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This study examined the practices of one public library system operating as a learning organization. The library bases its practices on the five disciplines described by Peter Senge: personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking. Eight managers participated in detailed interviews, and 94 employees completed questionnaires designed to elicit information about their experiences and perceptions of working in a learning organization. A strong commitment to staff development and learning is a hallmark of the library's operation. It reflects managers' understanding that an organization's ability to serve its users and to thrive in an ever-changing environment is based on its ability to learn, and that learning begins with every individual employee. While respondents offered unique perspectives on the details of the library's functioning, there was a general agreement that it was successfully working as a learning organization.

Headings:

In-service education
Personnel--Administration
Public libraries--Administration
Public libraries--Case studies
Public libraries--Staff
Staff participation in administration

A PUBLIC LIBRARY LEARNING ORGANIZATION:
A CASE STUDY

by
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The challenges faced by America's public libraries have been widely reported in recent years in the professional literature, in the news, in web logs, at conferences, and by word of mouth. In 2003, OCLC reported the findings of its inquiry into issues and trends affecting member agencies. Data collected through interviews and focus groups created a provocative, thoughtful, and somewhat familiar picture of working in today's information world. The 15-page Library Landscape section of *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition: A Report to the OCLC Membership* organizes the findings into two subsets: Social and Technology (OCLC, 2003).

Indeed, social and technological challenges abound. And almost all those challenges, coming from both external and internal environments, can be most appropriately considered in terms of change: Shrinking budgets, flattening hierarchies, frozen hiring, evolving technologies, increasing training needs of employees, the ever-shifting boundary between employee work life and home life, the library's changing role in the community it serves, waxing and waning of demands for service, growing diversity in the community of users, and competition with private industry to attract and retain new talent are all illustrative. It is the job of library managers to help guide their organizations through the turbulence that sometimes accompanies change, and to meet those challenges with vigor and creativity. But what sort of management approach will help libraries prepare for their futures, whatever those futures may present?

History

In looking forward, it can be useful to consider how public library management got to where it is. Richard Daft offers a useful framework for understanding the history of management in his book *Management* (2000). While many people look at different management efforts as fads that come and go, there is a sort of evolution and amalgamation of theories that takes place over time within a changing world context. Daft describes three main perspectives on management that have been influential in the last century: classical, humanistic, and management science (Daft, 45). What follows is a brief description of each perspective and an attempt to show how each has been interpreted in the practice of library management.

The classical perspective focuses on tasks and jobs and includes scientific management and bureaucratic organizational approaches (Daft, 45). These influences could be seen in public libraries beginning in the early 20th century, when managers began turning away from their rather authoritarian positions regarding philosophical and social order concerns, and became increasingly focused on technical and economic efficiency (Nauratil, 42). This scientific management approach focused mainly on tasks: carefully examining them to determine how best to perform them, and standardizing their performance for greatest efficiency.

As public libraries grew in size, managers began incorporating ideas from bureaucratic organizational theory. The main characteristics of bureaucratic organizations were that positions had distinct responsibilities and authorities, jobs were related in a hierarchical arrangement, promotions were based on measurable qualifications, and organizational rules were impersonal and applicable uniformly (Daft, 48). Library work

today continues to incorporate some of the more enduring aspects of these approaches. The most obvious areas neglected in the classical perspective, however, are the context in which work takes place and the workers themselves, their knowledge, individuality, and higher needs (Daft, 47).

The humanistic perspective is a sort of complement to the classical perspective in that it addresses the needs, attitudes, and interactions of the people who do the work. It has as long a history as the classical, but it features human relations, human resources, and behavioral science approaches (Daft, 50). Abraham Maslow's needs hierarchy theory and Douglas McGregor's Theory Y are part of the underpinnings of an evolving humanistic perspective. Human resource departments, employee assistance plans, staff development, union representation, flexible work schedules, and participative management are all part of the landscape from a humanistic perspective.

The management science perspective applies more mathematical approaches to solving management problems (Daft, 53). Consider the amount of counting done in modern public libraries: reference questions answered, attendance at programming, books circulated in a year's time, interlibrary loan requests, and requests to use special collections, for example. These numbers are used to create schedules, devise budgets, apply for grants, support operating decisions, and sometimes even justify the library's existence.

Systems theory, contingency theory, and total quality management grew out of the humanistic perspective and offer more ways to consider increasingly complex management issues (Daft, 55). All of these are more reflective of the complexity in which contemporary agencies operate.

Systems theory is a sort of cause and effect theory. Put simply, an organization can comprise several subsystems which are interdependent. A change in one part causes a response in another part. The manager's goal is to be able to understand operating patterns within a system and to understand how to create desired outcomes.

Contingency theory holds that what works for one does not work for all. An effective manager will evaluate the organization and figure out which factors need to be acted upon in order to attain desired outcomes.

Total quality management (TQM) is a process geared toward continual renewal and improvement. "Hallmarks of TQM include employee involvement at all levels; commitment to employee training and development; the use of problem-solving teams, quality control standards and statistical methods; long-term (instead of short-term) goals and thinking; and recognition that the system (not employees) is responsible for most inefficiencies" (Barnard, 1). Total quality management incorporates the use of numbers and statistics to get feedback from customers in order to know what their needs are. Some contemporary libraries managers have tried and committed to many of these practices. From helping employees become more effective to conducting user surveys and focus groups, many managers know that the internal customers and external customers are equally critical to customer service success.

The Problem

If OCLC's findings, described in *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan*, are an accurate depiction of the state of the information world, how, then, are library managers to help their organizations become more responsive to the ever-changing demands being

placed upon them? Has the evolution of management theories and practices presented library managers with a next logical step?

In 1990, MIT professor Peter Senge first published *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. The ideas in the book were based on years of work at MIT and other universities, as well as work being done at Innovation Associates, a firm committed to helping corporations and other organizations become learning organizations. The general proposition of *The Fifth Discipline* is that “our organizations work the way they work, ultimately, because of *how we think and how we interact*” (Senge, xiv). It is through the process of actively learning that we build the capacity to meet the challenges our organizations face.

Senge’s model for working as learning organizations is based on five disciplines or practices: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. Each is described briefly below.

Systems thinking, or the fifth discipline of the book’s title, is the conceptual foundation upon which all the other disciplines are built. The idea behind it is that we need to understand how to see the whole picture instead of just the parts. For example, we do not always get to see direct cause and effect relationships, because the result of one action might happen far away in time and space from that action. If we understand the system in which we operate, we are more likely to understand where to direct change in order to achieve the desired outcome.

“Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality

objectively. As such, it is an essential cornerstone of the learning organization--the learning organization's spiritual foundation. (Senge, 7).

Mental models are our pictures of how the world works. They are generalizations and assumptions we might not even realize we hold. Working on our mental models involves learning to be honest about the stories we tell ourselves, to learn how to scrutinize our own beliefs and thinking, and to expose our thinking to others.

When people in a group share a vision, they share an idea of the future they are working toward. The discipline of building a shared vision involves discovering a picture of the future that everyone is committed to, not just one everyone will comply with.

The practice of team learning involves learning through dialogue. The idea is that a group can gain insights through thinking and learning together that an individual cannot achieve alone. Since so many modern organizations are organized into team units, it is crucial that the team learn so the organization can learn.

This cursory description of the practice of the learning organization incorporates several management elements discussed earlier. Systems theory, total quality, and other elements of the humanistic perspective are clearly evident here. But even organizations that operate under more classical or scientific management systems might very sensibly and practically incorporate learning organization practices into their operations; they need not be antithetical.

When considering learning organizations from simply a humanistic perspective, Abraham Maslow and his needs hierarchy theory come to mind. In 1943, Maslow first published his theory of human motivation. In the decades since, this theory has often been used to try to explain human longings and behaviors.

The basic human needs, as described by Maslow, are physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. He wrote that at any given time, most people have all the basic needs partially satisfied and partially unsatisfied. He proposed that once physiological needs--hunger, thirst, and need for safety--are met, the “higher” social needs become dominant. Higher needs include affection and belongingness, achievement and respect from others, “feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (Maslow, 1973, p. 162). The highest of the basic needs, self-actualization, can be described by the following imperative to fulfillment: “What a man *can* be, he *must* be” (Maslow, 1973, p. 162).

The preconditions for satisfying basic needs, according to Maslow, are “freedom to speak, freedom to do what one wishes so long as no harm is done to others, freedom to express one’s self, freedom to investigate and seek for information, freedom to defend one’s self, justice, fairness, honesty, orderliness in the group” (Maslow, 1973, p. 163). Any deprivation of our cognitive capacity to satisfy curiosity; search for knowledge, truth, and wisdom; or to try to understand the world’s mysteries is thwarting our ability to satisfy basic needs.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge describes how the practice of the disciplines and principles of the learning organization creates an environment in which pursuit of understanding, learning, freedom, and the permission to grow as an individual within the organization not only take place, but are intrinsic components of a thriving organization. These principles seem to establish a situation in which the needs of a self-actualizing person can be met.

Len Tischler (1999) applies Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory at a social level to describe the trend in the 1990s toward spirituality in the workplace. His contention is that workers in economically evolved societies consider themselves satisfied in terms of physiological and safety needs, and are demanding more opportunities for satisfying esteem and self-actualization needs in their workplaces.

If the ability to learn is a fundamental prerequisite for being able to satisfy higher human needs of esteem and self-actualization, would working in a learning organization provide an opportunity for workers to practice the kinds of activities that would lead not only to the growth and fulfillment of their organization's potential, but also to their own growth? Do human goals for satisfying higher needs intersect with organizational goals in a learning organization to create a dynamic synergy that results in growth for both employees and in their organizations?

It is generally accepted that libraries lag several years behind the public sector in adopting innovations. In the 15 years since *The Fifth Discipline* was first published, businesses, schools, private associations, and government agencies have begun learning organization practices. It would seem that the practice of organizational learning as described by Senge might offer approaches to meeting many of the challenges faced in public libraries today by helping them become more flexible and responsive to environmental demands. But are there public libraries working as learning organizations? If so, how do they work, and what can they show other libraries about learning, changing, and meeting challenges?

