Chapter 95

Preparing Tomorrow's Library Managers:
Exploring Leadership and Succession Planning at The University of the West Indies Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on a study of leadership development and succession planning at The University of the West Indies Libraries. The research shows that in the absence of formal succession planning, leadership training takes place in tandem with the staff appraisal and career development process. The annual appraisal and assessment system provides the opportunity for staff who aspire to leadership positions to be guided in their career development and thus be better prepared when vacancies arise. The benefits provided to academic, senior administrative and professional staff—for example, funding for travel and professional activities, special leave for scholarly pursuits and other career development opportunities—are utilised by librarians to advance their careers. The chapter highlights the importance of strict adherence by library administration to the annual appraisal and assessment processes and staff use of organisational support for career development as integral components in leadership development and succession planning and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The University of the West Indies (hereafter The UWI), is the only regional university in the English-speaking Caribbean. It was established in 1948, with its first campus at Mona, Jamaica and subsequent campuses at St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago and Cave Hill, Barbados in 1960 and 1963 respectively. The Open Campus, with forty-two sites spread across sixteen territories was officially launched in June 2008.[1] There is a central governance system at the level of Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, but each campus has its own Principal and local governing body.

The four Campus Libraries work together to fulfil their goals of being expert centres, providing modern study facilities with access to a wide repository of information, including unique Caribbean resources. However, each campus has its dedicated library system with a Campus Librarian and a cadre of professional and support staff. One of the four Campus Librarians has the coordinating responsibility as University Librarian for The University of the West Indies Libraries (hereafter The UWI Libraries).

The UWI Libraries were among fourteen Caribbean libraries which were surveyed in 2007 to determine their readiness to deal with succession. The majority of those responding (11), The UWI Libraries included, had informal succession programmes only.[2] The issue of leadership development and succession planning is, however, of acute importance at The UWI Libraries as the professional staff is highly skewed towards the older age demographic and it is anticipated that within the next decade approximately 30% of them will be retiring. A significant number of these hold top level positions such as Campus Librarian, Deputy Campus Librarian, Head of Branch / Departmental Libraries or Head of Section and their departure will therefore create vacancies and opportunities for advancement for librarians on all the campuses. How will The UWI Libraries deal with the attendant leadership development and succession issues?

This chapter reports on an in-depth study of leadership development and succession planning at The UWI Libraries in the context of the overall theme of this book, "the importance of the development of library culture, policies, and documentation as integral parts of succession planning." This study will show that despite the absence of a formal succession plan, there are mechanisms in place which facilitate the preparation of staff to assume leadership positions on an ongoing basis. The University's annual assessment and performance appraisal system for senior administrative and professional staff categories, together with its employment benefit scheme, are effective tools which support leadership development. The culture of The UWI Libraries, as expressed in the criteria for staff advancement in the career path and in the execution of the processes for staff appraisal and assessment, takes cognisance of the development of leadership competencies as an integral component of professional development. The organisation is therefore able to recognise and nurture staff with leadership potential so that they are positioned to step into vacancies at the senior level when these arise. In this way, succession planning is achieved.

BACKGROUND

The UWI Libraries/Literature Review

It is a truism that while much has been written about succession planning in business literature, very little is to be found on the subject in the literature of librarianship and information science. What is the reason for this? The answer perhaps lies in a view expressed decades ago, that while business organizations are inclined to identify and groom

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