Talent Management

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Abstract:

Talent management is typically known as a human resources term, and sometimes the perception is that it all happens in a different building or with other people involved. That shouldn't be the case; today's academic library should be very invested in how the principles of talent management are applied and how they affect the library organization, both currently and with future strategies in mind.

Talent management is defined as a set of procedures and processes and development of organizational cultural norms that are used to assess, recruit, deploy, and retain the talent and skill sets needed to successfully run and strategically grow any organization. For the past twenty years, libraries have undergone tremendous change in service models, technology enhancements, and patron expectations, which affects the skills and competencies needed by library staff. Academic libraries are also expected to keep up with their home institution's needs for skills and talent in order to support the institution's education mission.

Keywords: talent management | library organization | academic library

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Recruitment

In today's more dynamic and diverse societies, with changing organizational needs, having a strategic recruiting program is essential for good, sustainable practices related to having a healthy organization that employs talented staff that can move the organization's mission forward.[1] Looking at professional human resource models to frame this recruitment need, the following are some basic components for external recruitment to obtain the best talent:

- Identifying the skills and experience needed to be successful in the position as well as the organization.
- Targeting individuals with credentials and experience desired.
- Considering the timing of recruitment. (In the case of academic libraries, this might relate to the flow of the academic calendar.)
- Designing a recruitment message.
- Evaluating previous recruitment efforts.
- Managing the entire process and individuals involved.

These components can further break down into objectives of a search, typically for faculty positions or strategy for a non-faculty positions in which other specific skills are desired.

A trend in recent years for academic libraries has been to create a branding model for the organization in the recruitment effort. By investing in an organizational brand for the library, apart from the larger institution, you are sending a message to prospective recruits about who you are and what the organizational culture is all about. This can also be significant within the profession to market other aspects of your organization for professional involvement or collaboration across a broader spectrum.

Competition within the academic job market has tightened over the years to make recruitment competitive, encouraging the need to be more strategic. Gregory K. Raschke addressed the problem early on with an analysis of hiring and recruitment practices and a call for academic libraries to up their gain on methods to recruit needed talent.[2] Raschke's well-cited article with many examples of current practices suggests seeing the recruiting effort as an investment in order to minimize risk and poor efficiency in the recruitment process.

Prior to determining the specific needs of the organization from a skills perspective, it is useful to determine the core competencies for how the organizational culture is formed and how new recruits will be assimilated into the organization successfully. These core competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are common to a library's staff and could become part of the recruitment effort for specialized positions. Core competencies across an organization can be difficult to manage and ensure universal compliance, but it does provide some common guidelines for executing a recruitment effort and finding individuals who can best fit into the organization.[3]

Another part of the recruitment effort to be concerned with are current trends, including trends within higher education that will affect the library. Some trends we are aware of from our own professional literature, but paying attention to the larger set of trends that are embraced by the institution and governing boards could influence how individual candidates are perceived for their future value. A good example comes from eCampus News, in which the author breaks down trends into short term, midterm, and long term.[4] Her short-term trends can already be seen in libraries with a focus on measured learning or assessment and redesign of spaces to better

engage connected users. The recruitment message here is looking for skills on learning assessment and space redesign. Everyone is doing it, so are applicants engaged?

Midterm trends are also familiar to libraries as our profession takes the lead on introducing open education resources and concepts to their institution community. And the other midlevel trend discussed is the rise of interdisciplinary studies that can affect a library's ability to engage significantly. New disciplines and/or subject growth within an institution signals the need to have the expertise within the library to serve stakeholders engaged in that arena, a prospect in which the library would definitely want to be connected.

The longer-term trends are a work in progress but can be significant in present-day recruitment to help build sustainability for the future. Cross-institutional can be seen administratively by agreements signed between institutions or organizational collaborations on research project, grants, or curriculum sharing. Where do libraries fit into these types of activities, and will they have to right people to do it? The other long-term trend of innovation can imply a stronger focus on soft skills or risk taking that librarians typically have not embraced but are starting to. From a recruitment perspective, looking for talent that is looking to the future can have a positive influence on future sustainability and succession planning.

Determining Organizational Need

Continuous assessment of the needed talent is critical to preparing an organization to be strong and viable to the stakeholders associated with the organization. Libraries are in transition, and many new roles, or needs, are popping up so that academic libraries must seek the needed talent to stay on top of trends for research, teaching, and learning. 5 This causes changes to the organizational structure as well in providing support structures and services for these new positions and trends.

