the employee requesting the training after reviewing documentation. Library BA also encourages employees to figure out what questions they have and then encourages them to request the additional training that would be helpful for them.

*Job Description Review*

Participants were asked how often they review job descriptions for the employees in the organization. This was an open-ended question aimed at learning more about what employees were expected to do in their position, and how often those duties were updated if those positions changed.

*Reviewed During Annual Review*

Participants (Libraries BJ, E, BK, AX, AJ, AA, BH, C, AE, AI, AK, and AL) noted that job descriptions were reviewed as part of the overall annual review. Library G, “Each one is reviewed at the time of the annual performance review and done at the supervisor level. Employees should be making micro-adjustments as well so that the wording reflects current practices.” Upon arrival as a new library director, participant AV explained that their staff issues were related to what was, or was not, listed in the job description, so after working with HR, it became more a part of the annual review process. Library W recently reclassed support staff positions and created new positions that will now be reviewed annually as part of the annual review process. Library M will move to a twice a year review in conjunction with a new HR evaluation process. There will be a mid-year check in to make sure that everyone is still doing
what matches their job description, and if not, it can be adjusted. When Library AM moved into the role of director, the descriptions hadn’t been reviewed in a long time. Now that those descriptions have all been reviewed, they will move to a yearly as part of the annual review process.

Reviewed Yearly

Library AU, “I typically peek at all of them once a year, but I don’t spend a lot of time on them unless I know there is an impending change. We just want to make sure nothing is out of date and that we are in compliance.” Library S also tries to review job descriptions yearly but noted that the pandemic altered the normal schedule. Library AO will review descriptions yearly and anytime responsibilities change or there needs to be more job clarity. Library AI reviews descriptions quite a bit based on the ALA joblist so that descriptions can be adjusted to address changes, trends, and competencies. Library BI reviews descriptions yearly as part of a departmental review, “our staff has shrunk so much we’ve had to rework job descriptions each year.” Library BB also likes to get their eyes on job descriptions once a year around performance review time, though it is not tied to the review itself. Library R advocated for regular review of descriptions in order to customize positions and make sure they remain up to date.

Reviewed Every 2-5 Years

Library BF notes that the strategic planning cycle for the organization is every 3-4 years, and that is when the library reviews job descriptions, library functions, product functions, realigns positions, and revamps processes. Library K mentioned that it depends on whether it is a staff or faculty position. Typically, staff have their descriptions reviewed in a cycle over the course of 5 years. “Sometimes we all sit down with all the job descriptions of the people that report to them and review them. It doubles as a training and team building exercise and is an
opportunity for them to really think through what everyone is doing.” Library A is working towards a more regular review of job descriptions. “There are two strong outcomes, one is that I do those reviews with the whole team, and not just with the person. So, it allows the whole team to remember what other people are doing on their team, so we can have transparency for what people do in their jobs. And two, you can minimize the fear of jobs changing by making it a normal thing to make sure that what you’re being asked to do is what you should actually be doing, and if it’s something different, we put the resources behind it to train you and upgrade your position.” Library B completes reviews on a semiannual basis as part of reporting to the provost.

**Reviewed When hiring**

Library AF described the last time a holistic review occurred was during a reorganization 10 years ago, but anytime an individual position opens, the position is reviewed before hiring begins. Other participants also echoed the practice of review during hiring process (Libraries U, Y, BA, N, L, BC, AT, J, and AP). Library Q noted the importance of rewriting job descriptions because, “it’s amazing how quickly they can fall out of date given how the library profession evolves, and you start doing different things and all of the sudden people’s position descriptions fall out of sync with what they’re actually doing.” Library P “conducts a 3-month, 6-month, and 1-year review for new hires, and employees are encouraged to make edits to their job description during this process.” After that time, it is informally reviewed yearly. In addition to new hires, if a position needs to be reclassified, Library AH will review the job description. Library Z typically reviewed positions for new hires but noted that a reclassification study by HR better aligned the jobs of classified staff and, because those positions are unionized, there is more scrutiny for those positions.
Not Reviewed Often

Library X will typically review job descriptions when someone comes in or leaves the position. Library AR noted that job descriptions are not typically handled in-house, but instead within HR. “I write a general job description for HR, and then I wrote specific job descriptions that I use in-house.” Library AS explained that the descriptions are reviewed infrequently but are tied to HR led compensation studies that happen every 2 years. Library H explained that, depending on the position or department, job descriptions may be reviewed more often, “I don’t know if it would be useful to do a review more regularly, partly because some of our faculty librarians don’t have job descriptions in the usual sense, but they have something similar, so it might be helpful to review them more often.” Library AN echoed the position on faculty librarians since those individuals did not have a stagnant job description, but infrequently otherwise. With retirements, leadership agreed to start reviewing job descriptions for staff more often.

