Impact of Career Mobility on Hiring Decisions for Academic Librarians

Sean Kennedy & Marilia Antúnez

University of Akron – University Libraries

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What are frequent job changes?

Our definition and the many related terms

• Frequent job changes is defined as having **multiple job changes** in **different colleges or universities** throughout an individual’s **professional career as a librarian** (i.e., external movement).
• Other terms are used in the literature related to this topic: job-hopping, protean careers, occupational mobility, career mobility, turnover, “hobo syndrome”, and many more.
• This study measures **academic library leaders’ perceptions** of candidates with frequent job changes.
• Some measures of the library leaders’ career (e.g., # of libraries worked at in their professional career) were collected to see if those measures resulted in more understanding of candidates with similar career paths.
Why research frequent job changes?

The problem

• Job changes **becoming the norm** (especially for career-focused librarians).
  – Some causes: leadership changes, retirement rates, reconfiguration of job duties, etc.
• Employment history **can be a major factor** in determining a candidate’s suitability for open librarian positions.
• Evidence from other professions shows that **employers can overlook** candidates with frequent job changes which can result in good candidates being screened out early in the search process.
• A librarian who moves between institutions ≠ a bad librarian.
• Our anecdotal experiences with frequent job changes / our motivation:
  – Marilia at job interviews and search committees.
  – Sean serving on search committees.
Understanding the problem in librarianship

Goals of the study

• Two-pronged approach:
  – Attempt to understand what is considered “job hopping” or job changing that is too quick in the eyes of library leaders.
  – Do library leaders actually discriminate against individuals with frequent job changes?

Methodology

• Online survey of academic library leaders.
  – Library leaders in our study were deans, directors, department heads, search committee members, and other librarians making hiring recommendations.

• Targeted email listservs that “library leaders” were likely read.
  – Some examples: acrlleadershipdg, lama-mmdg, libadmin, uls-l, etc.

• Survey was designed to cover the various organizational setups in academic libraries with respect to librarian status.
  – For example: only tenure track librarians, only non-tenure track librarians, librarians do not have faculty status, and various mixtures of faculty status
Academic library administrators/leaders

Total participants = 230

Gender breakdown of sample: 78.6% Females, 21.4% Males

Gender breakdown of ALA (2017): 81% Females, 19% Males

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• Age of participants ranged from 27 to 71, mean = 50.08 yrs old.
• Sample is a bit older than the ALA (2017) profession breakdown.
  – Expected since our sample features more accomplished librarians.

Age of sample vs. ALA (2017) breakdown

- % of sample represented by age range
- % of ALA represented by age range
Academic library administrators/leaders

Total participants by region

- Canada: 10
- Western US: 38
- Midwest US: 70
- Southeast US: 55
- Northeast US: 56

Participant breakdown by type of institution

- Public university or college: 61%
- Private university or college: 39%

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Academic library administrators/leaders

Participant breakdown by number of years as a library leader

- 0-5 years: 62.4%
- 6-10 years: 13.76%
- 11-15 years: 11.64%
- 16-20 years: 6.35%
- 21+ years: 5.82%

Total participants by number of professional positions held

- 1 position: 36
- 2 positions: 48
- 3 positions: 57
- 4 positions: 38
- 5 positions: 22
- 6+ positions: 28

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Length of employment before leaving

Background

- Beliefs on the duration or length of employment before moving to another institution range from one to five years.
- Job movement may be tied to librarian’s career trajectory, career goals, etc. (Osif, 2007) and the job market or economic climate (ACRL, 2002).
  - Early career vs. midcareer vs. late career
- Most librarians move at least once within their first five years of employment (Markgren et al., 2007).

Expectations / Hypotheses

- Library leaders will expect tenure track librarians to stay longer than non-tenure track librarians who in turn will be expected to stay longer than non-faculty librarians.
- Library leaders will believe tenure track librarians should stay longer than non-tenure track librarians who in turn should stay longer than non-faculty librarians.
Expectation for length of employment

Minimum length of time new hires expected to remain at your institution.