This echoes the need for the organization to be clear about goals and objectives, as well as culture as stated earlier. With library degrees opening doors for individuals to apply those skills in other professions, having an organizational strategy that supports a recruitment effort to find the best talent available is critical.

The organizational need for talent can be addressed in a variety of ways. At the heart of the matter it can be anecdotal in the sense of administration becoming aware of a rising need for talent in a particular area due to quantitative changes, such as number of students in a program, enrollment increases, or new programs added to the campus curriculum. Sometimes this grows out of incumbent librarians becoming overwhelmed or stressed over increased demand for time and effort or requests by campus faculty to broaden their scope of subject expertise based on trends in that discipline.

Assessment becomes the next level of determining organizational need, ensuring that subject faculty are part of the process to capture need based on subject expectations, changing technology, or new methods within a discipline or subject. Assessment also occurs at the individual level, be it faculty or staff, and changes needed could be vetted out of performance reports or annual goals and objects to determine points of change or demand.

More advanced means of recognizing evolving specialties comes from studies such as one published in the Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology. 6 The review focuses on position specialties within the subfields of librarianship, systems, electronic resources, and digital positions, as well as research areas and information literacy. It also looked at the relationship with administration. Using this study as an example, the authors

look at historic trends and position postings by position type to determine what trends are stronger and are carrying the profession in certain directions.

The conclusions for this study were broad and varied, but the concept and meaning are significant. A pattern of historic changes in positions across the profession aligns with what can be considered presently as a profession undergoing continuous change. Other changes, such as massive quantities of free infor1nation, open-access movements, and the need for mediation across these types of resources for information seekers, indicates that future hiring practices should incorporate seeking a set of skills that are nontraditional but flexible and open thinking.

Be strategic

The organizational need can translate into considerations or actions beyond the recruitment process. This requires the organization to take a strategic look at current practices and the skill sets of individuals already working. Through a performance management process, skills of current employees can and should be modified as changes occur to the library, to the institution, and from within the community.

Developing strategic goals for talent management initiatives should be part of any organization's overall strategic mission. Strategic planning starts with strategic formulation in which the organizational mission, goals, and values are identified.[7] As new ideas surface, recognizing the people resources that will learn and implement these ideas should be part of the process. This can also be part of that recruiting profile if needed. Strategic objectives will operationalize the mission and work of the organization.[8] This then allows for action items to be developed for moving forward.

The next part of your strategy will be to gather information and conduct assessment if needed. A common form of this is a SWOT analysis, a review of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In these activities, understanding how your organization's skills match up with weaknesses and threats can significantly influence hiring or training programs going forward. This will also help develop SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) objectives as you move into executing your strategy.

The next step would be implementing your strategy or the execution of your program and plans to move the organization forward. These are usually short-ter1n goals and objectives, so in the case of talent management initiatives this could include a review of your existing staff members' Job descriptions, modifying position postings to address skill shortfalls, or developing training programs to better equip current skill sets across your organization. If your organization is incentivized to pursue new trends or innovative ideas, then this step will be exciting for them to gain new knowledge. If not, other actions will be needed to support employee engagement and support of organizational goals and objectives that seem necessary for long-term survival.

Finally, you want to step back and see what is working and what is not. Evaluating changes made, in particular within human resource constructs, is essential so that corrections can be made if necessary before any damage is done. Developing and engaging in a strategic framework prior to hiring new talent will help ensure successful outcomes for bringing new talent and ideas into the organization.

Employee types

Most academic libraries operate with a variety of employee types, jointly charged with carrying forth the mission of the organization and embracing the values of the total organization. The American Library Association provides descriptions for the array of typical employee types within libraries.[9]

Faculty searches dominate consideration for talent management as it is your librarian ranks that establish the primary expertise in an academic library. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) is a division of the American Library Association that provides umbrella guidance for methods and processes used by academic libraries searching for talent.[10]

Recruitment and management of talent can cover multiple employee types based on the needed functions in each area of the library. The strategic direction for driving recruitment should be based on understanding the labor market and the supply and demand for needed skills and abilities and identifying organizational needs to achieve both short- and long-term goals.[11] Much talent acquisition can come from non-faculty or hourly workers who perform functions outside of a faculty role. These knowledge, skills, and abilities can be crucial to the successful operation of the library and should be given the same focus and attention as you would for a professional search.