Library AQ will review the description if there is a question from a staff member on whether it matches what they are currently doing. Library AW explained that there isn’t a regular schedule for review, but that it can be useful to look and see how positions mesh together or how descriptions can be updated to reflect new roles or collaborative connections. Library BG described the process as being complicated since they are part of a university system with more than a dozen institutions. The System Office is responsible for those evaluations and the library participates when necessary. Library AC noted that it is currently infrequent, but there is a goal to update them more regularly. Library F described the process as happening on the fly, “and in some cases we are using titles internally that are different than the titles that someone in HR is using, so in some cases, their positions are playing catch up.”
Never Reviewed

Library AD noted that job descriptions were never reviewed. Library BE mentioned it is not part of normal practice, but it was completed once in the 4 years since they have been at the library.

Job Duties – Other Duties as Assigned

As part of workforce planning and individual advancement, participants were asked what percentage of the time they thought employees spent doing “other duties as assigned.” The purpose of this question was to consider whether employees were doing jobs they were hired for and whether additional responsibilities were compensated or allowed for the individual to advance in the organization.

Figure 3

Percentage of employee workload that is considered ‘other duties as assigned.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Common Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10 %</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 %</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 %</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 %</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 %</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other Duties as Assigned – participant response, aligns with work

Participants who identified their staff as doing “other duties as assigned” between 1-20% of the time explained that, because job descriptions were written thoroughly, the need to do work outside of the job description was rare. Library I described that “employees have very thorough job descriptions, which they kind of joke about but I think it’s just best to know up front what they are expected to do.” Several participants noted that the job duties they created were very detailed, or they had just finished rewriting job descriptions and so the work is more likely to be aligned to what employees are doing (Libraries G, AR, and AL).

Other Duties as Assigned – participant response, crisis dependent

Participants in the 1-20% range were also more likely to identify “other duties as assigned” as being crisis dependent. Library D echoed that job descriptions were thorough in their organization but during COVID-19, pandemic related duties did creep in more than in typical circumstances. When there is an issue with weather, flooding, or building maintenance issues, even under the best circumstances, staff are going to be asked to do work that is outside of their scope.

Other Duties as Assigned – participant response, volunteer based

A way to manage “other duties as assigned” is to call for volunteers when new opportunities arise in the library that aren’t scoped to a job description, or when they require more expertise. Library E keeps employees working within their job description but also calls for volunteers if someone has expertise in a particular area for a project. Library AK explained that the employees are rarely asked to do “other duties as assigned” because of their very detailed position descriptions. However, if someone wants to participate in something outside of their job description, they can volunteer. Library Q mentioned that it would depend on the individual
“because there will always be some people with a lot more initiative and people who have time for additional things that others don’t.”

*Other Duties as Assigned - participant response, staff classification*

How staff are classified (i.e., staff versus faculty) played a large role in the discussion of whether employees engaged in “other duties as assigned.” Library O indicated that at the leadership level, it is higher than the 1-10% estimate, but “for staff, I’m really protective of them and their job description so it is far less.” Library Z also mentioned being careful not to load too many “other duties as assigned” onto staff. Library BE also uses the “other duties as assigned” for faculty level librarians to allow for research interests, committee, and association work.

In contrast, Library AQ indicated that it is more frequent in the case of staff than with faculty level librarians. For Library AV, staff have a higher percentage of “other duties as assigned” than librarians do. For Library AN, staff position descriptions are more closely aligned to roughly 5% of “other duties as assigned,” but for librarian level positions, it can be harder to define. “[F]rankly, because we have a lot of autonomy to go off and do other things, and sometimes that comes through committee work or university wide initiatives.” Whether or not staff or faculty were under contract with a union also determined if they were eligible to engage in “other duties as assigned.”

*Other Duties as Assigned – participant response, department specific*

In some libraries, the assignment of “other duties as assigned” is department specific. Library S explained that it most often happens when there are unexpected projects that come up and those tasks are not written into individual job descriptions. Library AH made a distinction between departments with technical services having more structured positions with demanding assigned duty categories and have less time to do things outside of their daily duties. Library AW
noted that larger departments with more people are likely to shift more responsibilities than smaller, more defined units who have less flexibility in their position descriptions.

*Other Duties as Assigned – participant response, staffing needs*

Library A explained that it is important to review job descriptions to make sure that the figure stays less than 20% so that people can get credit for the work they are doing. Smaller libraries with a reduced number of FTE were more likely to have higher percentages of “other duties as assigned.” Library P noted, “because we are a small staff and do a lot of cross-training, I would say probably 30% of their time can be ‘other duties as assigned.’” Library AJ explained that because they are a small organization, the participant tries to write job descriptions, so they are broad in case there are needs that arise. Library AG mentioned the hiring freeze influencing the higher percentage of “other duties as assigned” on the already small staff. Library Y noted that the size of the building and staffing needs dictates the higher percentage of “other duties as assigned.” Library K explained that, due to faculty on sabbaticals, librarians are doing more work than they would typically be doing. The amount of work they need to do would ebb and flow based on the number of individuals on sabbatical. Library M explained, “other duties as assigned are the most interesting parts of our work because no two days are quite the same, just in terms of the diversity of persons and needs that come through the library. So, most of the time we’re doing what is in our job description but there are plenty of times when things come up.”