Literature Review

One of the challenges of studying library learning organizations is that little in the way of formal study has been conducted to describe them. Most of the library literature on learning organizations can be classified into two discussions: summaries of *The Fifth Discipline*, along with attempts to define learning organizations and to relate those definitions to a library setting; and descriptions, often first person, of libraries in the process of adopting learning organization practices.

Describing and Defining Learning Organizations

Shelley E. Phipps (1993), of the University of Arizona Library, provides an explication of the five disciplines of the learning organization process, as written about by Peter Senge, and suggests how each could be applied in an academic library environment. She believes that academic library management is often marred by linear thinking, controlling leadership, negative mental models, and lack of vision, and that libraries are operating in times that demand change. Phipps states that organizations in transformation can best achieve their purpose through learning from the environment in which they operate. She encourages academic library managers to pursue learning organization practices in order to model learning to the greater educational environment in which they operate.

Brendan Rapple (2001) surveys various definitions of learning organizations, as found in business and organizational literature, in an attempt to find the essential meaning

of a learning organization. Interested in the potential of learning organization practices in academic libraries, Rapple is concerned about the shifting definitions and paucity of metrics, and questions how various organizations actualize learning organization principles. He writes that learning, vision, flexibility, leadership, and communication should be the primary considerations in any efforts toward becoming a learning organization. He also states that the learning organization might be an excellent model for libraries.

Libraries Practicing as Learning Organizations

Rena Fowler (1998) used qualitative and quantitative methods to explore how organizational learning facilitates organizational change and technological innovation. In this study, the adoption of Internet use in a university library setting was examined. Interview data yielded 14 methods of organizational learning, which range from formal and informal training to team learning, professional involvement, and reading . Fowler found that learning organizations drive innovation mainly by creating an environment in which the organization is primed and empowered for innovation, and that innovation and learning seem to fuel one another. Results suggested that technology and economic conditions were the real drivers for innovation, and that commitment to change might be related to technology, anticipating change, and fear of the library's becoming irrelevant. Other findings were that team learning precedes and contributes to shared vision, and that shared vision is significantly related to "age, professional reading, and committee service" (p. 229).

Hayes, Sullivan, and Baaske (1999) described the process of a library consortium administrative office becoming a learning organization. The North Suburban Library

System (NSLS) in Chicago employed thirty people in its headquarters, which served more than 600 academic, school, public, and special libraries. Because of rapid technological changes taking place in the library environment, NSLS realized the typical four-year plans they were accustomed to creating were no longer practicable. So they began a conversion toward a practice which was intended to result in better responsiveness and service to member libraries. Staff educated themselves on learning organization disciplines, as described by Peter Senge; got help from experts; and developed their own training programs and personal learning plans. Results of the changes included developing a shared vision, more risk-taking, better communication, more effective customer service, more local decision-making, broader knowledge, more flexibility, and a general transformation into a more positive workplace. Goals for the future included flattening out the organization's hierarchy, having managers take on roles as coaches and facilitators, and helping member libraries begin their journey toward becoming learning organizations.

The Queen's University Humanities and Social Science Library in Ontario, Canada, was the setting of a 2003 study by Corinne Laverty and Melody Burton. They described the reference department's response when it faced a sudden overwhelming need to learn a number of new electronic products, as well as to adapt to changes in platforms and interfaces. Reference staff themselves initiated a program to help one another learn. This proactive, team-based approach was the ultimate in a series of organizational changes that led the reference department to commit to developing a learning culture within a fledgling learning organization. Authors reviewed Senge's learning organization disciplines and Bloom's taxonomy of learning, briefly discussed

adult learning theory, and described the importance of interpersonal relationships in a learning environment. The authors further described in detail some of the particulars of training that reference staff engaged in, and how those activities related to learning theory. Results of the experience were reduction of fear and inhibitions, recognition of expertise among coworkers, and a realization that team learning was more effective than if each person had tried to learn everything in isolation from coworkers.

Joan Giesecke and Beth McNeil (2004) defined learning organizations according to Senge's framework and presented a description of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln libraries' conversion into a learning organization, a process which began in 1996. They described training and learning that have taken place on individual, group, and organizational levels within the libraries. Reviews of staff development program evaluations, reviews of training effects, and results of a recent campus-wide poll indicated that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln libraries had indeed made progress practicing as a learning organization.

Eleven years after publication of her persuasive recommendation that academic libraries consider becoming learning organizations, a summary of which began this section, Shelley E. Phipps (2004) wrote of the continuing organizational development work being done at the University of Arizona Library. Phipps used systems theories of W. Edwards Deming, Peter Senge, and Peter Scholtes as the foundation on which her discussion was based. She provided a detailed description of how the systems focused on at the university's library are managed in order that the work of the library achieve the desired results. The systems she detailed include leadership, team, planning, communication, process improvement, performance management, compensation, and

recruitment and hiring, among others. Included in the discussion were methods for designing the systems and the challenges to sustaining them. This article is a substantial contribution to the literature of library learning organizations, and would be of significant value to library managers and organization developers.

Beyond Academic Libraries

The above articles are a representative of the state of library learning organization literature. Not one of them discusses public libraries. If working as a learning organization is beneficial to a library and its customers, as one could conclude from reading the available literature on the subject, a public library would seem to be an appropriate place to put these practices into action. But is there a public library working as a learning organization? If there is, what are the practices of the library, and how would the people working in such an organization describe their experience working there?

Method

The literature search on the topic of library learning organizations yielded a few anecdotal stories, but little in the way of formal investigation. This case study of one public library system was designed to contribute to our understanding of work in library learning organizations. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from managers and other employees that would provide information about their practices, observations, and experiences at work.

Identifying a Library and Interview Participants

In order to identify a library system for study, I turned to the Internet. In that search I discovered a few public libraries describing themselves as learning organizations. After reading about some of them, I discovered one state agency which promotes learning organization practices in all its public libraries. I contacted the agency and found its deputy librarian to be a committed proponent of public library learning organizations. She referred me to one representative at each of two public library systems in her state who might be interested in sharing their stories with the greater library community. I e-mailed both contacts and got immediate positive responses from each. After considering each option, I chose to study the smaller, more rural system. The deputy director--who was also the temporary acting director--at that agency would be my main contact.

Once a subject for the study was available, I submitted a research proposal to my university's Academic Affairs Internal Review Board (IRB) for approval. The proposal included all documents required for conducting research with human participants. It also described the two steps for data collection. The first would be to interview managers of the library, in person at their offices; the second step would be to elicit information from all willing employees, including managers, by providing them with questionnaires to fill out. Consent forms assured potential participants that their identities, as well as the name of their library system, would remain anonymous. For the purpose of this paper, the library is called Wencatoma County Public Library (WCPL).

After receiving IRB approval, I requested from the deputy director at WCPL contact information for any managers she thought would be interested in participating in the study. Using that contact information, I sent e-mails, with consent forms attached, to eight managers and soon received positive responses from six. Of the two managers who did not respond right away, one never did; and one, who had been on temporary leave, offered at a later date to be interviewed by telephone. Eight female managers, including the deputy director, participated in interviews.

Interview Apparatus

Appendix A is the topical guideline used in manager interviews. As additional subjects of conversation presented themselves during the interviews, new questions were posed accordingly. For that reason, each interview provided unique information as well as echoes of what other managers reported.

Interview Procedure

I traveled to WCPL and spent five days visiting managers at their departments and branches, and exploring the communities the library serves. Approximately 16 hours of interviews with seven managers (the six who responded to my request, as well as the deputy director) were recorded using a hand-held tape player. Recorded conversations were transcribed, and notes from the telephone interview with an eighth manager were typed up. In total, 157 pages of interview material provided data for this study.

I analyzed interview transcripts for content and coded them according to chronology, topic and theme. Each piece of information was marked by a Post-it® note on which additional reference was made to respondent name and page number of the transcript where the topic was discussed. After all transcripts were thoroughly considered, the Post-it® notes were then sorted into an order that provided chronological and thematic structure.

Questionnaire Participants

Two hundred forty-five paid employees work at WCPL; that number includes full-time, part-time, salaried, and hourly workers. To determine how many employees might realistically be expected to know about and be able to complete questionnaires about the library's learning organization activities, I asked managers. They explained that all employees are welcome to participate in the library's learning organization activities, but in actuality, substitutes, pages, and volunteers most often forego those activities because of their work schedules. Of the 245 employees of the library, the 160 salaried employees were considered the most likely candidates to respond to the questionnaires.

Questionnaire Apparatus

Manager interviews yielded information that would enhance the design of the original questionnaire, so I modified it and re-submitted it to the IRB for approval.

Appendix B is the revised document as it was presented to participants. The document contains 50 Likert-type scale statements designed to draw out employee experiences practicing the five disciplines of the learning organization. The questionnaire also contains two opportunities for open-ended responses, as well as four questions about management or non-management status, job title, length of time worked at WCPL, and number of hours worked weekly at WCPL.

Procedure

I e-mailed all the eight interview participants, as well as the manager who did not respond to my earlier request, and asked permission to visit their branches and departments in order to distribute questionnaires to staff, and to answer any questions potential respondents might have about the study. Consent forms and a promotional flyer were attached to the e-mail request. Again, every manager I interviewed responded affirmatively. The manager who did not reply to my request for an interview did not answer the request to distribute questionnaires to staff in her branch either.

On the second trip to WCPL, I distributed questionnaires in person to all departments and every branch except the non-participating one over a two-day period at the beginning of the work week. The promotional flyer and e-mails from managers had been used to invite staff to participate in the study. On Friday of that same week, I returned to all locations and collected completed questionnaires. Self-addressed envelopes and postage were left at each branch and at the administrative office in case

any other participants wanted to return questionnaires to me at a later date. Within two weeks, every envelope was returned to me with additional completed questionnaires. Ultimately, 94 questionnaires were completed and returned for use in this study, a 59 percent response rate. Managers who participated in the interviews were also welcome to fill out questionnaires.

Data from the questionnaires were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet for preliminary examination and basic analysis. Responses to the two open-ended questions were recorded, organized, and analyzed there.

The numeric analysis was performed using SPSS, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. I began by recording all variables and responses into an SPSS data file. Then I reversed the coding for 18 negatively-worded statements so that total scores and means could be meaningfully compared.

