



**Janneka Guise, *Succession Planning in Canadian Academic Libraries*.  
Waltham, MA: Chandos, 2016, 124pp., \$55.00 USD.**

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This book may not be a how-to manual on succession planning, but that does not make it any less useful. Based on an online survey and in-person interviews conducted in 2013–14 with librarians and archivists at English-language member libraries of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), this study is an insightful and timely look at the dismal state of succession planning in those institutions.

Guise situates her study in the context of the massive wave of retirements that was predicted in the 1990s but has yet to occur. It is clear from her observations and analysis that this lack of turnover among baby-boomer employees is a succession problem in itself that requires planning. With senior management positions occupied by one demographic for an extended period, there are concerns that current middle managers may not have the chance to gain top leadership experience to move into these positions when the time comes. Furthermore, will there be enough qualified and interested candidates among new professionals to take these supervisory roles? Along with budgetary constraints and the changing nature of academic librarianship, this succession challenge is one that most university libraries have yet to take on. Indeed, Guise cites a 2012 study reporting that only ten percent of Canadian libraries have some kind of succession plan in place.

Common themes emerge from the literature on the topic and from the participants' responses in Guise's study. For instance, because libraries are generally unprepared for changes in leadership, they tend to adopt a reactive approach to departures, leaving little chance for a smooth transition, whether the position is being re-filled or eliminated. Guise also finds that respondents were divided as to whose responsibility succession planning should be: some felt it rested firmly with senior management (with the disadvantage of being a top-down approach, lacking transparency), while others believed that employees at all levels have a role to play, since they are in a better position to communicate to their superiors what their work entails, which is a central element of planning. Indeed, communication is identified



as a key factor in implementing a succession plan and understanding its benefits, something many respondents found lacking. Some expressed resentment and perceived unfairness in how certain individuals were given the opportunity to move into new roles or try their hand at management while others were left out. This is where sustained two-way communication between librarians and their supervisors, but also with the wider organization and social networks, would increase openness and provide a more accurate inventory of talents, interests, and aspirations across the library. Exposure to managers as leaders and motivators (not just as supervisors) to inspire the next generation, as well as equal access to professional development opportunities (even for short-term employees), were also mentioned as important measures.

The chapter on barriers (real and perceived) to succession planning may be the most revealing of the book. These are reminiscent of the obstacles faced in the larger context of organizational renewal and can prevent the elaboration of a plan or complicate the plan's implementation. Major hurdles singled out by participants include budgetary constraints resulting in more limited-term appointments that reduce the ability to train and retain the next generation of middle managers; a lack of transparency and fairness about who is being groomed to take on leadership positions and how one can even be considered and gain experience; an organizational structure that has a limited number of positions at the top, offering few opportunities for librarians and archivists to try on a management role; and the difficult task of transferring knowledge when it is not an institutional priority and overlaps between departing and incoming people are a rarity.

Guisse suggests that the current state of succession planning in academic libraries is not entirely surprising, considering that their parent institutions also fare poorly in this regard. Faculty, librarians, and archivists tend to enter academe with the principal objective of teaching and conducting research, not necessarily taking on managerial responsibilities. Providing proper support in the form of professional development, mentoring, management experience, and opportunities to exercise leadership are thus paramount for attracting qualified and interested candidates into senior positions.

Even without providing a clear road map to succession planning, this book offers much insight into what such planning entails and the implications of the current situation. By getting to respondents' own understanding of succession planning, Guisse identifies barriers and even some existing best practices among CARL libraries. Missing from the equation, however, are the library and archival technicians, who were not surveyed or interviewed for this study. Arguably, college programs do not train these paraprofessionals for management roles, and they are not expected

to teach, conduct research, or serve on committees. Therefore they are unlikely to become senior library administrators. But this distinction between these groups can be counterproductive when preparing for the future. A succession or renewal plan that does not include paraprofessionals in the conversation runs the risk of alienating a significant segment of a library's workforce, a situation that would merit its own study.

Overall, Guise presents a thought-provoking study that will be of interest to senior library administrators and benefit all library employees, since we all have a role to play in succession planning. This book will hopefully spur a much-needed conversation.