**Mentorship**

In terms of individual advancement, mentorship can be key in workforce development. Participants were asked whether their library offered mentorship opportunities. 50 participants indicated that they did have mentorship opportunities within their library, whereas 13 participants indicated they did not. In addition to asking whether participants had a formal
mentoring program, participants were also asked if employees were interested, could they pursue other areas of librarianship within their library as part of individual advancement opportunities. 54 participants noted that employees could explore other areas of librarianship, and 9 noted that they could not.

*Mentorship Opportunities- participant response, no*

The reasons why mentorship was not offered in the organization varied. In some instances, the lack of mentorship had to do with choosing a more informal route, tenure track faculty positions versus staff positions, and the size of the institution.

Informal mentoring was mentioned by various participants. Many participants mentioned mentoring visiting students, interns, or student workers. Library G mentors visiting students that have interest in faculty/tenure track positions. Library AR mentor’s library school students and those students get training across different departments within the library. Library Y mentors student employees. Other libraries noted informal mentoring that more closely resembles training for job tasks. For instance, Library AU has recent graduate (new hires) train in the position for task specific purposes. Libraries S and AO encourage new hires or recent graduates to engage in mentorship programs outside of the library.

Library E is on the precipice of creating a formalized mentorship program. “I care a great deal about trying to help people move on to whatever that next stage of their career is. We are not the kind of organization that expects people to come here and spend a lifetime.” Library H noted that the mentorship is not institutionalized because, from their experience, it has not been effective. “Once mentorship becomes institutionalized it is more of a requirement. Then, neither party is necessarily getting what they need, so informal mentoring has been more effective. The
problem there is that it relies on people making connections on their own, and if you don’t make those connections then you’re out of luck.”

Mentorship Opportunities – participant response, yes

The reasons that mentorship was encouraged or took place in the organization also varied. Library BF noted that, as the director, they have provided mentoring to everyone that has been on staff and that the institution encourages mentorship. Library U mentors individuals who will be moving into management positions. Library K offers mentorship whenever it is possible. Each new librarian on staff is assigned a junior librarian and a senior librarian. For staff it is less formal, but it is still offered. Library C assigns a mentor to all new hires that come in as well as for all support staff. New hires can also request a mentor outside of the library to help them navigate the institution or ask questions about campus. Library AE explained their mindful mentorship model, “It takes into account the progression of pre-professional to a professional staff member. All our pre-professional staff are in library school and on their way to becoming librarians, so it’s a way to develop them and provide guidance, independence and provide feedback.” Library BC noted that they identify strengths and interests and identify individuals that have the potential to grow in managerial and leadership work. Those individuals are then mentored.

Exploration of Other Areas of Librarianship

Another key element of individual advancement is the opportunity to explore other areas of interest. This type of development can be useful when there is no upward mobility in a library and/or an individual shows promise in a certain specialty. Participants were asked whether their library offered career exploration opportunities for staff and/or librarians. An example of what this might look like could be an individual that works at the circulation desk, who enjoys
answering general reference questions, and does well at it, is invited/allowed to receive training in reference, shadow reference librarians, and maybe even participate in reference instruction. Another example could be an electronic resources staff member who takes an interest in scholarly communications. They could be given professional development opportunities to increase their knowledge of scholarly communications or assigned to assist with projects related to the topic. Challenges to career exploration opportunities are noted at the conclusion of this section.

*Career Exploration Opportunities – participant response, no*

Library Q explained that while it is not something that has been typically done, it is something worth exploring. “I want to talk to each staff member and find out where their interests are and learn more about their talent so we can harness that. Not just for our benefit, but to make them happier and know their workplace brings them a little more joy and maybe a little more satisfaction.” Library AD noted that these opportunities are not currently available but, if there was a way to offer something in a meaningful way, it would be worth exploring. Library E mentioned that in the past, this is something that could be explored, such as everyone serving some time on the reference desk, but in terms of more specific interests, exploration of other areas hasn’t been customary. Library AS noted that no one has expressed an interest in this exploration.

*Career Exploration Opportunities – participant response, yes*

Many participants offer these types of opportunities to assist with cross-training and collaboration. Library AY noted that a staff member is currently enrolled in library school, which can allow them to expand their role within the library. Library D mentioned opportunities to pivot positions based on interests. For instance, a metadata and cataloging position transforming
into an electronic resource librarian position. Library T described their small staff as a catalyst for exploration because everyone needs to wear so many different hats. Library AL explained that when they came on board to lead the library, it operated mostly in silos. Since that is changing slowly, it allows individuals to start to explore other areas of interest. Library AG offers these opportunities to provide redundancy across positions in case of a crisis.

