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Human Resource Management in Today's Academic Library: Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities.

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Human Resource Management in Today's Academic Library: Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities by Janice Simmons-Welburn and Beth McNeil
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REVIEW

Human Resource Management in Today's Academic Library: Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities. Edited by JANICE SIMMONS-WELBURN and BETH MCNEIL. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004. Pp. xiv+181. $45.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-313-32076-4.

The perception of human resource management in academic libraries has shifted tremendously in the past decade. No longer are those who serve in this capacity solely expected to serve as liaisons between the personnel and the administration. The new inclination is for human resource managers to treat employees in a more holistic manner by fostering an environment in which lifelong learning, diversity, and flexibility are not only encouraged but also embraced.

While the fourteen chapters of this indexed book cover a wide variety of human resource issues, common themes run throughout the articles and are reiterated consistently. Although I obviously cannot comment on each chapter in the space allotted, some of the major themes brought forth by this book will be discussed.

With the baby boom generation aging, it is estimated that there will be numerous openings in the profession within the next ten years. The chapter by Stanley Wilder recognizes this certainty and analyzes the demographic trends of new hires of member libraries within the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). There has been a shift in the positions redesigned or created in academic libraries in recent years, with some positions rendered obsolete due to advancing technologies and changing competencies, and positions developed for new areas of expertise. In chapter 11, by Janice Simmons-Welburn, this organizational redesign is discussed. Librarians who are leaving may be replaced physically, but their duties and skill sets will not. Simmons-Welburn mentions an ARL study that looked at job announcements from member libraries and found that more emphasis was put on communication skills and instructional tasks than had been in the past, indicating an increased importance of public service. Changing responsibilities mean changes in the library and information science (LIS) curriculum so new hires are as familiar with Web development and systems as they are with more traditional roles. Simmons-Welburn notes that there has also been a shift in the expectations of employers. Instead of presuming that an employee will stay with an institution the whole of her working years, the expectation is now that the employee will strive to be a lifelong learner. In this capacity, the employee will continue to feel fulfilled and would find more motivation to stay with an organization that encourages growth.

Continuing education is a topic that is brought up in the majority of the chapters, but is the main focus in chapter 5 by Luisa Paster. This chapter reflects on the need to keep current as information professionals and suggests ways that employers could facilitate this. The author gives several examples of training programs that different organizations have implemented that could be used as models for other institutions. Some work settings have both individuals and groups who are in charge of keeping staff current. Chapter 7, by Beth McNeil, focuses on managing work performance and career development. Regarding motivation, McNeil states, "Many factors motivate library staff, including working in an environment where difference

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is valued and new ideas welcomed, where risk taking is encouraged, and where the culture is one of cooperation rather than competition" (p. 66).

Recruitment and retention are issues that are important to all academic libraries. Laine Stambaugh addresses these concerns in her excellent contribution. The author notes that while mass retirements are expected in the near future, the number of accredited LIS programs is in decline. "Thirty ALA-accredited programs have been suspended or discontinued since 1925—four since 1992—and those programs are producing only slightly more graduates now" (pp. 27–28). Stambaugh notes that there is still a disproportionately small percentage of minorities in professional roles in academic institutions. This underrepresentation affects the ability of libraries to recruit more minorities in that minorities would not be able to envision themselves in these positions. Furthermore, this also affects our material holdings due to less influence in the shaping of the collections, which ideally should represent society as a whole.

Stambaugh also stresses that academic librarians must be more proactive in promoting interest in the profession. Instead of trying to fight the stereotype of librarians, we should promote the dynamic nature of our work. The continuing education and flexibility within our profession make for a challenging, rewarding career. In the chapter by Stambaugh, as well as other chapters throughout this book, the three Rs (recruitment, restructuring, and retention) are mentioned as vital roles upon which the employer must concentrate to create a positive atmosphere for employment.

Leadership at all levels is the issue stressed by Sheila Creth in chapter 10. The author discusses the significant changes that have formed a new model for leadership in the past decade. Leadership is no longer just for the few at the top; it is the responsibility of all library staff. Leadership can be expressed in many different ways not exclusive to the overall goals of the institution, such as through projects and activities. Creth dispels some myths that are common to leadership, such as, leaders are born and not made, and that it is a rare skill to be able to lead. The author quotes from Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus's book, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), which states, "major capacities and competencies of leadership can be learned. . . . It is a deeply human process, full of trial and error, victories and defeats" (p. 101). Directors of libraries should create an environment in which staff development is of high concern and where staff feel empowered as leaders. "What is most important is to dispel the assumption—or myth—that leadership is restricted to those occupying administrative or department head positions. This is a view of leadership that limits this activity to only a select few. Such a view can be crippling to an organization" (p. 105).

Communication is of great importance in any relationship, and working relations are no exception. In the chapter by Lila Fredenburg, the focus is mainly labor relations and, in particular, political activism to unionize to create better working situations at colleges and universities. Fredenburg concludes the chapter with five suggested strategies for library administrators. The first strategy concerns communication. To paraphrase, the author states that communication is essential and that administrators should strive to create a communication process to empower staff awareness. The establishment of a communication system between the administration and the staff creates a supportive culture of sharing and inclusiveness.

This book is highly recommended for those with an interest in human resource management in libraries. Although the book focuses on academic libraries, the insights provided could be useful to all types of libraries. The varying nature of the chapters in this book would be beneficial for those in administrative and human

resource positions, for students learning about the profession, and for those working within the profession. A quote by Sheila Creth in chapter 10 provides the best summary of this book: "The greatest opportunity for success in any academic library lies with the staff. As one colleague observed, our most valuable resource goes home every night" (p. 114).

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