1-17-2019

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Recommended Citation
Evener, Julie, "Organizational Learning in Libraries at For-Profit Colleges and Universities" (2019). Other Topics. 6.
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Organizational Learning in Libraries at For-Profit Colleges and Universities

Julie Ewener, MLIS, EdD

Problem
There is a gap in knowledge about organizational learning in the libraries of for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) in the United States. Though for-profit institutions are educating an increasing number of American students, few research studies have focused on the libraries in FPCUs. Academic libraries contribute to student engagement, student learning, and retention; therefore, the effects of improved library services for students at FPCUs may be positive and long lasting.

Purpose
The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study was to assess and explore the use of organizational learning in libraries at FPCUs.

Significance
• Professional organizations can better understand the context of library staff members at FPCUs to provide better support and training for those individuals.
• Library staff and leaders at FPCUs can apply principles of organizational learning to improve their libraries, based on research that libraries at FPCUs may be inadequate compared to those at traditional colleges and universities (Davis, Adams, & Hardesty, 2011).
Because libraries contribute to student success, improved educational services could result in better outcomes for students attending FPCUs.

Social Change Implications
More knowledge about organizational learning and its implications could lead to positive social change as libraries use it to support student learning and success.

Framework
The theory of organizational learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978) provided the framework for this study. Relevant Scholarship
Double-loop learning is more effective for organizational learning than is single-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Individual learning (training/professional development) is important for organizational learning (Antonacopoulou, 2006), but must be communicated to the larger organization (Fiol & Lyles, 1985).

Academic libraries contribute to student achievement (Soria, Fransen, and Nackerud, 2017), retention (Murray, Ireland, & Hackathorn, 2016), learning (Squibb & Mikkelsen, 2016), and engagement (Soria et al., 2017).

Participants
38 library staff members from FPCUs in the U.S. participated in the quantitative survey. The survey was administered through the Librarianship in For-Profit Educational Institutions (LFPEI) interest group electronic mailing list sponsored by the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL).

6 survey respondents participated in the qualitative interviews. These individuals all indicated their willingness to participate in the interviews via a question on the survey.

Procedures
Quantitative phase
• Online survey administered through the LFPEI interest group electronic mailing list.
• Used first 20 items of Chen’s (2006) Processes and Phases of Organizational Learning Questionnaire (PPOLQ), as well as demographic information.

Qualitative phase
• One-hour interviews, based on a standard interview protocol created for this study, conducted via online telephone software.

Analysis
Quantitative: Descriptive and regression analysis of organizational learning scores and 7 demographic variables.

Qualitative: Recurring themes and major topics were identified.

Findings
RQ1: Organizational learning score (M = 2.3) indicated medium level of organizational learning based on Bertram-Elliot’s (2015) scale.

RQ2: Number of FTE students had a statistically significant relationship with organizational learning score.

RQ3 Primary Themes:
• External pressures made organizational learning more difficult.
• Communication was key to promote organizational learning.
• Decision making processes contributed to organizational learning.
• Library staff used a variety of organizational learning strategies.

Recommendations
• One-hour interviews, based on a standard interview protocol created for this study, conducted via online telephone software.

Future research:
• Broader study of FPCU libraries with more participants;
• Study of libraries at traditional colleges and universities, comparing to FPCUs.

Acknowledgements
Thank you to committee chair, Vicki Underwood, committee member, Caroline Crawford, and URR member, Beate Baltes.