Challenges to Career Exploration Opportunities

Libraries that offered these types of opportunities described challenges as well. Library Z explained, “I want to be careful with classification work because I don’t want to give people the opportunity to develop professionally and have it take advantage of them because they are working outside of their classification. I want to make sure they are compensated correctly, and I don’t want to get in trouble with other folks who may have an interest and they file a grievance.” Another challenge that was mentioned by Library F was lack of interest in participating, even though it was available. Library O mentioned that since positions were multi-headed anyway, the expectation is that when there is a gap that needs filled, someone must do it and it may not be out of interest.
Chapter V: Discussion & Summary

This project utilizes the theory of triangulation to help explain the data and phenomena related to succession planning, particularly in relation to “continuity in key positions, retaining and developing intellectual knowledge capital for the future, and encouraging individual advancement” (Singer, 2010, 1). Participants’ perception of succession planning is that it is important work in the field of librarianship. Not all participants were seeking to make changes or participate in this type of planning, but all participants noted its usefulness. The profession of librarianship lacks a workable theory. Despite this, the literature review showed the connection to various aspects of public administration theory and management. As an entity within public administration, it makes sense that libraries could benefit from these practices. This chapter uses the traditional model of public administration, new public management, and new public service to explain the findings.

Traditional Public Administration (Classical)

The traditional public administration model sought to organize a government in a way that was predictable and Max Weber considered this classical style as the most efficient way to organize and run the government. At their core, many of the library leaders who were interviewed could be considered part of the classical style of public administration. Libraries are often divided into 2 to 4 units with a single department head who is responsible for organizing the unit, coordinating, and reporting out. Hiring and budgeting is often shared across multiple positions, except in the case of small libraries whose only leadership is via the Director.

Despite being one of the more rigid approaches to public administration, in library administration, its prevalence is due to the ease in which libraries can operate under its simplicity, while still working to meet the needs of its patrons. Classical approaches can be conducive to employee development but in succession planning, it leaves little room for individuals to move up
the ladder within the organization or to cross-train to re-skill. This is often because there is nowhere to promote employees to due to the limited units and single department head.

Frederick Taylor’s, *Scientific Principles of Management* can best explain the way in which many of the libraries are organized, particularly in more technical facing units. Taylor contended that the division of labor should be between the managers and the employee doing the work (Rainey, 2014). The manager would look at the most effective ways to perform a task and provide those policies and procedures to the employee. In libraries, this can be seen in a relationship between the head of a unit and the staff that report to the head. Each unit head seeks to provide library services in the most efficient way possible and, while Taylor is often credited with having a harsh perception of workers, the positive aspects of his theory are prominent in many library structures.

The hiring practices of library leaders within the study also aligned with classical theory. Library leaders are often seeking individuals with a specialized skillset to do a specific job. In smaller libraries, leaders may be seeking an individual who can wear multiple hats, but when most library leaders hire a subject-specific reference librarian, they anticipate that individual will be able to provide library services to that subject/population of people and do that task well. Someone who has only worked in electronic resources would have difficulty re-skilling in most of the organizations that participated in the interview mainly due to a lack of training opportunities, prevalence of smaller organizations, and leaving a new gap that would need to be filled as that individual reskilled. Participants who acknowledged it was possible to promote from within for their organization wanted to be able to show dedicated employees that they were valued and supported. In the case of promotions, it is often a promotion into the unit head position of the area where one specializes. In limited cases, individuals were promoted to a director level position.
mostly serving in a unit head role. It was rare that someone who was not a unit level leader is promoted to a director level position. The desire to hire externally by most libraries is based on size, location, and specialized needs of the unit. When it becomes impossible to reskill internally, library directors seek out individuals who can meet their needs in terms of specialty, but also in personality.

Library directors acknowledged the importance of position specific training, which also aligns with classical public administration theory. Not all directors provided training or opportunities to re-skill beyond the position training provided, thereby limiting individual advancement opportunities. While some may view this style of leadership as stifling growth, others would argue that the predictability that is provided by a basic flat structure and skilled employees, allows the library to react in a fast-paced environment, pivoting when necessary. Most directors indicated their employees were doing “other duties as assigned” between 1-20% of the time, again, aligning with the principles of traditional public administration, with each individual specializing in their role and rarely operating outside of that specialty.

At the 3rd International Scientific Conference on Economics and Management, Fiala and Sovova noted that public administration should have a separate form of government that is not borrowed from the private sector (2018). They postulate that management approaches in the private sector cannot translate to the public sector without being refined, particularly when it comes to the internal operation and mission. Interestingly, library leaders interviewed from publicly funded institutions tended to have a more robust succession plan (formal or informal), while private, not-for-profit library leaders almost always had a flat-line, traditional public administration approach that at the time left little space for succession planning practices, though notably all the directors found importance in the work. Library leaders at academic institutions are
at the mercy of institutional culture and, depending on how the library is funded, also at the mercy of state and local legislatures. This can make it difficult to side-step traditional practices in favour of new practices and ideas.

