

The Leader Among Us: Identifying Career Progression Barriers Between Archivists and Librarians

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Abstract

Libraries and archives share a focus of organizing and providing access to various information sources. Considering this, it makes sense that librarians and archivists have overlapping educational backgrounds, work values, and professional networks. However, despite these similarities, archivists are underrepresented in senior leadership positions in libraries (Condic, 2020). This imbalance may impact setting strategic priorities, allocation of resources, and collection development decisions. For many reasons, not every organizational member will have equal access to career progression or senior leadership positions. Barriers to advancement have been widely studied with demographic differences (e.g., gender, race) but little research has focused on deep-level, cognitive differences. Reasons for disproportionate advancement may be related to individual differences between groups, perceptual biases, or contextual factors. This paper explores whether the imbalance of librarians and archivists in leadership positions is due to organizational barriers, individual differences, or a combination of these factors. Participants were 460 librarians and archivists recruited through professional associations. Participants completed an online survey using established measures of personal values, motivation to lead, worries about leadership, engagement, and supervisor support. Using t-tests to compare the groups, it was found that the librarians and archivists were largely similar on individual differences yet varied significantly in their experiences at their organization. This indicates that individual differences are not the primary factors leading to the observed leadership imbalance and that there are likely organizational barriers at play. Additional research is needed to gather more insight into how upper library leadership is contributing to these different work experiences and imbalanced leadership emergence across library units. Recommendations for practice include ensuring equal access to training and development opportunities, including frequent feedback mechanisms in addition to the performance appraisal process, and formalizing mentorship programs so everyone has the opportunity to form high-quality relationships with more senior colleagues.

About the authors:

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