The next step was to organize the 50 Likert scale statements into categories according to the discipline with which they were most readily associated: personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking. Four statements were included in more than one category or discipline. Then each category was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. All were found to be reliable at .70 or higher except systems thinking, which rated at .62. Three statements--30, 39, and 50--were found not to be reliable for their categories, so they were analyzed individually.

After reliability of statements within their categories was determined, frequency distributions of response means within categories were run. *T* tests compared mean responses between managers and non-managers and between full-time and part-time

employees. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) compared means according to number of years worked at the library and across job titles.

Findings of the interviews and questionnaires are presented in the following two sections.

Interview Findings

Interviews with eight WCPL managers provided a richly detailed picture of the library system's history, organization, and operation. The first part of this Interview Findings section describes the context in which the library operates and the users it serves. Then follows a chronological overview of the library's recent history, the events that catalyzed change, the library's adoption of teamwork, its subsequent introduction of learning organization principles and practices, and how teamwork and team learning processes have evolved over time. A more thematic arrangement continues the section, providing information on human resources practices, staff development, the library's learning philosophy, and a description of the library's service to its community. Then a description of learning disciplines in actual practice, managers' views on what it is like to work and manage in a learning organization, and a discussion of whether any library can become a learning organization conclude this section.

Setting

Wencatoma County is historically an agricultural county that lies near two large cities. Hilly terrain, rivers, creeks, woods, and farmland mark the rural landscape in this scenic area. Its natural attractions, its proximity to jobs in larger cities, and a relatively lower cost of housing have resulted in significant growth pressures on the county. Attempts to stave off growth have come in the form of building restrictions and farm trust programs, but development forces are changing Wencatoma County from a rural area to a

suburban one. With a population of 166,000, the county is home to the second highest number of commuters in its state. Wencatoma County has little industrial development, no interstate highways traversing it, and no significant public transportation.

The population of the county is 96 percent Caucasian; it is described as middle class, Christian, and conservative. At least 75 percent of households in the county have Internet connections. About 25 languages other than English are spoken by students in the county's single school district; and a growing number of Hispanic migrant workers are establishing permanent residency, slowly and significantly changing the demographics of the county. Women (and some stay-at-home dads), their young children, students, and seniors constitute the largest segment of users in the library's five branches. WCPL serves not only its own county's citizens, but also residents of contiguous counties.

Historical Background

Public library service in the Wencatoma County began in the mid-19th century, but a county-wide system was not formally established until the late 1950s. By the late 1970s, libraries nationwide were beginning to automate some of their functions. WCPL had little in the way of financial resources, but it did have a forward-looking director who established a collaboration with an equally entrepreneurial director of a larger neighboring library system. The result of their arrangement was that the larger library system would provide materials selection, processing, and cataloguing for WCPL, while the smaller system worked to bring its system online, an accomplishment realized in early 1980.

In that same year, thanks to construction money having come available earlier, the library's one full-service branch was able to move out of the church building it occupied and into a new library building. During the succeeding 14 years, the remaining four branches moved from their storefronts into proper new library buildings. Also during that time, a new administrative office was established, new staff were hired, and the outsourced work was brought back in-house. Additionally, an automation department was created.

The growth years also saw increases in the number of employees and in the number of services being provided. Those increases created a need for someone to oversee the development of the organization. The assistant director, who had started as an outreach librarian in the late 1970s, was ready for a new professional challenge. With the support of the library and the director, she took a master's degree in organization development. It was during that time, the early 1990s, that *The Fifth Discipline* was published and the ideas in it were gaining such traction among organizational leaders.

The assistant director knew there were characteristics about WCPL that would make it a good candidate for working as a learning organization, as described in *The Fifth Discipline*. First of all, the library director had already established a culture that promoted experimentation and learning. Second, the system was organized to be hierarchical, but not bureaucratic. Third, as the number of employees began to increase, it became clear that flexibility and decentralization would be necessary to keep everyone contributing and happy; hierarchical control would not be sufficient to meet growth and change challenges. Also, two organizational development ideas that spoke directly to learning organization practices particularly intrigued the assistant director. One was that

organizations have life cycles, and that as they grow, they need different things from their leaders and staff. The other idea was that the solutions to today's problems carry the seeds for tomorrow's problems.

Catalysts for Change

After more than a decade of library expansion came a period of economic contraction. In the early 1990s, WCPL faced a budgetary shock. The county government, source of 85 percent of the library's funding, announced it would have to reduce its financial contribution by 14 percent. In spite of a modest tax increase intended to soften the blow, a significant cut to the library's already lean budget still resulted. Even though no library jobs were lost at the time, managers did not believe the budget woes were over; and there was a sense that the track of the pendulum swing was changing. The library's understanding of what it could expect from the local county government in the future had been significantly altered during the budget talks. Furthermore, there was a broader sense of environmental change afoot: The Internet was becoming a growing presence in society, surely foretelling not-yet-imagined changes in how the library would work. Meanwhile, WCPL's patrons continued eagerly to use and support the library's services, making it the state leader in per capita circulation year after year.

When a new library director was hired to succeed the retiring director, she had a vision for WCPL: It would become a premier library system, but it would have to do it with little money. A consulting group was hired to conduct, simultaneously, an organization study and a salary study. The outcome was not only an organizational rearrangement, but also a change in compensation expectations. Salary ranges were narrowed so employees reached their highest pay step faster; longevity pay increases for

library staff would no longer be offered; and a merit pay system was established. The confusion caused by conducting two studies at the same time, the changes wrought as a result of the studies, and some negative publicity resulted in significant unhappiness among staff. In what two managers referred to as the long hot summer, WCPL struggled through the most extended bad period it had ever experienced, while still working hard for a positive outcome. Ultimately, managers believed that their best hope for getting the organization through this difficulty intact would be to put more control in the hands of employees, in other words, to move to teamwork. That option did not suddenly present itself; strategic plans had been orienting the library in that direction already, and other systems in the state were having significant success using teamwork in their operations. Plus, there was one manager who was already introducing WCPL staff to teamwork practices.

Introduction of Teamwork

That manager had been hired by the library in 1996 to run one of its branches. She was convinced of the value of teamwork due to her experience in another public library system. At her WCPL branch, she saw how cooperative team practices could help employees overcome departmental segmentation and gain a sense of the larger environment in which they all worked. With that in mind, the manager began guiding her branch toward teamwork. Converting to working as egalitarian teams was challenging to employees more accustomed to supervising or being supervised. But buy-in came as employees got to do more interesting things, as they began to see they could get their goals met more quickly and with less resistance when they worked together, and as they started to understand how they could effect positive changes in the way work was being

done at their branch. Not long after teamwork practices were introduced at a single branch, the decision was made to begin teamwork training throughout the system. Staff from the branch most experienced at teamwork were happy about the learning opportunities afforded by working on teams, and they were able to reassure people in the rest of the system that the changes would not be as bad as they predicted.

During the transition to a more team-oriented workplace, some of the unhappiest employees left the library, and every vacant position was reevaluated in terms of its usefulness and position within the organization. People interested in taking on new responsibilities were hired.

The early days of system-wide teamwork were problematic because teams were created to be very hierarchical and bureaucratic. Every team addressing a system-wide issue had to have representation from each branch. Teams typically had 10 to 12 members each. Team charters (tasks, problems, assignments) could take a long time to accomplish, sometimes requiring people to rotate into and out of team membership. Branches found it difficult to support that amount of commitment.

Employees had a lot to grapple with, so as an organization, WCPL staff began to talk about why they were doing what they were doing, what they were learning, what was working, what was not working, and how changes could be made. The result was that over the years, the shape and processes of teams changed for the better. Further improvements in teams would result from the library's impending introduction to learning organization practices.

Advent of the Learning Organization

The state in which WCPL is located has a division of library development and services within its education department. That division supports school library and public library development and administers federal and state programs. The deputy state librarian, who is also referred to as a futurist, is an advocate for helping public libraries acquire the tools they need in order to be responsive to change. In the late 1990s, she became interested in introducing the concept of the learning organization to library administrators, knowing that learning organization practices diffuse throughout any organization from the top down. She hired two leadership consultants to present the ideas at an administrators' meeting. Response from participants was inexplicably tepid at best.

In a second attempt, a different consultant was found and an advisory group was formed, made up of people who either were familiar with learning organizations, were interested in learning, or were in organizations that might be supportive. This advisory group decided they would teach teams of people from different library systems to identify and solve problems. The group developed a curriculum; and in 2001, teams of employees from public library systems throughout the state participated in a learning libraries workshop. They discussed trends affecting the state's public libraries; learned about the five disciplines of learning organizations as described by Senge; practiced team building, team learning, and problem-solving; and developed change models for their systems. In the following year, learning libraries teams met again to learn more about group development, team building, team lifecycles, and team dynamics. They learned about identifying library needs, building a case for change, implementing change, and change management. All discussion was based on a common understanding of the work of the

learning organization--testing and transforming experience into knowledge that is accessible to the organization and relevant to its purpose--and on the five learning disciplines described in *The Fifth Discipline*. Teams who had used what they learned in the first year's workshop brought back success stories in the second year. Teams all across the state were beginning to use learning organization vocabulary, and library systems were finding they had a common language for discussing their change activities. Teams were also reporting improved customer service.

Teamwork in a Learning Organization

To understand how WCPL came to its practice as a learning organization, it should be emphasized that WCPL employees had already incorporated teamwork and team learning--one of the learning organization disciplines-- into their operation before the learning organization workshops were held. Several of the managers interviewed indicated that team learning and teamwork were really the beginning of the library's subsequent work as a learning organization.

The learning libraries workshops not only introduced the other four disciplines of learning organizations, but they also gave WCPL more tools for understanding, working in, and managing teams. As previously noted, original teams were challenged by too much bureaucracy and by rigid hierarchies. Time, training, and tenacity, however, brought significant changes and created more effective teams. Because teamwork and team learning are so integral to the library's function as a learning organization, it is worth noting some of the significant changes that helped teams improve their processes.

Team charters were narrowed so that they more clearly stated team goals. They were made more specific so that teams were less likely to wander off course and in

unnecessary directions. The language was made more understandable, less theoretical, and more practical.