**New Public Management (NPM)**

In a contrast to traditional public administration, NPM looks at how borrowing from the private sector can help to improve organizational management in the public sector. NPM sets its sights on organizational outcomes and customer satisfaction. Dwight Waldo contended that the government should be designed to serve the people. In order to do that, two things must occur: the development of policy and then the workforce planning that dictates how that policy will be turned out (Otenyo, Lind, & Jones, 2006, 130). Librarianship, like NPM, embraces initiatives that have a patron-first mindset. Hiring, training, and the deployment of resources are typically the result of patron suggestions, requests, or criticisms.

Other managerial aspects of NPM that translate to librarianship are financial control, performance monitoring, and customer responsiveness. When looking at the way that library leaders view succession planning, it becomes clear there is a connection to NPM. Financial control is generally outside of the hands of an academic library. While there may be opportunities for library leaders to request additional funding, participate in consortia, or request resource cost reductions from vendors, the leaders rely on the institution to provide the finances that will fund library resources, personnel, and services. With limited library budgets that can be unpredictable, particularly in publicly funded institutions that are in heightened political states, it can be difficult to develop succession plans that include increased compensation or compensation for a higher skillset within the same position.
In succession planning, NPM shines when considering contingency and crisis management. The main goal of NPM is to ensure the satisfaction of the customer. When it comes to contingency and crisis management, the needs of the customer are considered and operational plans for mitigation designed: library leaders who utilized contingency planning did so to appease the needs of the students, faculty, and patrons within their academic libraries. NPM also provides consistency in documentation and policymaking, aligning with the values of succession planning focused on knowledge transfer, and continuity in key positions. Written documentation and policymaking can provide context to procedures and provide key pieces of institutional knowledge that could otherwise walk out the door with departing personnel. The use of NPM in libraries can also provide leaders, often the director level and heads of departments, to use more discretion when engaging with their staff. It was not uncommon to hear director’s talk about the freedom their department heads have in operating their departments. The way their staff are trained, document material, and advance internally can all be dependent upon the single department head. When the library has consistent, quality, and transformative leaders, this type of organizational management can make sense. When leadership is inconsistent, it can lead to challenges within a single department, resentments towards other departments, and a lack of consistency across the organization.

Library leaders often talked about the differences between technical services departments, typically non-public facing positions, and public facing positions in that technical facing departments tend to have more policy and workflow documentation and public facing departments tend to focus on customer satisfaction and needs. No matter how individual departments were led, many library leaders described how the measurement of performance standards was part of a human resources process and could impact individual advancement within the library. Job
descriptions and job roles were often the topic of these performance standards discussions, or yearly reviews, with library staff. Other measurements that align with performance standards are things like reference statistics for public services and reference staff, or ticket management and cataloging statistics for technical services staff.

Finally, in considering library leaders within NPM, management is an important topic. Many library leaders described the freedom they had to manage the library in general. Library leaders often create a strategic plan or directive for the library that is followed over a period of 3-5 years, and in some cases, yearly plans are devised to meet short-term goals. It is typical for library leaders in academic institutions to have directives from top leaders across the institution, including the provost and technology departments. Library leaders also need to answer to high level financial leaders within the broader institution when it comes to things like budget. This can create a highly politicized environment under NPM. Leaders can be forced into making decisions that may not be best for the library but are on the radar of other senior leaders within the institution, who may or may not understand how libraries operate. A sentiment shared by library leaders during their interviews.

**New Public Service**

While organizational management in academic libraries tends to fall in line with a more classical or NPM approach, the New Public Service model may be the solution for the future. New Public Service provides flexibility in theory allowing for varied approaches, uses multiple tests of rationality, looks at shared values, is citizen focused, is designed to serve, builds coalitions through a multifaceted approach, remains accountable, collaborates, and is contributive within society (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Library leaders grappled with succession planning, with only a handful having a formalized plan. These leaders also tended to be within institutions that supported
succession planning across the larger institution. The remaining library leaders found succession planning to be important and were often implementing unofficial succession planning within their library. Leaders struggled when it came to the amount of time, change, and resources needed to implement a succession plan. Leaders of small libraries (3-4) with staff who held longevity of 15 years or more had a more difficult time coming to terms with succession planning for their units. It was after the full conversation and discussion of contingency plans and knowledge transfer that it became more of a sticking point. Only a few library leaders noted how an unexpected departure in their own position could be problematic for the staff left behind. In a New Public Service model, creating a collaborative, accountable staff that is willing to re-skill and cross-train to meet the demands of the library, would be a way for smaller libraries to engage in succession planning without feeling that time could be better spent on public facing activities. Good governance, then, would support the quality of the management across the library and provide consistencies in leadership, performance measurement, and individual advancement. Charles Wise noted the importance of public administrators in creating reform and change through the training and re-training of civil servants (Wise, 2012, 710). Reforming library organization is a necessity in present day library culture. Using Wise’s reference to public administrators, it translates that in order to reform librarianship overall, it is necessarily to continue training and re-training library employees. Through training initiatives, library leaders can advance or re-skill employees within their organization, which will lend itself to creating a community of practice that can push forward the strategic plan and initiatives.

