

REIMAGINING

The Academic Leader Search Process



Foster Talent: Developing a Pipeline for Internal Academic Leadership Candidates

Developing internal successors and engaging internal candidates in an academic leadership search is a challenge for many post-secondary institutions in Canada. A reimagined approach to the search for academic leaders requires greater attention to the talent pipeline.

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Post-secondary clients tell us they struggle to develop a pool of internal talent capable of taking on leadership roles. What is at the root of this problem? Academic leadership roles are more complex than ever, with changes in government funding and direction, a globally competitive education sector, and evolving student and faculty expectations for leaders all contributing to

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making these positions appear more daunting, time-consuming, and challenging than they may have been in the past. As a result, faculty members who have devoted their professional careers to research and providing students with an exceptional educational experience may view these opportunities as unattractive, declining to step onto the leadership track. And although we have seen some progress on this front, the number of qualified candidates remains limited, resulting in considerable competition among post-secondary institutions in attracting and retaining leaders.

In the course of our consultations with post-secondary institutions nationwide, it has become clear to us



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that there is an acute need for universities to commit to intentional development of an internal pipeline of leadership candidates. We know there is untapped talent within these institutions – individuals who have served on a range of academic and institutional committees, who possess transferrable skills, or have demonstrated strengths in areas such as strategic decision-making, innovative programming, and team building. Why don't they step forward when leadership opportunities are available? Many are unconvinced about the value proposition of making such a move and believe it will detract from their academic pursuits.

Many potential leaders are unconvinced of the value proposition and believe it will detract from their academic pursuits.

In the face of these challenges, universities must take a thoughtful, planned approach to raising awareness and interest in leadership positions, providing opportunities for skills development, and ensuring alignment with the post-secondary leadership value proposition. Why? When faculty members opt out of leadership, they lose the opportunity to shape their institutions, and miss the chance to work towards creating a more sustainable, progressive academic environment with a focus on high-quality teaching and research for the benefit of colleagues, staff, and students. We believe human resources has a vital role to play in this effort, one of encouragement, collaboration, and guidance. By working in partnership with academic leaders to articulate a vision and strategies for internal leadership development, HR professionals can engage faculty

members in conversations that spark enthusiasm and speak to the potential to reshape or reimagine the policies, procedures, and frameworks that govern these faculty members and their colleagues.

Based on our experience in leading more than 150 leadership searches for universities and colleges nationwide in the last five years, we believe effective internal leadership development efforts involve seven key steps.

1. Articulate your leadership needs

The requirements of leaders are always changing and are directly impacted by the surrounding environment. We encourage organizations to consider both the current and future skills and competencies required of leaders. Developing a clear leadership profile will make it easier to communicate expectations to the potential pool of candidates.

2. Identify potential leadership candidates

Developing successors occurs over years rather than months. It is essential to consult with Faculty deans and chairs to identify individuals who possess the knowledge, skills, or interest in taking on leadership roles. Take proactive steps to engage strong potential candidates in considering leadership opportunities.

3. Promote opportunities for faculty members to build leadership skills

Faculty members spend their careers exploring their fields of interest. By promoting opportunities to participate in committees and decision-making bodies related to their academic or professional interests, you can encourage faculty members to learn leadership skills, shape policies and procedures, and gain invaluable perspectives of the institution as a whole that will enable them to transition into senior leadership roles.

4. Ensure diversity in potential candidates

Traditionally, there has been a core group of faculty members that have either been sought out or typically come forward to volunteer with committees. It is important to be inclusive of, and seek out, a wide range of identities, backgrounds, and perspectives. By promoting committee membership and other leadership development opportunities to a wide range of candidates, you can help ensure a pipeline of leaders that reflects the diversity of both the campus and the greater community.

5. Link committee work with leadership development programming

Support committee members at all levels of the institution with opportunities to participate in committee-related learning and development initiatives, such as training in how to chair committees, understand the value of diverse styles, and facilitate consensus decision-making.

6. Develop succession and talent plans for high-potential faculty members

Consult with faculty members about their career paths and help them create skills development plans that achieve their goals. The more attention and intention you invest in individuals with a demonstrated interest in leadership, the more encouraged and confident they will feel to take on those roles.

7. Provide opportunities for coaching and mentoring

Provide faculty members with access to coaches and mentors who are able to help them build skills along their path to leadership. This support will ensure each individual's development is monitored and facilitated, resulting in skills and knowledge that reflect the leadership requirements of your institution.

Our experience shows that it is possible to develop a robust and diverse internal pipeline of leaders who have a deep understanding of your institution's challenges and opportunities.

Ultimately, the goal is to develop a robust and diverse internal pipeline of leaders who have a deep understanding of your institution's challenges and opportunities, and who possess the skills, experience, and desire to deliver on the institution's objectives. Not everyone will take on leadership roles. In some cases, personal circumstances will be the deciding factor. However, there is value in empowering everyone with the skills and knowledge to step up and be a leader in their own way, as it will inspire faculty members to find opportunities to contribute to the operations or enhancement of your institution, and ensure its continued vitality and academic excellence.



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A highly skilled and proven human resource leader, Katherine Frank's approach to academic search and transition planning is informed by her extensive experience within the academy, having served as the Assistant Vice-President of Human Resources for Dalhousie University and the University of Calgary. She is a skilled facilitator and search professional and a Certified Human Resources Professional, with a strong understanding of the complexities of university leadership.

OUR TEAM IS COMMITTED TO YOUR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP SUCCESS.

KBRS has been a strategic talent advisor to universities and colleges across Canada for more than 40 years. Our approach is shaped by four important principles: our deep understanding of academic leadership, our ability to facilitate strong committee decisions, our exceptional candidate care, and our commitment to successful long-term partnerships. Over the past five years, our firm has conducted more than 150 leadership searches for universities and colleges nationwide.

One of Canada's largest independently owned executive search firms, we pair the flexibility and focus of a boutique firm with the research and rigour expected of a multinational organization. Our team of partners and recruitment professionals focused on academic search are informed by an Academic Advisory Council of past-presidents of Canadian universities and colleges. We work in partnership with Lee Hecht Harrison Knightsbridge, which has 27 offices across Canada and is affiliated with Knightsbridge Amrop's 80 offices in 50 countries, giving us both local presence and global reach.



Join the conversation. We are committed to working with our clients to improve the academic leadership search process ingrained in today's institutions and know that change takes time and collaboration. We believe our efforts will be strengthened by the contribution of diverse perspectives, including yours. We want to learn more about your experiences with the search process and to discuss ways to further improve the approach. What challenges are you facing? What successes have you had? What insights have you gained? We invite you to connect with our Academic Search Partners at Reimagining@KBRS.ca.

Read more. Find our *Reimagining the Academic Leader Search* series at www.kbrs.ca/reimagine

