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Book Review

Review of *Innovative Library Workplaces: Transformative Human Resource Strategies*

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ABSTRACT

Review of *Innovative library workplaces: Transformative human resources strategies*, edited by Lisa Kallman Hopkins and Bridgit McCafferty. Association of College and Research Libraries, 2025. 392 pp. ISBN 9798892555357.

KEYWORDS

human resources, work culture, libraries

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Innovative library workplaces: Transformative human resource strategies, edited by Lisa Kallman Hopkins and Bridgit McCafferty, is a timely contribution to the ongoing debates about labor and organizational culture in academic libraries. The editors ground the book in the transformations that libraries experienced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, arguing that library workplaces must permanently reimagine how they recruit, compensate, and support employees (p. vii). In the introduction, the editors highlight a central tension that runs throughout the book: how to balance autonomy and collaboration in ways that sustain both individuals and institutions. With 22 chapters, the book is divided into two parts: Part I addresses human resources in libraries, and Part II examines workplace culture and organization.

Part I, “Human Resources in Libraries” contains 11 chapters across three sections on recruiting and hiring, onboarding, and training, and salary studies and unions. The opening chapters make a strong case for treating human resources as a strategic, rather than transactional, function. Chapter 1, “HR as Strategic Partner: Practical Approaches for Building HR Capacity in an Academic Library Setting,” outlines a roadmap that includes tools such as gap analyses, SWOT frameworks, and futures thinking. The author’s argument that libraries must align HR with organizational strategy is persuasive, particularly in its emphasis on workforce planning and equity-centered mission statements. Chapter 2, “Subvert the Dominant Paradigm: Reimagining Academic Library Hiring Practices,” takes on the structural whiteness of academic library hiring and critiques the persistence of “fit” as a hiring criterion. Through case studies, the authors show how libraries can embed equity directly into the hiring process by using search advocates, rubrics, and intentional committee composition rather than relying solely on individual bias training. Chapter 2 stands out because it moves beyond incremental fixes to interrogate the underlying systems that replicate homogeneity in the profession. Compensation also emerges as a key theme in Part I. Chapter 9, “Assessing Salary Equitability: A Review and Case Study of UVA Library’s Salary Review and Adjustment Initiative” is one of the book’s more data-driven chapters. By documenting inequities and implementing corrective adjustments, the authors provide a replicable model for other institutions. This empirical grounding is a welcome contrast to more aspirational chapters, demonstrating the value of transparent data analysis in building equitable workplaces.

Part II, “Work Culture and Organization” contains 11 chapters across three sections on employee morale, flexible work arrangements, and strategic planning and reorganizing. Chapter 12, “Wellness Initiatives in Academic Libraries” illustrates how libraries have attempted to move beyond patron-centered wellness toward supporting employees. While the examples are practical, the chapter reflects a broader challenge in current conversations around wellness, labor, and burnout: the reliance on anecdotal accounts rather than longitudinal evidence. Efforts to reduce burnout, improve morale, and redesign workspaces are timely but not always evaluated for long-term impact. The most compelling contributions in this section come from

the chapters on flexible work. Chapter 15, “The New Normal: An Empirical Examination of Remote Work in Academic Libraries,” presents an empirical study of remote work in academic libraries showing that flexible arrangements are not only popular but also crucial for recruitment, retention, and equity. Complementing this, Chapter 16, “Flexible Work Empowers: An Inclusive Strategy for Recruitment and Retention of Academic Librarians,” argues that flexible work is an inclusive strategy, particularly for employees who have historically been excluded by rigid workplace norms. Together, Chapters 15 and 16 advance one of the book’s most important arguments: that remote and hybrid work should be seen not as temporary accommodations but as long-term equity tools.

Across both sections, autonomy and collaboration serve as the dual foundations of the post-pandemic workplace, just as the editors described in the introduction. Employees want flexibility in how and where they work but also value a sense of collective belonging. Inclusivity in hiring and retention is a consistent thread, with some chapters (notably Chapter 2) moving beyond surface-level reforms to engage in structural critique. Wellness and flexibility are framed not as individual coping mechanisms but as organizational strategies. The book’s strength lies in its practical orientation. Readers will find tools that can be directly applied in library settings, including onboarding road maps, salary study models, and HR mission-building exercises. Many chapters blend pragmatic strategies with a willingness to interrogate structural inequities.

The book’s limitations stem mainly from scope and perspective. Most contributors are administrators or managers, leaving staff, paraprofessional, and contingent perspectives underrepresented. The focus is also largely North American, with limited international context. While the case study approach of many of the chapters keeps the book engaging, it sometimes leans towards description rather than critical assessment, raising questions about long-term outcomes. Despite these limitations, the book makes a valuable contribution to the literature on library labor by decisively centering employee experience. By highlighting hiring reform, salary equity, wellness, and flexible work, the book situates libraries within the broader conversation about workplace equity in higher education. Its primary audience is practitioners seeking actionable strategies, though researchers also find much to consider. For practitioners, the book offers concrete models; for researchers, it raises pressing questions about how power, equity, and labor relations will shape the library workplace in the years to come. *Innovative library workplaces: Transformative human resource strategies* is a timely and adaptable collection that succeeds in inviting libraries to reimagine their workplaces as inclusive, flexible, and sustainable.