**Theory Review**

Researchers have often correlated libraries with public administration theory and management. In fact, libraries tend to take on the traits of various models. For example, classically,
libraries tend to fall in line with the traditional model of public administration. Literature from the 1970’s through the early 1990’s shows that libraries are typically flat, simple organizational structures divided into specialized units to promote efficiency. In the late 1990’s and early to mid 2000’s, the trend in libraries shifted to a New Public Management model. Libraries looked for ways to be more responsive to patron concerns and outsource work to be more effective and efficient. As libraries move into a new era, there is more collaboration and focus on good governance. Based on the responses of library leaders in this study, the best way to implement succession planning would be within the New Public Service model.

Limitations of the Study

As a library practitioner, it is important to acknowledge the bias I have within the profession. I have my own experiences with succession planning across multiple libraries and those biases, whether perceived or inherent, were present during the writing of the findings. To address this bias, it was important to look at the experience of library leaders who chose to find succession planning as unnecessary in their institutions and truly take in their comments, examples, and understanding of the concept. Additionally, the overall sample size of library leaders was small versus the number of institutions in the United States with an academic library attached to a 2-year, 4 year, specialized, or tribal institution. Despite the small sample size, the responses to the questions showed there was an overall saturation on the topic of succession planning.

Other limitations in the study were the way in which some of the questions were asked, such as contingency planning activities and crisis mode. There was no context given within the question to describe the concept of crisis mode or the purpose of the contingency planning. Some library leaders accounted for the COVID-19 pandemic in their crisis mode score and others had a crisis score pre and post pandemic versus the height of the pandemic in 2020-2021. Further
clarification on these concepts could have garnered a more accurate response to the question. Despite this limitation, leaders scored their libraries to the best of their abilities and these questions did not impact the outcome of the research on succession planning.

**Future Research**

Succession planning exists informally in many libraries but lacks formal research across the discipline. Further studies on succession planning, including more in-depth studies on knowledge transfer and individual advancement can be useful for the profession. Additionally, more work on theories in librarianship can help to bring change in the way libraries are managed. Public administration theories can be useful in helping to design, operate, and organize libraries, along with providing context and direction for library leaders.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Utilizing a New Public Service approach to managing libraries can be beneficial in building more formalized succession plans. It is recommended that libraries engage in, at minimum, knowledge transfer planning, cross-skill collaboration, and contingency planning in order to mitigate crisis modes within the organization and when providing public services. Planning for what individual libraries consider vital positions can also ensure that institutional knowledge and workflow does not get lost when an individual leaves the organization expectedly or unexpectedly. These positions are often heads of departments, director level, and technology facing. Leaders should not overlook positions with staff longevity, as these are the positions where knowledge can be most easily lost when an employee departs. A way to begin this process is through the job success profile plan described by Library AA. Each position is broken down into four components: experience, knowledge and skills, leadership competencies, and personal attributes. After each profile is completed, the leadership team creates a heat map for each role that has three categories:
current status of individual, organizational risk, and replacement difficulty. Each of those statuses is given a low risk, high risk, or unknown designation. Using this information, potential replacements are identified within the current team. This type of planning is more worthwhile for libraries with a larger staff size, as smaller libraries with 2-3 employees may find this type of in-depth planning unnecessary for their needs. Using the methods of Library T, and taking small actions to create shared knowledge (i.e., using a generic library e-mail instead of individual e-mails to engage with the public and vendors and moving all documentation to a shared drive in a single location) and redundancy (i.e., cross-training) can create a culture of knowledge, documentation of workflows and policies, and the review of those procedures on a routine basis are ways to engage with succession planning.

It was also clear from the interviews that most libraries are flat without much room for movement. Individual advancement then becomes dependent upon the individual department or whether someone in an academic library is considered staff or a faculty member. Creating room for individual advancement or re-skilling can potentially help libraries to address turnover and general dissatisfaction in the workplace. Using the ladder plan for librarians and staff members, as discussed by Library BK, can allow individuals to advance from Librarian I, II, III, and a similar scale for non-librarian staff. Library AT also strongly considered individual advancement by finding ways to train, re-skill, or prepare individuals who express an interest in staying or growing in the library. Giving space for employees to identify their professional wants can be a great way for smaller libraries to also implement succession planning ideas.

