From Information Professionals to Information Creatives: On Educating Future Generations in iSchools

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Abstract: The leadership mindset and associated skills have become a mainstay in the education and practice of information professionals. Our own policies, pedagogies, and attitudes become part and parcel of the educational environment we foster and serve as role models for students. Guided by the discussion of selected human resources practices at Google, among others, this session will provide us with an interactive venue for examining the values we hold and for reflecting on how this relates to student learning outcomes and demands of the marketplace. Collectively, we will explore the extent to which future information professionals and scholars value diversity (broadly construed), demonstrate out-of-the-box thinking, and are capable of unorthodox solutions. This task is crucial at the time when iSchools join efforts in rethinking their curricula, with an eye on educating not just information professionals but information leaders and information creatives.
Keywords: information creatives; information science education; leadership; values-based diversity; creativity; critical thinking
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1   Purpose and Intended Audience

The discussion of the crucial role that the leadership mindset and skills play in the education and practice of information professionals has become a mainstay in our field. Numerous research reports (e.g., Auckland, 2012; Bedford et al., 2015; Bertot et al., 2015), strategic plans, and policy statements emphasize critical thinking, creativity, the aptitude for lifelong learning, adaptability, and commitment to diversity in the broadest possible sense. The well-publicized hiring practices by Google and other companies also suggest the need for such critical skills, approaches, and sensibilities. There seems to be little disagreement that these skills are vital for the future of the information field, and there is no doubt that pedagogies supporting them should be an integral part of the curriculum. There is also a realization that graduate professional education is more than content delivery. Students learn through collaboration and socialization and look up to faculty members as role models. That is to say, our own attitudes, departmental practices, and classroom policies are all part and parcel of the learning process; they may be emulated, replicated, or disregarded by our students at their future workplaces, depending on how we fare.

In this interactive session, we invite the attendees to examine their own understanding of the management and leadership values they hold and reflect on how this understanding relates to student learning outcomes and demands of the marketplace in an interactive and playful environment. It will be of interest to a broad audience of scholars, educators, practitioners, and Ph.D. students.

The guiding frame for this session will be chiefly derived from the recently published book *How Google Works* (Schmidt, Rosenberg, & Eagle, 2014) and supplemented as needed. Several chapters of the book examine Google's human resources practices, which seem to be designed to maximize the pool of talented, creative, and diverse employees. We will discuss their application beyond the corporate environment, including higher education. Can iSchools benefit from Google's experiences and practices? What can and cannot be adopted? What is practical creativity, and how do we develop it in our students and ourselves? The session will address these questions through interactive group activities that will aim to reflect on, and critically engage with, specific statements and concepts, such as:

 "The "growth mindset";

"Insight that can't be taught", or "Great talent often doesn't look and act like you";

"Passionate people don't use the word" (Schmidt, Rosenberg, & Eagle, 2014, pp. 102, 103, 107,108, 100); and

"[E]veryone is creative, and can learn to be more so" (Pappano, 2014, para. 12).

2   Proposed Activities

Working in small groups, participants will discuss and devise strategies regarding some of the following themes (below are some examples of possible discussion topics):

- How do we identify students' extracurricular passions and integrate them in our coursework and, more generally, program design? [Goal: develop specific suggestions for educating leaders sensitive to the unique talents of their teams and able to capitalize on unexpected insights and diverse potentials]

- How important is the "growth mindset" (Schmidt, Rosenberg, & Eagle, 2014, p. 103)? [Goals: analyze the conflict between maintaining one's established 'expert' image vs. investing into new directions; explore the (real or perceived) tension between hiring for the specialized knowledge and hiring for the intellectual potential; examine what it means to be a lifelong learner in an academic department and in a professional setting]

- How do we ensure that "insight that can't be taught" is part of our work environment (Schmidt, Rosenberg, & Eagle, 2014, p. 107)? [Goals: inquire into the meaning of values-based diversity, i.e., "the kind of diversity that [goes] past demographics or other visible characteristics" (Caidi & Dali, 2015; see also, Hudson-Ward, 2014, The Economist, 2014); sample exercises may include: Who is a team player (a team player vs. a conformist)?; Can/should we work with people we don't like (Schmidt, Rosenberg, & Eagle, 2014, p. 107)?

- Can I interest non-specialists in my research? [Goals: critically examine Googlers' statement that "passionate people don't use the word" (Schmidt, Rosenberg, & Eagle, 2014, p. 100); develop short pieces in the format of creative writing or implement an artistic production which will convey the value of one's research to a broader audience, in the language understood by the general public].

- How do I get rid of my writer's (designer's/creator's) block? [Goal: examine our own capacity for creative expression through participation in blitz-creative writing and/or design activities].

3   Logistics & Time Distribution

We will start off with a brief introduction describing the rationale for and specifics of Google's hiring practices, while placing them in the context of current educational requirements in the field of information, and discussing such notions as practical and acquired creativity. We will proceed with group activities, with a sufficient number of facilitators. Facilitators will encourage attendees to

"create" and "produce" solutions and not fall (back) into the pure "discussion mode." The general discussion will enable critical engagement by participants, as well as a roadmap for the future.

Session: 90 min
General introduction: 15 min
Group activities (hands-on; *imagining* and *creating*): 35 min
General discussion and reflection (*reporting back*): 35 min
Concluding remarks: 5 min

4   Relevance to the Conference and Significance to the Field

What does this mean for the collective mission of iSchools to educate the next generation of information leaders and information creatives? How does it translate into the classroom practices, and in what way does it affect our own scholarship and service? Most importantly, how do we assess the merit of chosen approaches and who has a say in the matter? To foster a stimulating and holistic educational environment, we have to start by examining our own attitudes, current practices, and artistic potential because what we do and how we do it becomes a role model for young professionals and future scholars. Additionally, given the fluidity and eclecticism of the information field, it is all the more important to be able to communicate its merit to the general public and community stakeholders. As a result, this session will not only appeal to a broad audience of conference participants but will also be directly relevant to the conference theme of partnership with society.

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