The size of teams was reduced also, which helped them work more quickly. Teams at WCPL today are typically made up of between three and eight members who represent a range of job titles. Participation is voluntary. Employees choose to be on teams investigating topics that appeal to them; interest, not expertise, in a subject is the only prerequisite. Anyone can suggest creating a team, and some people never volunteer to be on a team. There are in-house branch teams and system-wide teams.

Team hierarchies were flattened out. A director's staff of five managers act as administrative liaisons to the teams. One of the five managers, the deputy director (the assistant director mentioned previously) oversees the team charters, making sure they get articulated. She assures that teams report on a quarterly basis, that recruitment gets done for new teams, and that team leaders get the training they need. The other four members of the director's staff act as advocates or sponsors of teams. They do not lead teams; their role is to take away barriers that prevent the teams from being successful. Interest and workload determine which teams a manager acts as advocate for. The director's staff meet weekly to share information about teams they are sponsoring and answer questions for one another about teams.

There is also an umbrella group made up of a representative from each work location, the deputy director, and the director. Team leaders cannot be in the umbrella group. The group meets quarterly, reviews team progress reports, makes suggestions to teams, asks questions of teams, writes charters, and develops ideas for new teams. Between five and eight system-wide teams are at work at any time.

Employees have had training in team activities such as generating ideas, brainstorming methodologies, decision-making, and dealing with conflict. They have also learned about the behaviors expected of team members. Considerable work has been done to educate staff on the different roles--facilitator, process observer, timekeeper, recorder--they might assume in team meetings. The information is posted on the library's intranet for easy reference. Understanding and maintaining those roles is critical in making meetings productive. Several teams use plus-delta to evaluate team meetings in order to learn how to improve them. Plus-delta is simply a process of describing what went well in the meeting and what needs improving. Is one person monopolizing the meeting time? Was the agenda sufficient? Questions such as these help the group to manage itself. The result is more efficient, effective, productive meetings. Also, in the process of describing what went well in the meeting and what needs to be changed about the way the team works, more safety is created, and people are willing to think more deeply about the work of the team.

One manager indicated that the people who learn most are the ones who work on really substantial team projects. She believes those team members become more tolerant as they work to get people signed on to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Another manager thinks that the best team learning occurs in the process of solving problems.

Manager descriptions provide insight into working in a team-based culture. According to one, working in teams is the foundation that leads to work on the learning organization disciplines. In her experience, working in teams helps create the shared vision and systems thinking. She also believes that working in teams helps create trust. Another manager believes personal mastery results from teamwork: While working on

teams, people discover and develop talents and skills they were not aware they possessed. One manager declares that teams are wonderful and integral to the way the library works, while another describes moving to teamwork as one of the biggest changes the system has ever made, and the best. She also believes working in teams has helped people be more flexible; they are more willing to consider ideas or suggestions, for example, rather than reject them outright. Another manager states that the advent of teamwork has opened up staff, and that people are talking to one another across departments and branches with tremendously positive results.

After a team accomplishes the objectives of its charter, there is a sunset process of evaluation. Team members evaluate the team leader and they collect data for their own performance reviews. The evaluation also provides a final opportunity for team learning as members reflect back on their team's activities.

Appendix C provides a brief description of the work of some WCPL teams both currently and in recent years. From it, one can get an idea of the scope of topics explored and responsibilities borne by teams at WCPL.

Have there been any down sides to working in a team-based environment?
Managers provided the following examples.

Some of the negatives were obvious from the early days. When the library first began changing over to a team-oriented environment, "everybody did not love it immediately," according to one manager. She emphasized the critical importance of practicality: People must understand how the change to teamwork is going to affect their activities. She maintained that while librarians can tend to theorize, many people have a

tendency to tune out the theoretical; they just want to know how it all works in practical terms.

Another negative was occasional resentment from people who believed they were being asked to do work that was not their job. This reaction was more or less alleviated when participation on teams was made voluntary, and when people began to see that opportunities and rewards were coming available to them because of their work on teams.

One manager stated that some people, including some managers, are not comfortable working on teams. She said the people who prefer to have more traditional control and say-so are less enthusiastic about teamwork.

In the early days, a team was given an undoable job, or perhaps simply a job that should have or could have been done by one person. The lesson learned was that if a team's charter is inadequate, the result will be off target.

Another negative was experienced by a team that invested much effort into meeting its charter's objectives, only to find that the resulting recommendations would not be approved by the governing board. Such an experience can result in intense disappointment.

Finally, when a team has members who are not up to speed on working in teams or who are out of their depth, teammates might end up doing more than their share of the team's work.

Human Resources

The human resources department is a vital champion of and contributor to the development and maintenance of the learning organization culture in WCPL. In a broad sense, it can be seen as departmental support for the discipline of personal mastery, given

its activities promoting training and staff development. A closer look at some of its activities and interests--compensation, hiring, evaluation, staff development--provides beneficial insight.

Employees of WCPL are not attracted to the library by financial incentives. As stated earlier, organization and salary studies conducted in the early 1990s resulted in significant changes at the library. Two of those changes were that staff would go on a merit pay system, and that there would no longer be longevity increases for people who had reached the top of their pay scale. At the time of these interviews, even the merit pay increases had ceased. The deputy director and the human resources director deplore the lack of funding for competitive compensation, and they expressed hope that the opportunities and challenges available to people working in a stimulating learning environment are helping mitigate that deficiency.

Employees at WCPL are not union members. There is a fairly active staff association that serves as an employee voice on various issues. Managers and the association communicate openly and discuss any concerns that need addressing. The organization arranges fund-raisers and donates the proceeds to charities. It also coordinates staff social activities.

When managers are interviewing to hire new staff, they are looking for caring attitudes, people skills, and compatibility with the library's learning culture. The interview panel provides the applicant with information on the library's background, and they indicate that continuous learning is a strong value in the library. The availability of funds for promoting staff development is discussed, and questions are asked about the applicant's experience working on teams and in an environment that has values similar to

those in a learning organization. In spite of WCPL's inability to pay top wages, managers said that the library is fortunate to be able to hire and retain excellent employees.

The performance evaluation tool at WCPL was designed by a team. It is a thorough, detailed document that outlines behaviors associated with individual jobs. Employees either meet or exceed standards associated with those behaviors. Staff are encouraged to take part in filling out their own evaluations, to be proud of their accomplishments, and to celebrate their successes.

One section of the evaluation document is a development plan. The development plan serves as a sort of map to indicate the road a person is on in the organization. Staff are asked to state what they want to accomplish, what they need in order to reach their goals, and how they plan to reach their goals. Both employees and their supervisors contribute to the plan, which is described as fluid and ever-changing. Target dates can be changed, and items can be added and taken away.

It is in the area of evaluation and development planning that the human resources manager sees employees actively working on changing their mental models. As for evaluations, some employees, particularly female, tend to be dismissive of their accomplishments, thinking that their successes are just part of doing their job. Getting them to shift their ideas and beliefs about acknowledging their own achievements is a challenge. In regard to development planning, employees begin to realize they are responsible--not their supervisors--for their own goals. That shift in understanding can create a richer experience working in a learning organization.

A strong commitment to staff development is a value that WCPL has never wavered from, even in the worst economic times. That commitment makes WCPL very

special according to one manager. The deputy director and the director were praised by all managers interviewed for adamantly protecting the development budget. Staff development is seen as both good for the organization and good for the individual. Particulars of staff development are covered in more depth below.

Learning Philosophy and Staff Development

Several years ago a team was established at WCPL with a charter to develop the library's learning philosophy which, in practical terms and in a broad sense, institutionalized the discipline of personal mastery. That philosophy describes the role of employees, the environment in which they can expect to work and learn, what constitutes a learning activity, how learning will be documented in development plans and recognized in performance reviews, and how staff can take advantage of learning opportunities. Employees are expected to seek out challenges and intellectual stimulation, follow their curiosity, innovate, create, and take risks. Worthwhile learning activities prepare employees for current and future work assignments, help employees help others achieve their goals, enhance their people and leadership skills, help them be at the forefront of their profession, and help staff adapt to the library's and the profession's changing needs.

Staff are personally responsible for taking advantage of learning opportunities; supervisors act as facilitators to learning by providing encouragement, time away from work, and financial support. Additionally, peer and system support can be expected.

Employees at WCPL have abundant opportunities--on an individual, branch, system-wide, and state level--for taking part in workshops, classes, and training in order to develop their knowledge and skills. Two examples illustrate staff development at the

individual level: At least three branch managers have recently begun to learn Spanish in order to provide better service to a growing population of Spanish-speaking patrons; and a number of paraprofessional staff have taken advantage of the library's policy of paying for one course per semester for staff working on MLS degrees.

Training on a branch level occurs also. Children's and young adult programs have particularly benefited from the fact that employees are encouraged to cross-train outside of their own departments. Stepping outside of comfort zones is applauded. To aid in understanding more about learning organization disciplines, one branch manager created workshops and exercises to help her staff do more in-depth work on mental models, shared vision, and systems thinking. When she went to a creativity workshop in another library system, she brought back some of the ideas she learned there and provided creativity training at her branch. Sometimes training will start in a branch, but another library system will learn about it and join in. In fact, sharing training with neighboring systems is becoming a statewide trend.

On a system-wide level, the deputy director and the human resources director coordinate training. One initiative they were looking forward to at the time of these interviews was the Leadership Academy, a program created to help develop leadership within the organization and to contribute to succession planning. The main goal would be to provide people with an opportunity to gain leadership skills, particularly those who have not led teams and who do not regularly come in contact with the director's staff. While a full curriculum had not been designed at the time of these interviews, some topics being considered included Myers-Briggs leadership styles, group processes, communication, facilitation, and outcome-based evaluation.

In the past couple of years, training the trainer has become a model used more frequently system-wide. People who are interested in developing skills as trainers get training on a particular topic--either by going outside the system or having someone come in--and then they take what they have learned and train other staff. This practice of sharing of training has been very successful at WCPL.

Statewide initiatives also play a part in WCPL learning. From the learning libraries programs of the early 2000s that helped get systems on the track to becoming learning organizations, to leadership programs, to mandatory training for library associates, employees have a range of learning opportunities through the state library. Because the employees at WCPL like to be in on new library innovations and initiatives--after all, their vision is “Leading the way in lifelong learning and enjoyment”--they are often funded by the state library to be the system to try new things first. As one librarian put it, WCPL often gets the money to try new things, but they also do it well, getting the “most bang for the buck.”