• Options were 1, 2, 3, 4, 5+ years
• Mean responses* (limitation)
  – Tenure track = 3.673
  – Non-tenure track = 2.961
  – Non-faculty = 2.883
• Tenure track mean response statistically significant from non-tenure track and non-faculty means responses (p-value = 0.000).
• Library leaders expect tenure track librarians to stay longer than non-tenure track and non-faculty librarians.
• No difference between non-tenure track and non-faculty librarians.
Library leaders beliefs on length of employment

Minimum length of time new hires should remain at your institution.

• Options were 1, 2, 3, 4, 5+ years
• Mean responses* (limitation)
  – Tenure track = 3.274
  – Non-tenure track = 2.738
  – Non-faculty = 2.613
• Tenure track mean response statistically significant from non-tenure track and non-faculty response (p-value = 0.000).
• Library leaders believe tenure track librarians should stay longer than non-tenure track and non-faculty librarians.
• No difference between non-tenure and non-faculty librarians.
Length of employment expectation vs belief

- Mean responses in all three cases were lower for belief than expectation.
  - Tenure track expectation vs belief statistically different (p-value = 0.002).
  - Non-tenure track expectation vs belief showed no difference (p-value = 0.114).
  - Non-faculty expectation vs belief statistically different (p-value = 0.038).

- Our results show no statistically significant difference for non-tenure track librarians in the reported lengths that they are expected to stay versus the amount of time library leaders think they should stay.

- For tenure track librarians and non-faculty librarians, library leaders reported they expect individuals to stay employed longer than their belief of the minimum amount of time they believe librarians should stay before leaving. Those differences were statistically significant.

- Results are some indication that frequent job changes or “job hopping” isn’t seen as a prevalent issue in the field. Library leaders expect individuals will stay at their library longer than they believe they are professionally obligated to stay.
Key variable: Gender

Background

• Male academic librarians tend to change jobs more frequently than female academic librarians (Schiller, 1968) and Braunagel (1975) found male librarians change jobs for salary and career advancement reasons.

• In other industries, employers are more likely to hire males with job changes than females with job changes (DeVaro et al., n.d.).

Expectations / Hypotheses

• Female library leaders would be more understanding of individuals with frequent job changes than male library leaders.

• Women will experience more job changes than men. (Schiller (1968) study findings are outdated!)
Key variable: Gender

Findings – no differences based on gender

• Study sample showed no statistical difference in number of libraries worked at by gender.

• No difference in general attitude towards candidates with frequent job changes.
  – 61.67% Females / 48.98% Males reported an unfavorable view in general.

• No difference in expectation for length of employment based on gender.
  – 87.78% Females / 91.84% Males reported no difference.

• No difference in expectation for length of employment for millennials.
  – 52.78% Females / 48.98% Males reported no change in expectation for millennials.
  – 46.67% Females / 46.94% Males reported they expect millennials to leave sooner.

• No difference on weight given to job qualifications versus job history.
  – 65.36% Females / 55.10% Males reported giving some weight to job history but not as much as position specific qualifications.

• No difference on rating scales about loyalty, trust, and would you hire.
Key variable: Age / Cohort status

Background

• Recent library school grads as well as mid-career librarians can experience frequent job changes (Markgren et al., 2007; Fontenot, 2008; Greenfield, 2013).

• Early-career librarians perceived that seasoned librarians would be more critical of individuals with frequent job changes (Markgren et al., 2007).

• Millennials tend to be early adopters of technology (Emanuel, 2012).

Expectations/ Hypotheses

• Younger library leaders will be more understanding of frequent job changes.

• Older library leaders will expect librarians to stay in one position for a longer period of time than younger library leaders.

• Older library leaders will expect the millennial generation to change jobs faster than the younger library leaders will expect of millennials.
Key variable: Age / Cohort status

Findings – age is just a number!

• Age correlated with a few expected variables:
  – Weak positive correlation with # of libraries worked (r = 0.260, p-value = 0.000).
    • Indication that job movement activities may not be generational.
  – Moderate positive correlation with years in current position (r = 0.578, p-value = 0.000).
    • Indication that current library leaders tend to stay in their positions.
  – Weak positive correlation with minimum expected length of employment for newly hired tenure track librarians (r = 0.256, p-value = 0.008).
    • Older leaders showed a small tendency to expect tenure track librarians to remain employed for a longer duration before moving to another position.