Final Thoughts

The results of this study showed that succession planning is taking place, at the very least informally, in some way within most libraries. Librarianship could benefit from borrowing on
public administration theory, such as the New Public Service model, to help shape and utilize succession planning. Succession planning, as most library directors pointed out, is not something that is easily deployed. It takes time and patience to create and foster this type of culture within an organization, and often time and patience are not available in organizations that are already stretched thin. It is helpful if it is not just the library that engages in succession planning, but the institution as a whole. In some cases, that is more of a dream than a reality so finding small ways to do the work of succession planning in the scope of the library can leave lasting impacts on the library culture, staff, and the way the public perceives the library.
References


Appendix A – IRB Approval

IRB #: IRB-FY2022-164
Title: Workforce & Succession Planning in Libraries
Creation Date: 11-23-2021
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Kaci Resau
Review Board: West Chester University Institutional Review Board
Sponsor:

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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Appendix B – Recruitment Letter

Email Subject: CALL FOR PARTICIPATION: WORKFORCE & SUCCESSION PLANNING IN LIBRARIES

Hi {{Participant_first_name}},

My name is Kaci, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Public Administration program at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study on the role that workforce and succession planning play in academic libraries. I am emailing you to ask for your participation by sharing your knowledge and experience regarding workforce and succession planning at your institution via an audio only Zoom interview. If your library does not currently implement workforce or succession plans, I would still like to speak with you.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous. Further information regarding participation is below.

Upon completion of this study, I plan to use the findings for my dissertation at West Chester University, and for published research in peer reviewed journals.

I would like to share a little bit of my background with you. I have worked in higher education for 14 years, and in academic libraries for 9 years. Much of my time in libraries has been spent in technical services departments working with electronic resources, discovery, and collection management. My research interests include usability, discovery, and organizational management and planning. I have presented at ER&L, ELUNA, Charleston Conference, SUNYLA, and Code4Lib on these topics. I have also published work on usability studies and testing in Computers and Libraries magazine. I currently serve as Electronic Resources Librarian at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, please fill out this brief survey form: [LINK]

Best,

Kaci

Do you have any questions you would like answered now? You may contact me as the principal investigator at: Kaci Resau (K943005@WCUPA.EDU). If you prefer to speak with someone else, you may contact my Doctoral Advisor, Dr. Kristen Crossney at: kcrossney@wcupa.edu.

IRB NUMBER: FY022-164
PI: Kaci Resau
Appendix C – Informed Consent
Project Title: Workforce and Succession Planning in Libraries

Investigator(s): Kaci Resau, Dr. Kristen Crossney (Faculty Sponsor)

Project Overview: Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being conducted by Kaci Resau as part of their Doctoral Dissertation to analyze how workforce and succession planning play a role in organizational management and strategic planning within libraries. Your participation will be via an audio-only Zoom interview and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Your responses in the interview will be anonymized. There is a minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality as documentation will be stored on the cloud, but all efforts will be made to keep the written transcript in strictest confidentiality by utilizing West Chester University supported and secure OneDrive storage. I will not link your name to anything you say, either in this transcript, or in other external publications. Your de-identified information, however, may be shared or used in publications without your additional informed consent. Finally, there is a small risk of breach of privacy since we are using Zoom. The recording will be audio only, and your information de-identified during the transcription process. Audio files will be destroyed once transcription is complete.

If you would like to take part in this research study, West Chester University requires your consent. Please select the consent options at the end of this consent form and use the forward progress arrow to continue.

You may ask Kaci Resau any questions to help you understand this study. As this study is voluntary, you are not required to participate. If you choose to be part of the study, you have the right to change your mind, or stop the interview at any time.

1. What is the purpose of this study?
   - To understand the role that workforce and succession planning plays in academic libraries.

2. If you decide to be part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:
   - Complete a 45-minute audio-only interview via Zoom. The audio will be recorded.

3. Are there any experimental medical treatments?
   - No.

4. Is there any risk to me?
   - No.

5. Is there any benefit to me?
   - No.

6. How will you protect my privacy?
   - The session will be recorded.
   - Your records will be private. Only Kaci Resau, Kristen Crossney, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.
   - Your name or identifiable information will not be used in any reports.
   - All records will be coded. No names will be used, only pseudonyms. Identifiable information will be removed or changed to pseudonyms.
   - Records will be stored:
Password Protected File/Folder
• Records will be destroyed 7 years after study completion.

7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?
• No.

8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?
• For any questions with this study, contact:
  o Primary Investigator: Kaci Resau at KR943005@WCUPA.EDU
  o Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kristen Crossney at kcrossney@wcupa.edu

9. What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?
• Not applicable.

10. What will be done with the data in the future?
• Participant’s de-identified data may be used when publishing Kaci Resau’s dissertation, articles, and/or in-conference presentations.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk. I consent to participate in this study.

____________________________________
Subject/Participant Signature

____________________________________
Date
Email Subject: INTERVIEW: Workforce and Succession Planning in Libraries

Hi {{Participant_first_name}},

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview to discuss workforce and succession planning in libraries. The interview will be an audio-only Zoom interview, consisting of 10 questions, and will last approximately 45 minutes. Your responses will be anonymous.

I would like to schedule an interview with you at a time that is convenient to you. If you could respond with three days/times that work best for you, I will do my best to accommodate.