Library and Community

Until now, this narrative has described the library’s setting, its evolution, the shift to team and learning organization practices, human resource activities, and staff development opportunities. This would be an appropriate juncture for introducing more information about the library’s current activities and the services it provides to its community. Technology, outreach, and programming are featured.

The state library sponsors an annual futuring conference to help librarians envision the trends that will be affecting libraries, and to help them take advantage of technological developments that will affect library service. It is WCPL’s practice to

search out and use technology to help provide better service to its community. The library is an Internet service provider to the county government and to individual citizens.

Patrons can use the library's interactive Web site to search the catalog, view their records, request titles from any library in the state, suggest titles for purchase, check the library board's meeting minutes, reserve a meeting room, get homework help, get reference assistance, use online databases, register to attend programs, search the community services directory, get library news, download audiobooks, receive reader's advisory newsletters, and more.

There are approximately 115,000 registered users of the library. Year after year, patrons make WCPL the system with the highest circulation statistics in the state. WCPL is also one of the busiest systems in the state in terms of programming, and it is widely regarded for the quality of its programs. In the 2004 fiscal year alone, WCPL presented 105 programs per week, with a total annual attendance of approximately 35,000 people.

The outreach department of WCPL plays a vital role in community learning. One method of fulfilling that role is by taking services to people who might not otherwise visit the library. The department serves seniors in nursing homes and assisted living centers; it services the library at the detention center and supports computer training for inmates; and it has three bookmobiles that travel to childcare providers in order to reach the county's youngest population. Outreach staff are responsible for 45 of the 105 programs offered weekly by the library. In the 2004 fiscal year, they presented 110 puppet shows at library branches and community locations.

The department is also heavily involved in partnering with other local agencies and organizations. The manager is a board member of at least eight community

organizations. She has worked at facilitating partnerships by introducing into meetings simple team processes that she uses at the library. Establishing a mission, a purpose, and an action plan helps focus groups and make them more effective. On a recent occasion, the manager gathered together a panel of experts on immigration issues and invited representatives from various community organizations who serve immigrant families. The purpose was to learn from the panel and to support a learning network of people with similar aims. The department plans a more in-depth workshop a year later, as a follow-up, to continue the interagency dialogue.

Branches are also involved in outreach and partnerships. Leadership programs with the Chamber of Commerce, an initiative with the health department directed at expectant mothers, service on the board of a local psychiatric hospital, and work with local agencies to help a growing Hispanic community are examples of outreach activities originating in branches. Branches and the outreach department collaborate at times, but usually branches work independently in their communities. The outreach department can be a source of funding for some projects, and it can serve as a liaison which introduces branches and the community organizations to one another as potential partners.

Programming is high quality, extensive, and well-attended at WCPL. While children's programming has been a feature of the library's services for 40 years, there is an increased interest in cultural and adult programs. These shifts are due to community interests and an aging user population. Examples of programming activities at WCPL are summer reading, one community/one book events, book discussions, computer and Internet classes, crafts, author visits, musical and dance events, and fairs. Two branches have hosted "lock-ins," which are after-hours events for youth.

Branch managers as well as the outreach department actively seek out grant monies that will help support programming and reader services activities. Recent applications have sought to purchase Spanish-language children's books; to provide literacy training for childcare providers; to purchase training videos for helping dyslexic readers; to serve at-risk families, particularly Spanish-speaking ones; and to provide science and math programming for youth. Three branches within the system have received repeated awards to fund Library Discovery Zones, which promote library use to at-risk families.

Having now described the library's evolution toward learning organization practices and its service to the community, this account will now turn to the specific details of learning organization activities at WCPL.

Learning Organization Disciplines in Action

In actuality, the five disciplines of the learning organization can result in a variety of activities and outcomes, and none of the activities is enhanced by one discipline to the exclusion of all others. The disciplines are related and work together. Because team learning and personal mastery have been covered in-depth up to this point, this section will focus more on how managers and employees work on systems thinking, mental models, and shared vision, and how those affect other critical learning activities such as communicating; making decisions; experiencing autonomy, empowerment, and change; solving problems; taking risks; and making mistakes.

At WCPL, the practice of systems thinking is generally seen as an awareness of cause and effect, how the actions in one department or branch will affect situations in other departments or branches. Managers at WCPL report that it is customary in their

organization for people to ask themselves the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions in anticipation of initiating change or making decisions. That awareness and orientation is an integral part of their operation.

In day-to-day activities, systems thinking can particularly affect communication. Staff strive to make sure news and information is conveyed to people who need to have it. In one branch, departmental notebooks, e-mail, and even the physical layout of the workspaces is all geared toward keeping communication flowing. When one manager realized that one of the services provided in her department was not familiar to everyone working at the library, she and staff conducted an analysis of the system to try to figure out where the communication had faltered and how they would successfully market their services internally so that all staff would be familiar with them.

Working in teams also helps maintain communication and system awareness within branches and across the system. The fact that teams are composed of members from different departments and from different branches results in communication links being created.

When the deputy director was asked about the particulars of systems thinking, she described her approach as a thought process during which she asks herself what can be done to effect a particular change. She uses Post-it® notes on a board or creates diagrams on her computer. Much of her systems thinking is not to solve immediate problems, but to position the library so that it will be prepared to take advantage of an opportunity later on. Sometimes the preferred outcomes or situations are not within the library's control or influence, but systems thinking allows for preparation so that the organization is ready when the desired results are possible.

While communication between departments and branches is an important part of systems thinking at WCPL, interpersonal communication skills are critical. Practicing the discipline of recognizing and understanding one's own and others' mental models is crucial to productive communication. One manager said that in her branch, staff feel very comfortable in expressing themselves freely, yet she sometimes feels some reticence herself when speaking her opinions with other managers. The reason for this is her belief that her management style is different from others'. Another manager made a distinction between being able to express her opinion and knowing it is being heard. Although the feeling of not being heard is not a regular occurrence, she thinks she lacks skill to express dissenting opinions. She does believe, however, that WCPL is a place where there is freedom of expression. Other managers spoke of the value they place on openly communicating in their branches; one demonstrated her technique of eliciting opinions, suggestions, and information from staff.

When managers were asked whether they think one explanation for communication failures is that people sometimes just do not know how to say what they want to say, their responses were affirmative. In fact, this had already been seen as an opportunity for skill-building and learning. Participants in the Leadership Academy, as well as their branch manager mentors, were scheduled to work on dialogue skills during their training. It is likely that dialogue training at WCPL will continue beyond the Leadership Academy.

As for mental models, work on that discipline not only helps bring about better communication, but it also helps with decision-making. One example mentioned by several managers was the success of the No Logs, an activity that took place in one

branch shortly after the library started working in teams. The impetus was the branch manager's overhearing staff, over a period of days, saying no to patrons. Something about hearing repeated negative answers to public requests and questions made her want to examine customer service in her branch. The No Logs project involved getting staff to mark in a log every time they said no to a patron, and to indicate the reason for saying no. Upon reflection, they realized that saying no was a habit that could be changed. The result was a complete turnaround in the way the branch conducts its business. Front-line staff became empowered to provide positive solutions to patrons' needs.

In another instance, a single honest question about whether the library was really the "door to learning" for preschoolers, as it had always believed it was, was a catalyst for completely altering the way the library provided service to young users. A realistic look at the statistics showed that the library, at the time the question was posed, was actually not reaching as many of the county's preschoolers as it had thought. The outreach and children's departments began working together to try to increase the number of children who were able to attend programming. Changes in registration policies for story times and summer reading programs resulted in large growth in attendance. Significant efforts went into problem-solving and changing the library culture in order to make the changes, but the result was that the library's mental model of itself and its role came more aligned with reality.

Practicing the discipline of shared vision in a learning organization has several effects, according to the managers interviewed. One is that the responsibility for making decisions no longer lies solely with managers. In a learning organization, everyone understands the direction the agency is headed and is empowered to make customer

service decisions as needed. Having a common goal and a spirit of cooperation tends to alleviate power struggles. Additionally, having a shared vision helps to solve problems; when everyone understands what the goal is, everyone can contribute to finding a solution that will help meet that goal.

While shared vision might seem to be one of the easier disciplines to practice in a library, one manager indicated that “the vision thing” is the most difficult of the disciplines for her. She said that her branch’s vision is customer service, but she relates the difficulty she has with shared vision to the fact that so much is out of their control every day. In her opinion, a vision is related to setting and meeting goals. But combine frequent interruptions with a spontaneous management style, and the result is a difficulty maintaining that vision.

The learning philosophy of WCPL states that one of the roles of all staff at the library is to be risk-takers. As one manager laughingly said, “What’s the worst that can happen?” is practically a corporate ethic at WCPL. Indeed, the phrase turned up repeatedly in conversations with managers. Risk-taking is supported by the practice of any or all of the five disciplines in the learning organization framework.

Managers at WCPL support risk-taking by expressing an open attitude toward mistakes. They start by admitting their own. As one manager said, it is important for managers to own their mistakes so staff know it is okay to for them to make mistakes, too. Mistakes are looked at as learning opportunities. And since one never knows what the outcome of a risk will be, the value is in experimenting, learning, and moving on.

One way risk-taking is promoted in the library system is via the risk-takers’ network. The risk-takers’ network is a competition designed by the first team involved in

the state's learning organization training. The team called on staff to think about their best effort at risk-taking, to write a two-minute sketch about it, and to videotape the sketch. The videos were then posted on the intranet, and staff could vote for the best risk. Prizes were awarded at the annual staff day. The risk-takers' network competition continues. One manager noted a marked difference in staff willingness to take risks after this competition was established. She sees less fear--of reprisals, of looking silly, and of failing--in staff than she did in earlier years.

More willingness to take risks can even be seen in programming changes. For example, efforts to build a stronger relationship with the community's middle school age users resulted in popular late-night and overnight lock-in activities. Cultural programming for adults has also expanded due to a commitment to take more risks.

What, then, must it be like to work in an organization where risk-taking, independent decision-making, effectively communicating, problem-solving, mistake-making, change, and learning are not only supported, but are goals and objectives?