• Age did not correlate with a number of expected variables:
  – Except for the areas mentioned above, age did not correlate with expected length of employment, all questions about beliefs for length of employment, expectations of millennial librarians, willingness to hire candidates with frequent job changes, ratings of trust and loyalty of candidates with frequent job changes, etc.
Key variable: Succession planning

Background

• Libraries are experiencing higher turnover due to a combination of retirements (e.g., baby boomers) (Taylor & Lee, 2014) and a growing trend of external movements in the field.
• Turnover is expensive for organizations (Becton et al., 2011; Ramkumar et al., 2016).
• More leadership positions are becoming available (Taylor & Lee, 2014).
• Nearly 40% of ARL libraries have a succession plan but most fail to fully utilize it (Taylor & Lee, 2014).

Expectations / Hypotheses

• Libraries with active succession plans will be less critical of candidates with frequent job changes.
Key variable: Succession planning

Findings – planning is good!

• Respondents indicated that only 21.4% had a succession plan, 17% did not have a succession plan, and 61.6% had some planning but not a full succession plan.
  — Private schools reported more libraries with succession plans and less libraries with no succession plans compared to public schools. This was statistically significant (p-value = 0.035).

• Library leaders who reported having a succession plan rated less disruption when experiencing librarian turnover than those with no plan or some planning. This difference was statistically significant (p-value = 0.000).

• However, there was no statistically significant difference in the general view of candidates with frequent job changes and level of succession planning.

• Succession planning did not have an impact on other expected variables such as beliefs about length of employment, willingness to hire a candidate with frequent job changes, and loyalty or trust ratings for candidates with frequent job changes.
Key variable: Institutional differences

Background

• Type of academic institution (i.e., public or private) plays a role in the search process and any legal requirements for that process. Regardless of the type of institution, the hiring process is multi-faceted, time-consuming, and can be very costly. *Procedures and protocols are different between institutions* even if those institutions are of the same type or from the same geographic area. (Womack, 1997; Howze, 2008; Benjes-Small et al., 2011; Shaffer, 2011)

• **Search committees** can sometimes make subjective decisions about candidates. The search committee process needs improvements to be more efficient. (Becton et al., 2011; Kausel et al., 2016)

• Frequent job changes are most visible on application materials such as a CV and can lead to good candidates being eliminated early in the process (Wang & Guarria, 2009).
Key variable: Institutional differences

Expectations / Hypotheses

• Public colleges/universities will be more understanding of individuals with frequent job changes than private colleges/universities.
• Public colleges/universities will put more emphasis on job qualifications (legally required) than private colleges/universities.
• Private colleges/universities will believe and expect librarians to stay employed longer than public colleges/universities.
Key variable: Institutional differences

Findings – different but the same

• No difference in general attitude towards candidates with frequent job changes.
  – 57.59% Public / 61.97% Private reported an unfavorable view in general.

• No difference in expectation for length of employment for millennials.
  – 51.90% Public / 52.11% Private reported no change in expectation for millennials.
  – 46.84% Public / 46.48% Private reported they expect millennials to leave sooner.

• No difference on weight given to job qualifications versus job history.
  – 63.29% Public / 62.86% Private reported giving some weight to job history but not as much as position specific qualifications
  – 6.58% of the total sample reported giving more weight to job history than position specific qualifications – could be illegal!

• No difference on rating scales about loyalty, trust, and “would you hire.”
Key variable: “Information technology librarians”

Background

• “Information technology librarians” were defined in the survey as librarians whose job duties are technical in nature and may have elements of crossover with the information technology field (e.g., Systems, Electronic Resources, Digital Content, etc.).

• The information technology profession as a whole experiences an ample amount of frequent job changes (Ramkumar et al., 2016).

• The 2014 ARL member survey showed that 63% of respondents said that information technology respondents are difficult to retain (Taylor & Lee, 2014).