Employee engagement

Internally a form of recruitment is retention and development of talent already existing within the organization. By keeping all employee types engaged and connected to the organizational mission and collective values, talent will stay and be open to growing and changing with societal and institutional changes.

It's important to understand that the workplace is changing, and a new generation of workers might take different steps to keep engaged than previous methods. The new generation of workers might have different expectations of a working life as they are coming from a millennial or Generation Y perspective. A Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation report describes these younger workers as more focused on the immediate future, as opposed to long term, and looking for more innovation and variation in the workplace.[12] This report also identifies areas of expected change that would apply to academic libraries, such as diversity needs and technology enhancements.

In some ways this innovation and variation within academic libraries is already taking place. Traditional roles related to reference and instruction have already diversified into more detailed student success activities, more opportunities to become embedded in coursework, or stronger partners with subject instructors and a focus on high-impact factors related to supporting the campus curriculum. Employee engagement can become a critical component to how these innovations grow and develop or become stagnant and slow down the organization.

Employee engagement has many definitions for different organization types and is also affected by size and, in the case of academic libraries, the home institutions. Behaviors of engaged workers are usually behaviors that demonstrate optimism, team orientation, selflessness, passion, and a positive attitude toward the organization.[13]

Performance management and assessment

Academic libraries fall into a broad range of employee types, in most cases driven by institutional systems deployed by the entire campus but also reflecting the different roles played

by these employee types within the academy. The management of performance can be the catalyst for developing talent from within the organization by identifying measures that are critical to organizational performance and incorporating them into performance tools and processes.

An overview of how this can look is found in the ARL Spec Kit 344 and includes examples of performance review documents and survey statistics from questions on the role performance management takes within the organizational structure. 14 While types of assessment of performance vary, the authors note that performance management should be part of the larger talent management strategy in addition to recruitment and professional development opportunities that grow organizational skill sets in total.

Performance management brings forth the need for strong leadership in order to use performance assessment tools effectively. Organizational culture that provides employees with the resources to develop their skills and competencies, especially related to leadership development, are more likely to be healthier and stronger as a group.[15]

Some forms of performance assessment fall into peer-review actions usually related to tenured organizations. It is important to have in place guidelines and criteria related to the function of peer reviewers in order to get useful and nonbiased feedback. Peer-review guidelines should embrace the following:

- Peer review involves the use of established standards for all.
- A peer is someone of the same rank.
- Feedback is timely, routine, and a continuous expectation.
- Peer review fosters a continuous learning culture.
- Feedback is not anonymous.
- Feedback incorporates the developmental stage of the tenure process.[16]

This peer-evaluation process can also influence how the organization promotes continuous change as job expectations of others are understood and aligned with each other. As academic libraries began to move to new models of service and expectations, Charles B. Lowry wrote early on that continuous organizational development was needed to foster future need.[17] He said, "We must embrace the notion that part of the job is to change the job." This has current ramifications with performance management in aligning what jobs are needed with how performance factors are determined and perceived going forward.

Professional development

With the changes in our work environment such as technology, users needs and expectations, and teaching methods or pedagogy standards, librarians in academic libraries must embrace a continuous organizational development strategy in order to stay relevant and valuable to stakeholders. This is not always easy as funding, availability, and assessment factors can all become a consideration in developing that strategy.

Having a strategy that can be used by the organization to grow individuals who jointly grow the organization is part of developing the talent needed for the organization to continuously be of value to the larger institution. Professional development strategies are also good for morale and provide motivational opportunities to recognize and reward folks who make the effort and are accomplished.[18] These opportunities can come in the form of conferences, internal and

external training programs, formal curriculum learning, coaching and training activities, and group interactions with those who have different skills and are willing to job share or collaborate.

Providing professional development opportunities can help grow skills needed internally for the organization as well as provide a career ladder for employees seeking to advance or find diversity in their career. This also relates to managing performance for those needing additional education and focus on areas not meeting the needed expectations of their position.

Diverse hiring practices

The call for more diversity within the profession is not new and at times appears to be slow in changing. This is not only about diversity in the library but also about higher education in general. In 2006 Christine Stanley published an important benchmark study identifying barriers in the recruitment and retention of faculty of color in higher education institutions, and those issues are still active and important today for addressing the call for talent to academic libraries as well.[19] She outlines components that needed attention or in some cases an overhaul of policies and practices that impede the hiring of diversity talent into higher education organizations.