Working in a Library Learning Organization

Managers described working in a learning organization as a very positive experience. WCPL was portrayed as a busy library system where a lot gets done, partially due to the fact that every task and objective need not go through a long chain of command in order to be completed. Two managers humorously described WCPL staff as having a low tolerance for boredom, one indicating that a little bit of chaos is normal. Work was described as stimulating, challenging, exciting, exhausting, fun, and energizing. A cooperative spirit is dominant in the library, which leaves little room for turf battles, though an occasional tussle might occur when someone is particularly

attached to a position or procedure. Two managers, speaking for their co-workers, said people enjoy what they are doing, and they enjoy working for the organization. Working at WCPL is said to be more than just a job. One manager declared that the positive attitudes and attempts to bring out the best in people are remarkable values in the organization. She also indicated that working in this learning organization allows her to align her personal goals with her work goals.

One manager compared working at WCPL in 1994 and in 2004, and declared that over a decade's time, it became a much improved place to work. She asserted that anyone being honest would agree. A second manager who witnessed the changes taking place over time noted that there is now less blame, more trust, more permission to make mistakes, as well as different ways of communicating and making decisions. Another manager spoke of listening to friend and family descriptions of their business workplaces, and comparing them to working at WCPL. She indicated that WCPL has more of an atmosphere of cooperation, of people wanting to provide good customer service, of wanting to work together toward a common goal. The near absence of "complaining gossip" is a notable trait of the library's culture, according to one departmental manager.

Managing in a Library Learning Organization

Managers were adamant in their conviction that the learning organization approach to running a library must come from the highest ranks of the agency. It matters who are in key positions. Furthermore, working as a learning organization is a commitment and an ongoing learning process. One manager stated that the learning organization is simply another step in an evolutionary process, another tool along the way, but one that adds valuable structure to the way the library operates. From a similar

perspective, another manager stated that the library had already been working toward becoming a learning organization before, but that going through formal learning organization training gave terminology to some of their practices, thus providing a common vocabulary. Applying learning organization principles also validated the already recognized need to evaluate and learn from team processes. Evaluation procedures were strengthened, resulting in teams' improved abilities to work and learn.

Department and branch managers at WCPL have taken on learning organization practices according to their own management styles and temperaments. Some use the jargon associated with practicing learning organization disciplines--systems thinking, mental models, team learning, shared vision, personal mastery--others do not. The main reason for not actively using the terminology is that to some it can seem too theoretical, not practical enough. However, those same managers do practice the disciplines at work, and they model or talk about them with staff.

Details of manager practices shed light on individual perspectives and approaches to managing in a library learning organization. Highlights are described briefly below.

The first, a branch manager, described herself as reflective manager. She likes to take the time to understand so she can better apply what she learns. She was a proponent of learning organizations and was already practicing cross-departmental learning in her branch when the entire system began its shift into working as a learning organization. She emphasized the importance of communication, honesty, having fun at work, and taking on challenges. Problem-solving is the principal activity that results in team learning. The manager and her staff see mistakes as learning opportunities and accept their successes

and failures together as a team; no one fails or succeeds alone in this supportive environment.

A second manager described a participatory management environment in the branch she manages. She supports a cooperative effort in building solutions. There is little nay-saying in her branch; instead, there is more of an experimental, try-it-and-see culture.

A third branch manager described working in a collegial family atmosphere where value is placed on flexibility, sharing opinions, and communicating. She models learning organization behaviors instead of talking about them, and prefers the practical and nitty-gritty to the theoretical. In her perspective, this learning organization welcomes risk-taking and encourages creativity. She also noted the sense of pride that results from the value placed on forward thinking in the organization.

Another branch manager spoke of her role encouraging staff development. When new teams are being created or new initiatives are being developed, she tries to nurture an interest in staff who might not initially consider themselves to be appropriate candidates for the topic or activity.

A departmental manager talked about the importance of creativity in her work. An important stimulation for that creativity comes from interactions with colleagues outside the library. Attending national conferences and regional meetings helps her stay in touch with practices in different agencies. Learning from others inspires her to create new practices also. Likewise, staff in her department are encouraged to learn from the professional world around them in order to create new ways of doing things in their own

library. Reciprocally, this manager and her staff act as sources of learning for associates outside.

Finally, the manager of another department emphasized the importance of orientating new staff into the library's learning culture. She spoke about meeting with individuals or small groups in her department semiannually in order to have a formalized learning experience. Once a year there is a day-long retreat for all staff in her department. On those occasions there is a further opportunity for group learning, particularly through team-building. An issue that has been a particular challenge to this department is learning to prioritize and to say no. As this manager becomes more of a master in this area, she is able to model her learning with staff.

One of the main roles of managers in this learning organization is that of facilitator. Since the implementation of teamwork, a lot of the traditional work of the managers has been taken over by teams. That is not to say managers do not have authority, but teams do formulate the answers to a lot of the issues the library works on. Managers help the teams get to where they need to go.

Can any Organization Become a Learning Organization?

Managers' experiences in this learning organization lead them to believe that other libraries can work as learning organizations. While there are big challenges, the payoffs are also big. One of the most important factors to determine the success or failure is top managers' absolute commitment to the process. One manager, who believes any organization can be a learning organization, emphasized the importance of practicality, of showing staff at the grassroots level how practicing learning organization disciplines affects their daily job and affects the customers they serve. She believes that even

organizations that have unions can become learning organizations. The key is to show the practicality, the job satisfaction potential, and the new skills that can be developed in staff. She stated that people who are not allowed to learn new skills because their job descriptions are strictly enforced by union rules are losing out on opportunities for learning and job satisfaction. In her view, the size of an organization affects its flexibility and its ability to make the changes necessary to becoming a learning organization.

Another manager spoke to that same point: Any library can become a learning organization, but the larger the system, the harder it is to do. She emphasized that it is absolutely doable, but not without an openness and commitment at the top levels of the organization.

Interviews with managers at WCPL provided valuable insight into the library's move toward learning organization practices and its continuing evolution. They described a stimulating and enriching experience of working in a supportive environment, where learning benefits not only the organization, but employees as well. The following section, which presents results of questionnaire data, will show how other employees experience working in this public library learning organization.

Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire presented to employees at WCPL was designed to elicit information about their experiences and perceptions working in a learning organization. The questionnaire contained 50 Likert-type scale statements which were intended to provide insight into the practice of the disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking. The 50 statements were to be responded to with either (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, or (5) Strongly Agree.

The questionnaire also contained two opportunities for open-ended responses, as well as four questions about management or non-management status, job title, number of hours worked weekly at WCPL, and length of time worked at the library.

The first step of the analysis was to reverse code all negatively worded statements so that means could be compared. After reverse coding, one would expect item means to approach 5 rather than 1 in a learning organization.

Next, all 50 statements were classified into the disciplines with which they were associated. Some statements were assigned to more than one discipline. Reliability analyses were run in SPSS to ascertain that the statements assigned to each discipline were indeed measures of the underlying construct they were intended to measure. Each analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha. A Cronbach's alpha of .70 was the index against which the reliability measures for each group were compared. Any statement that

significantly lowered Cronbach's alpha for the group was determined not to be a reliable measure of the construct. Three statements out of 50 were found not to be reliable indicators of either discipline.

Response means and frequency distributions were then found for each discipline. The data were analyzed to determine whether there were significant differences in the means based on management status, job title, number of hours worked weekly, and length of time respondents had worked for the library. Simple t tests compared means for management and non-management staff and for full-time and part-time workers. One-way analyses of variance, or ANOVAs, compared means across job titles and across length of time worked at the library.

The two open-ended questions gave respondents a chance to offer comments in their own words. The first question invited comments based on the 50 Likert scale statements. Highlights of comments were summarized for this section; the full text of comments is included as Appendix D. The second open-ended question asked respondents to write three words to describe their experience of working at WCPL. The most frequently used words and the words expressing negative experiences are discussed at the end of this section. Complete data for the question are in Appendix E and Appendix F.

This presentation of questionnaire findings is organized by discipline in the following order: personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking. Within each discipline, the reliability analysis and frequency distribution of means are shown first, followed by the findings of the t tests and ANOVAs. Information from the open-ended statements concludes the section.

Personal Mastery

Reliability. A reliability test was run to determine that the items grouped together under personal mastery actually worked together to reflect personal mastery experiences at WCPL. Mean responses to the 14 statements reflecting personal mastery are shown in Table 1. A 15th item, *I will sometimes change my goals so they more closely match reality*, was eliminated from this category, as it did not seem to test personal mastery as intended. The idea behind the statement was that a person practicing personal mastery would not allow goals to erode in the face of adversity. A negative response would have been expected here, but the mean was 3.7556; 67 people out of 92 agreed that they would change their goals to match reality; six strongly agreed. Respondents perhaps interpreted the question to indicate a willingness to compromise or negotiate. In any event, responses to it did not reflect responses to other statements in the category, so it was eliminated, resulting in Cronbach's reliability alpha of .733. A reliability alpha of at least .70 is desirable.

Table 1 is arranged in order by means. The highest means indicate respondents care about their work and their patrons, and they are committed to lifelong learning. On the other hand, lower means show some respondents are not so comfortable dealing with change at work, feel powerless in the face of failure, and have a fear of making mistakes at work. The statement with the lowest mean--after reverse coding--actually falls closer to a neutral response than to an *Agree*, suggesting that fear of punishment for mistakes is a concern for some respondents. Taking risks and making mistakes seem to be the biggest challenges for employees in their practice of personal mastery.

Table 1

Personal mastery practices (N = 92)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I genuinely care about my work.	4.6413	.50452
I am committed to my own lifelong learning.	4.5326	.58274
I have compassion for library patrons.	4.3587	.67256
Employee development is an important value at WCPL.	4.3152	.67822
WCPL embraces new technologies that will help employees be better learners.	4.1848	.69424
I do my work with a clear sense of purpose.	4.1630	.61621
Failure is an opportunity for learning.	4.0761	.68314
I seek out learning opportunities that will help me do my job better.	4.0543	.73176
I am comfortable making customer service decisions without getting permission.	3.9783	.93736
Working at WCPL inspires me to push beyond my comfort zone.	3.9348	.73834
My creativity is valued at this workplace.	3.8804	.89985

I feel uncomfortable dealing with change at work. ^a	3.6630	1.07189
Failure makes me feel powerless. ^a	3.5543	.90620
I am afraid of getting into trouble if I make mistakes at my work. ^a	3.2174	1.08765

^a Item has been reverse coded.

