


1-17-2019

Organizational Learning in Libraries at For-Profit Colleges and Universities

Julie Evener

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, jevener@usa.edu

Author(s) ORCID Identifier:

 orcid.org/0000-0002-5123-139X

Follow this and additional works at: <https://soar.usa.edu/other>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

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

<https://soar.usa.edu/other/6>

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty and Staff Research at SOAR @ USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Other Topics by an authorized administrator of SOAR @ USA. For more information, please contact soar@usa.edu, erobinson@usa.edu.

Organizational Learning in Libraries at For-Profit Colleges and Universities

Julie Evener, 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).

Predictors of organizational learning in academic libraries include **library size** (number of employees and number of students) and **librarian experience and education** (Bertram-Elliott, 2015; Huang, 2014).

Though organizational learning has been applied to academic libraries, the current literature lacks clear outlines for effective application (Limwichitr, Broady-Preston, & Ellis, 2015).

The libraries at FPCUs are rarely studied or mentioned in the literature (Davis et al., 2011).

Research Questions

RQ1–Quantitative: What capacity for organizational learning is present in libraries at FPCUs?

RQ2–Quantitative: Which FPCU library demographic variables are most strongly related to organizational learning capacity?

RQ3–Qualitative: How do library staff members in FPCUs experience organizational learning in their libraries?

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-Elliott'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.

Interpretation

Organizational learning capacity at the high level is necessary for the flexibility and innovation required in today's environment. Library leaders, therefore, should be aware of the factors that contribute to organizational learning, as well as strategies to increase organizational learning in their libraries.

Limitations

Survey response rate of 6.5% based on total subscribers on the electronic mailing list (38 respondents out of over 500 subscribers). Recruiting via a professional association list may have skewed toward participants who understand the importance of, and had a desire for, continued learning and communication because people who voluntarily subscribe to such a list may already view continued learning as important.

Recommendations

To increase organizational learning:

- Proactive efforts toward communication;
- Develop and regularly update onboarding processes;
- Provide support, including monetary, for library employees to attend trainings, conferences, and other learning opportunities;
- Develop processes and resources for sharing and storing learning.

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.