Stanley starts by indicating that campus climate plays a large role in how diverse candidates would see themselves and see if they could be successful or not. Those that tout the library as being a neutral place must work to ensure that the hiring of diverse staff is at the forefront of that neutrality. Having librarians and library staff on board who do not share those neutral feelings is a sign of failing at that objective. This could be especially true in tenure/tenure-track situations that become perceived as unfair.

Other factors to consider is how the organization addresses discriminatory issues, institutional racism, and biases in any given work-related activities, such as teaching, resources management, or reference consultations. Acquiring diverse talent is intended to connect stakeholders with staff members who share their point of view or world life perspective and that cannot happen in a demeaning environment.

Academic libraries and their associations have promoted diverse hiring for many years with programs developed for residents, scholarships, and fellowships and library and information science (LIS)-focused recruitment. From Educause comes a checklist, paraphrased here, that provides an overview of what inclusive hiring should look like:

- Job descriptions: Vetted of gendered language or descriptions that imply stereotypes to any particular traits or characteristics that could create a bias.
- Statement of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) values: States the organization's values related to DEI and that speaks to it throughout the process.
- Recruitment strategy: A strategy to promote the position in a wide range of venues, in particular with organizations representing diverse candidates.
- Search committee: Makeup of this is important to represent a broad point of view for the organization and institution and shouldn't just be focused on the specific department for which the position is intended.
- Implicit bias training: Many institutions now have this training for search committees and others connected to the search. Maximize its impact through discussion and examples with the search committee.
- Human resource support and direction: Important to ensure that equity and legal issues are addressed properly.

- Résumé review: Conducting a blind resume review without candidate identifying information helps ensure that the search committee is focused on the needs of the position without bias.
- Rubric: Having a rubric to evaluate skills and experiences is also a tool to guide search committee members to the needs of the position.
- Leadership committee for DEI: This process helps ensure that hiring is done openly and without judgment.[20]

The value in creating a culture for hiring diverse faculty ana staff can be broad. Hiring diverse faculty can provide colleagues that bring diverse approaches to teaching and research. Students can benefit with more interaction from diverse faculty members, which can influence academic self-challenge and an improved sense of belonging. Creating a solid program controlling barriers to diverse hiring initiatives and promoting the benefits gained can provide strong organizational benefits for years to come.

Looking for trends

The Association of College and Research Libraries publishes in most years a review of the top trends and issues in academic libraries. The most recent in 2020 emphasizes the significant amount of change that our institutions are managing and navigating in the current environment.[21] Applying good talent management techniques is especially important in managing trends and changes in academic environments, and within the academic library these trends manifest themselves in providing service and resources to library stakeholders.

Of current importance is the need for good leadership skills and the ability to not just manage change but also foresee needs and anticipate obstacles. Future leaders are encouraged to use professional development techniques and resources for focusing on the skills needed to lead libraries successfully in the face of volatility and uncertainty. This report expresses an urgency in that regard as change is happening rapidly.

Other trends discussed evolve around changes to technology and how library systems, machine learning, AI open-access initiatives, and streaming media all produce the type of change that modifies working conditions and primary job responsibilities of library staff. Continued develop of those trends might require different skill sets and talents to grow them within the organization.

This report was written before the full impact of COVID-19 would be fully known. The anticipation that the pandemic would affect these trends and possibly create new ones is realistic and prolific as the higher education environment is making modifications continuously to offset negative discourse with stakeholders.

Overall, the need for talent management will reflect the need for academic libraries to make changes to appeal to the stakeholder being served. A move to user-centric skills related to skills for discovery and use of information resources from the collection-centric organization of information is apparent.[22] That includes moving from librarians who are generalists to librarians who are subject specialists to work more closely with specific disciplines and research initiatives.

Academic librarians are also most connected with the higher education mission of teaching and learning. These trends include skills and competencies that embrace adaptive learning technologies, elements of instructional design, UX design in pedagogy, and open educational resources, to name a few.[23] Finding the talent to move academic libraries forward is

a significant and potentially daunting task in order to break the status quo of traditional and legacy hiring practices. Having a strategic objective to determine talent needs and following a process that is inclusive and transparent and assesses the trends within the environment can be the key to positive organizational change.

Notes

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