Frequency. Once it was determined that the statements included in personal mastery category were reliable, comparisons and analyses could be made. The first query was to find the average response to questions of personal mastery across the entire group of respondents. Figure 1 shows the overall response mean for personal mastery to be 4.0330 with a standard deviation of 0.37333. The range of means for this discipline among all 94 respondents was from 3.21 to 5.00. The median was 4.0714. The bell curve on the graph shows a normal distribution based on the mean and standard deviation.

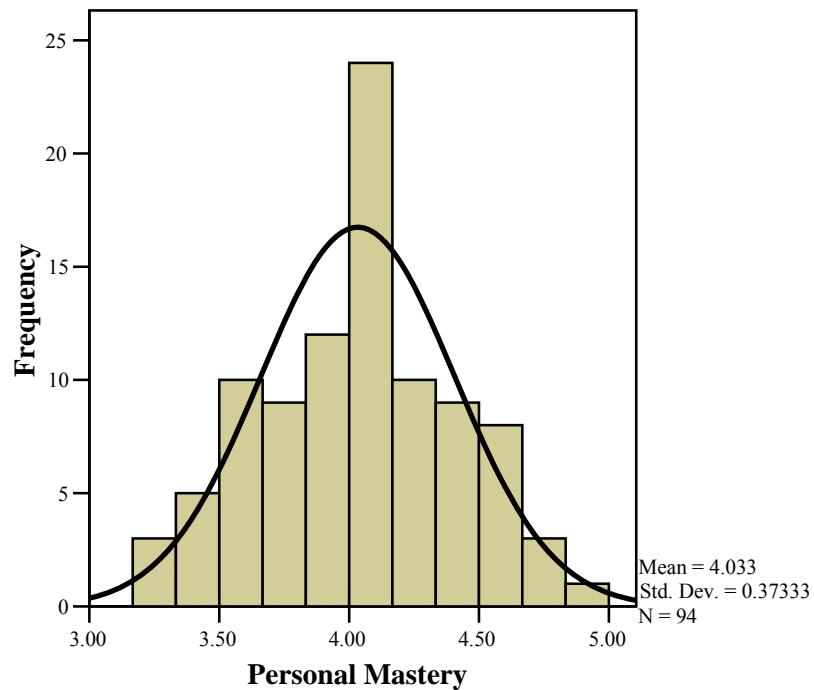


Figure 1. Frequency and distribution of means for personal mastery.

Management status. Mean responses for personal mastery were then compared according to whether employees worked as managers and supervisors or as non-management staff. Numbers used in this comparison are in Table 2.

Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at .460, $p < .05$, so means across groups could legitimately be compared. The t test for equality of means was significant at .012 (2-tailed), $p < .05$. Therefore, manager means for personal mastery were significantly higher than those for non-management employees.

Table 2

Personal mastery practices of managers and non-managers (N = 89)

Management Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	24	4.2024	.32472
Non-management employee	65	3.9801	.37750

Title. Another test of responses was conducted to find whether a significant difference in means could be found based on job title. The category *Other* was used to classify everyone whose title did not fit any of the other major categories. The eight respondents in Other were distinct enough from one another in job classification that their responses realistically could not be compared. As a result, the responses in Other can be disregarded. Means for all groups are shown in Table 3.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, significant at .018, $p < .05$, indicated that no assumption of homogeneity could be made; the significance level of .000, indicated a significant difference in means between groups. A post hoc analysis using Tamhane's T2 comparisons--used when homogeneity of variances cannot be assumed--found that the significant differences were between means for managers and circulation clerks, .019, $p < .05$, and managers and pages, .000, $p < .05$. Managers had significantly higher means than circulation clerks and pages in the practice of personal mastery.

Table 3

Personal mastery practices by title (N = 77)

Title	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	19	4.2895	.23866
Circulation clerk	13	3.9505	.28777
Library associate	19	4.2293	.39882
Page	18	3.8327	.27497
Other	8	3.8839	.43689
Total	77	4.2590	.36951

If the category Other is eliminated and the means are arranged from high to low, the same order also reflects job category, from highest rank to lowest rank. In other words, managers ranked highest in personal mastery practices, followed by library associates, circulation clerks, and pages.

Hours worked weekly. A comparison of personal mastery practices based on respondents' full-time or part-time status was based on the figures shown in Table 4.

Levene's test for equality of variances, not significant at .867, $p < .05$, indicated that comparisons between the means of the two groups could be made. The t test for equality of means was not significant at .063 (2-tailed), $p < .05$. No significant difference

was found between respondent experiences of personal mastery based on whether they worked full-time or part-time.

Table 4

Personal mastery practices by full-time or part-time status (N = 84)

Hours Worked	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
Part-time	43	3.9798	.37590
Full-time	41	4.1324	.36651

Years worked. An ANOVA compared employees' personal mastery practices in relation to how long they had worked for the library. Data used for comparison are in Table 5.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, not significant at .169, $p < .05$, indicated comparable variances across groups. The comparison between groups was not significant at .526, $p < .05$. Personal mastery experiences and practices at WCPL were not significantly different based on how long employees had worked at the library.

So what can be known about the practice of the discipline of personal mastery at WCPL from examining employee responses to these first 50 statements? The overall average was 4.033; employees generally agreed with the statements reflecting personal mastery practices in their system. Managers responded with significantly higher averages than non-managers. Managers had a significantly higher response to personal mastery

Table 5

Personal mastery practices by number of year worked at WCPL (N = 83)

Years worked	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
0 years to < 5 years	38	4.0335	.36351
5 years to < 10 years	15	3.9714	.30758
10 years to < 15 years	18	4.1349	.45565
15 years and over	12	4.1250	.24390
Total	83	4.0575	.36111

statements than did circulation clerks and pages. Furthermore, means fell in order, high to low, according to the rank of employees' titles within the organization. There was no significant difference in employees' experiences of personal mastery in relation to their full-time or part-time status or in their number of years employed by the library.

Mental Models

Reliability. The 11 items in Table 6 were designed to reflect the learning organization discipline of becoming aware of and challenging one's mental models.

Cronbach's alpha of .711 indicated that this group of items did consistently measure the single construct of mental models practice.

Table 6

Mental models practices (N = 93)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I welcome others to ask me about my opinions.	4.3118	.60753
In a disagreement, I am willing to take in new information that might change my opinion.	4.2581	.46399
I am interested in understanding the thoughts of others when I disagree with them.	4.1183	.50754
I try to understand the assumptions behind the thinking of my coworkers.	3.9032	.60907
I regularly avoid letting others know what I really think. ^a	3.8065	.76978
I am comfortable having my opinions scrutinized by my coworkers.	3.7849	.74963
I welcome a chance to learn from a conflict situation.	3.6774	.76842
I tend to jump to conclusions without considering all the facts. ^a	3.6129	.84740
Teamwork inspires me to examine my assumptions about how the world works.	3.6022	.88637

My workplace is a safe environment for honest expression.	3.5914	.95822
I have the skills to articulate my opinion when it is an unpopular one.	3.5806	.75646

^a Item has been reverse coded.

Items in the table are arranged in mean order, from highest to lowest. The three highest means indicate that employees welcome others to ask their opinions, they are willing to take in new information that might change their opinions, and they are interested in understanding the thoughts of others when they disagree with them.

Items with the three lowest means address the topics of teamwork's ability to inspire re-examination of assumptions about how the world works, about whether the workplace is a safe environment for honest expression, and about whether respondents have the skills to articulate unpopular opinions. Items with the lowest means still fall closer to Agree than to a neutral response, indicating a substantial agreement with the statements about the discipline of mental models.

Frequency. The overall average for all responses in the mental models discipline was 3.8434, with a standard deviation of 0.37202. Among the 94 respondents, individual means ranged from 3.09 to 5.0. The median was 3.8182. Figure 2 is a visual representation of these numbers. The bell curve on the graph shows a normal distribution based on the mean and standard deviation.

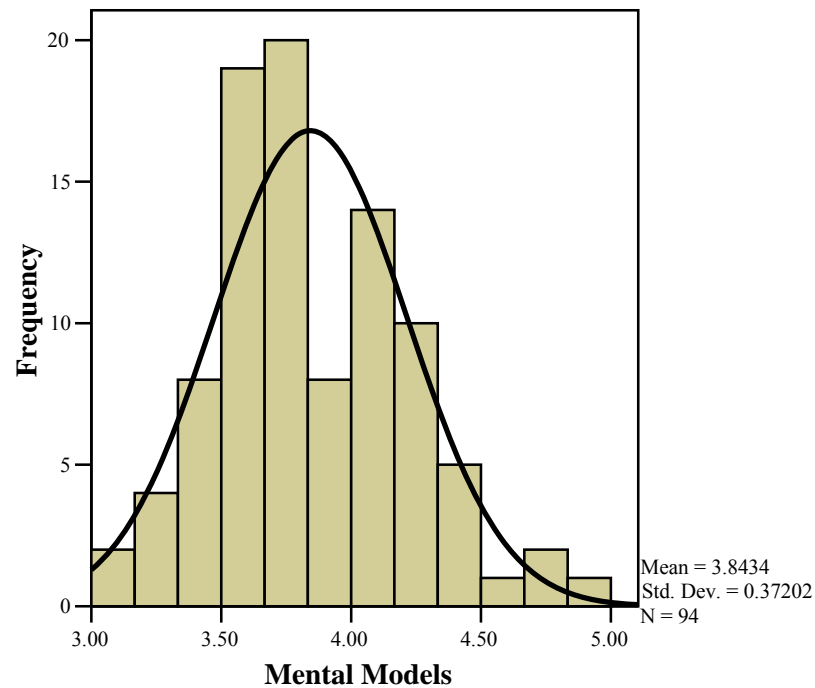


Figure 2. Frequency and distribution of means for mental models.

Management status. A t test compared the response means between managers and non-managers for the discipline of mental models. Means used for comparison are shown in Table 7.