Once I receive your response, I will be sending you a Zoom invite for the interview as well as an Informed Consent to participate document to review and sign prior to the interview.

I look forward to speaking to you!

Best,
Appendix E – Scripted Interview Overview

Interview Protocol

Interview #
Interviewee:
Date:
Time
Length of Interview:

Thank you for joining me today. This is a semi-structured interview, so I do have a script. I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Public Administration program at West Chester University. I am conducting a research project on workforce and succession planning in academic libraries. I’m interested in finding out whether libraries are doing this type of work, and if so, what can be done to improve those processes, and if not, what can be done to help create a space for this type of work even in the smallest of libraries. Your insight will be beneficial to my project and my research. I will break the interview into three sections. Section 1, I’ll just ask some questions about your library and organization structure. In section II, I will focus on succession planning, and we will talk more about whether this type of work is happening in your organization. In section III, I will ask you questions regarding workforce planning and my project focus really leans into understanding more about the role of job descriptions. Many of the initial questions I ask will be yes or no based, this is for data recording purposes, but feel free to expand on any of those answers and I will have followed up questions.

To facilitate notetaking, I would like to record our conversation today. This was covered in the informed consent. If you have any questions, please let me know. I’ve also set a timer. I want to be respectful of your time. As a reminder, I will de-identify any of the identifiable information including institution name during the transcription process.
Appendix F – Interview Questions

Section I: Background

Question 1: What is your current role/job title (at insert location here)?

Question 2: How long have you held this role?

Question 3: When you are fully staffed, how many individuals are employed in the library (this should include part-time, full-time library or unit affiliations and include faculty level librarians)?

Do you have any vacancies currently?

Question 4: Could you describe the organizational structure of your library or unit?

Section II: Succession planning questions:

In 2010, Paula Singer defined succession planning in libraries as “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.” Based on this definition:

Question 5: To the best of your knowledge, does your library have a workforce or succession plan?
Follow up if yes: Could you describe what the plan looks like?
Follow up if yes: Who participates?
Follow up if yes: What are the benefits to this plan?
Follow up if yes: What are the challenges?
Follow up: Does your organisation revisit this plan? If yes, how often?

Follow up if no: To the best of your knowledge what are the main reasons or themes that outline why your library does not currently utilize succession or workforce planning?

Question 6: If someone leaves your organisation does your library typically promote within or hire externally?
Follow up: What are the benefits and challenges of this practice?

Question 7: Are there opportunities for pursuing other areas of librarianship in your organisation? (Ex: An employee is in technical services but interested in reference)
Follow up: If yes, could you describe how that process works?
Follow up: If no, would you like to have those opportunities?

Question 8: Do you have mentorship opportunities in your library?
Question 9: If someone leaves your organisation how are their duties typically distributed while you wait for either an internal or external hire to be onboarded?

Question 10: Does your organisation have any contingency plans for unexpected departures in your organisation?
Follow up: How were those plans developed?
Follow up: Could you describe what those plans look like?
If no: What generally happens after an unexpected departure?

Question 11: How often do you believe your library is operating in crisis mode? 10 being all of the time, 1 being none of the time.
Follow up: do you think this is related more to external forces (ex: pandemic) or internal forces (ex: Budget / turnover)?

Question 12: How would you describe the process of knowledge transfer within your library?
Follow up: What do you like most about the current process?
Follow up: What are the challenges?

Question 13: When thinking of workforce or succession planning in general, what do you think are the benefits?

Question 14: When thinking of workforce or succession planning in general, what do you think are the challenges?

Question 15: To the best that you can recall have you ever worked in a library that had formalized succession plans?

**Job Duties / Workforce Planning**

Question: Do you have onboarding processes for the library or the department that are separate from HR?

Question: When thinking about the job duties listed on a staff members’ job description, did they receive training on each of those duties upon hire? For instance, if they are hired as a technical services librarian are they given training on how you do those tasks at your institution?

Question: To carry on with that question, when thinking about the job duties listed on the job descriptions of onboarding staff members, did they receive any documentation that outlined processes for each task? (Ex: Manuals, LibGuides, Technical step by step processes)
Follow up: who creates these documents?
Follow up: How often reviewed?

Question: While in your current role, how often do you review job descriptions either at a holistic level, or at a position level?
-does it help promotion or pay increase?
Question: When thinking about your staff, how often do you think they complete job duties that are not listed in their job description? Or other duties as assigned. For instance, 10 percent, 20 percent of their time etc…?

Question 20: How often do your staff document job duty workflows and guidance. Follow up: Was this a departmental or organizational directive?

Question 22: What role does cross-training or collaboration on workflows play in your library? [Department head/director follow up] Could you describe your thoughts on cross-training or mentor training in your organization?

Question: Do you have an offboarding process for departing staff? Is it aligned with transitioning their job duties?

Challenges:

Question 23: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience with workforce and succession planning?