Expectations / Hypotheses

• “Information technology librarians” will not be viewed by library leaders any differently than other types of librarians. Therefore their expected job movement will not match that of the IT field.
Key variable: “Information technology librarians”

Findings – librarians are librarians

• Library leaders were asked if they had a different expectation for length of employment for librarians with information technology type duties.
  – Tenure track “IT librarian” = 79.8% of total sample said no change / 17.5% said shorter
  – Non-tenure track “IT librarian” = 75.2% of total sample said no change / 23.8% said shorter
  – Non-faculty “IT librarian” = 67% of total sample said no change / 25.5% said shorter

• Our sample seems to indicate that librarians with IT-related jobs are primarily viewed similarly to other librarians in terms of length of expected employment but may tend to move between positions slightly quicker.
Key variable: Region
(What can we say about our Canadian friends?)

Background & Findings

• We made the assumption that different U.S geographic regions and Canada would have different norms, attitudes, and/or opinions to the employment issues we are raising. In general, we did not observe these differences in our data.

• We did see some interesting trends with the Canadian respondents although we do not have enough in our sample to draw statistical conclusions.

• Across all regions, there was no difference in general attitude towards candidates with frequent job changes.
  – However, 80% of Canadians in the sample rated holding multiple positions in the past as favorable or neutral. The next closest region was the U.S. West at 44.74%.

• Canadian respondents were consistently more understanding / less harsh on a number of rating scales asking if candidates with frequent job changes were disloyal, untrustworthy, and not worth hiring due to perceived quick turnover.
Anecdotal feedback from our sample

Themes

• Type of moves are important: lateral vs. career progression.
• Length of time at an institution remains an important factor when hiring.
• Reason for moving is important: quality of life vs. incompetence/bad teammate.
• Growth: Do job changes indicate the development of the librarian?

Quotes from participants

• “If in the second year they are looking for a new position, then I question how much energy they have placed in their current position.”
• “Better to have a stellar librarian for 1 year than a mediocre one forever!”
• “I think that more institutions suffer from stagnation related to too much longevity than instability from frequent job-hopping.”
• “I have had more trouble motivating librarians who have been in one place for over 10 years than I have ever had with those who move jobs.”
What can we do as a profession?

Takeaways

- Overall, our data indicates there is no *systematic* discrimination or unfair treatment of individuals with frequent job changes.
  - However, we also know from anecdotal experience that this happens!
- Some of our findings suggest isolated biases in hiring.
  - 46.7% of the sample have lower expectations for length of employment of a millennial.
  - 59% of the sample believes frequent job changes reflect unfavorably on a candidate.
  - 6.6% of the sample reported giving more weight to job history than job specific qualifications.
  - 13.5% of the sample reported a level of belief that candidates who have moved between institutions in the past would be disloyal or uncommitted.
  - 13.3% of the sample reported a level of agreement with the notion of preferring not to hire candidates who have moved between institutions in the past “because it means they will soon leave my library.”
What can we do as a profession?

Suggested practices

• Succession planning leads to less disruption when individuals leave a library.
  – Assembling and actively implementing a succession plan is one alternative to automatically weeding out good candidates who may leave your institution sooner than desired.

• Librarians move between institutions for many reasons that are separate from the quality of work they perform.
  – Examples: salary, tenure status, family changes, upward mobility opportunities, etc.

• View candidates with frequent job changes as unique individuals and do not jump to subjective conclusions about them.

• Consider potential benefits of having an individual on staff who has been exposed to different libraries and their procedures.

• Do not automatically pass on potentially valuable candidates to your library based on job history alone. Use references and phone interviews to better understand an individual’s career movement.

• Make sure to weed out those individuals who may truly be a “job hopper” or a disruptive force in the workplace!!!
References

References cont.


Questions?

Sean Kennedy
Assistant Professor of Practice, Bibliography
Collection Management Librarian
skennedy@uakron.edu

Marilia Antúnez
Assistant Professor of Bibliography
Life & Allied Health Sciences Librarian
mantunez@uakron.edu