Levene's test for equality of variances, not significant at .942, $p < .05$, indicated comparable variances across the samples. The t test for equality of means was not significant at .192 (2-tailed), $p < .05$. No significant difference was found between managers and non-managers in regard to their practice of challenging mental models.

Table 7

Mental models practices of managers and non-managers (N = 89)

Management Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	24	3.9318	.33936
Non-management employee	65	3.8197	.36356

Title. Table 8 shows the means across specific titles or job classifications. The category Other was used to classify everyone whose titles did not fit any of the other major title groups. The eight respondents in Other were far enough apart in their titles that their responses realistically could not be compared to one another. As a result, the responses in Other can be disregarded.

Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was not significant at .245, $p < .05$, indicating comparable variances across samples. The ANOVA test of the means between the groups showed no significant difference between the groups at .252, $p < .05$. There were no significant differences in the practice of the discipline of mental models based on respondents' job titles.

Table 8

Mental models practices by title (N = 77)

Title	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
Manager or supervisor	19	4.0191	.28033
Circulation clerk	13	3.7420	.24120
Library associate	19	3.9139	.48813
Page	18	3.8333	.31837
Other	8	3.8068	.43310
Total	77	3.8809	.36557

Hours worked weekly. Table 9 shows the numbers used in the *t* test that compared means between respondents who worked full-time and those who worked part-time. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at .473, $p < .05$, indicating comparable distributions across samples. The *t* test for equality of means found no significant difference between the two groups; the significance level was .464 (2-tailed), $p < .05$.

Table 9

Mental models practices by full-time or part-time status (N = 84)

Hours Worked	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
Part-time	43	3.8438	.38753
Full-time	41	3.9002	.30949

Years worked. An ANOVA compared means between groups based on length of time worked at the library. Homogeneity of variances was established with a Levene's significance measure of .122, $p < .05$. The between-groups significance level was .110,

Table 10

Mental models practices by number of years worked at WCPL (N = 83)

Years worked	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
0 years to < 5 years	38	3.8684	.33731
5 years to < 10 years	15	3.6788	.38242
10 years to < 15 years	18	3.9702	.43781
15 years and over	12	3.9318	.16041
Total	83	3.8654	.35907

$p < .05$; thus, no significant difference was found between the groups. Means used in this test are shown in Table 10.

Two summary conclusions result from this examination of how the discipline of challenging mental models is practiced at WCPL. One is that the overall mean for the 94 respondents was 3.8434. The second is that there was no significant difference between groups in any comparison made--between managers and non-managers, across job titles, between full-time and part-time employees, nor for the number of years worked at the library.

Team Learning

Reliability. Ten items, shown in Table 11, were categorized as representative of team learning practices. An 11th item, *Disagreements rarely occur among workers in this library system*, was originally meant to be a reflector of team learning, but responses to the statement revealed that it was not testing the team learning construct. Perhaps the word *rarely* was the problem, or perhaps there was a misapprehension about the role and meaning of disagreements in a team environment. In any event, removing the item from this collection of statements resulted in a Cronbach's reliability alpha of .726 for the remaining 10 items in this category. An alpha of .70 is generally accepted as indicating the items are testing the same construct.

Items in Table 11 are arranged in means order, from highest to lowest. Items with the three highest means indicate that working in teams enhances employees' ability to meet library goals, working in teams is beneficial to the library, and employees enjoy experimenting with innovations in their work.

Table 11

Team learning practices (N = 90)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Teamwork diminishes our ability to meet library goals. ^a	4.0667	.87152
Our working in teams is beneficial to WCPL.	4.0556	.87873
I enjoy experimenting with innovations in library work.	3.9667	.75625
Working at WCPL inspires me to push beyond my comfort zone.	3.9333	.74653
I practice listening “deeply” in order to understand others.	3.8667	.62170
My creativity is valued at this workplace.	3.8667	.91431
Teamwork inspires me to examine my assumptions about how the world works.	3.6333	.87986
I sometimes manipulate conversation so I won’t have to reveal my thinking on a topic. ^a	3.6333	.91737
After team meetings, we review what we learned from the meeting.	3.5667	.88749

Sometimes working on a team brings out defensiveness in me. ^a	3.1222	.94605
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^a Item has been reverse coded.

Items with lowest means dealt with manipulating conversations to avoid revealing thinking on a topic, reviewing what is learned at team meetings, and teamwork's bringing out defensiveness in employees. The item with the lowest mean falls closer to a neutral response than to an Agree. Perhaps that is an indicator that communication in teams is a problem area for some respondents.

Frequency. The overall mean for team learning among all 94 respondents was 3.7618, with a standard deviation of 0.4548, as shown in Figure3. The range of means for

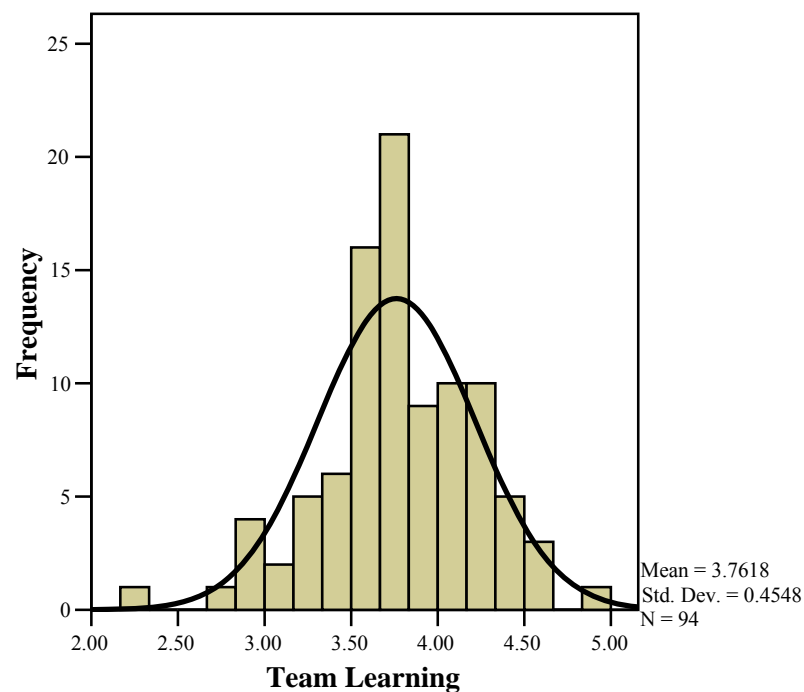


Figure 3. Frequency and distribution of means for team learning.

this category was 2.30 to 5.00; the median was 3.7389. The bell curve on the graph shows a normal distribution based on the mean and standard deviation.

Management status. Team learning means were compared based on whether employees were managers and supervisors or non-management employees. Means

Table 12

Team learning practices of managers and non-managers (N = 89)

Management Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	24	3.9616	.29811
Non-management employee	65	3.6904	.47078

used are shown in Table 12. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at .138, $p < .05$, indicating response variances were comparable across samples. The t test for equality of means found a significance of .010 (2-tailed), $p < .05$, indicating that managers had a significantly higher incidence of practicing team learning than did non-managers.

Title. A comparison of means based on job title was performed. Table 13 presents means analyzed. Levene's test of homogeneity of variances, not significant at .264, $p < .05$, indicated that there was comparable variance across groups. An ANOVA found significance at .004, $p < .05$. A Scheffe post hoc comparison did not find where the significant differences lay, but a Tamhane's T2 post hoc analysis showed managers to have a significantly higher mean than circulation clerks, .038 with $p < .05$, and a

Table 13

Team learning practices by title (N = 77)

Title	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	19	4.0515	.24026
Circulation clerk	13	3.6974	.33678
Library associate	19	3.9566	.42751
Page	18	3.6778	.34904
Other	8	3.6000	.54511
Total	77	3.8340	.39975

significantly higher mean than pages, .007, $p < .05$. Differences across other comparisons were found not to be significant.

If one simply arranges the means in order, again disregarding the category Other, one finds the means correspond with the rank of the job classification. In other words, managers and supervisors show the highest means for team learning, followed by library associates, circulation clerks, and then pages.

Hours worked weekly. When means shown in Table 14 were compared according to whether respondents worked full-time or part-time, a significant difference was found between the two groups. Levene's test for equality of variances was found not to be significant at .457, $p < .05$, indicated that variances across samples were similar.

Table 14

Team learning practices by full-time or part-time status (N = 84)

Hours Worked	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
Part-time	43	3.6808	.44547
Full-time	41	3.9190	.35036

The *t* test for equality of means had a significance of .008 (2-tailed), $p < .05$. Full-time workers were significantly more likely to experience practices associated with the discipline of team learning than were part-time employees. This finding was supported by managers' reports that part-time workers often are unable to fit learning organization activities--such as participating in teams--into their schedules.

Years worked. An ANOVA compared the groups and means shown in Table 15 to determine whether a difference in practices could be detected in groups based on how long they had worked for the library. Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was not significant at .123, $p < .05$; variances were comparable across samples. The test comparing the means had a significance level of .295, $p < .05$, meaning there was no significant difference in team learning practices based on how long respondents had worked at the library.

Table 15

Team learning practices by number of years worked at WCPL (N = 83)

Years worked	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
0 years to < 5 years	38	3.8263	.44460
5 years to < 10 years	15	3.6050	.38870
10 years to < 15 years	18	3.8636	.48358
15 years and over	12	3.8000	.20449
Total	83	3.7906	.42090

A summary of the findings for team learning practices indicates that the overall mean for team learning was 3.7618. Managers' means were significantly higher than non-managers' means in team learning practices. There was also a significant difference in team learning practices according to title; managers were significantly more likely than circulation clerks and pages to practice the discipline of team learning. Full-time workers were significantly more likely than part-time workers to participate in team learning practices, yet no difference in team learning practices could be detected based on how long respondents had worked for the library.

Shared Vision

Reliability. The 12 items in Table 16 represent respondents' experiences of the practice of shared vision at WCPL. Items in this category were found to measure the same construct and had a Cronbach's alpha of .788 for reliability.

Table 16

Shared vision practices (N = 89)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I don't really have a clear vision of what I'm trying to accomplish at work. ^a	4.2921	.64319
This organization does not operate with a long-term view in mind. ^a	4.1798	.80569
I do not feel a strong connection to the people I work with. ^a	4.1011	1.04495
I am comfortable making customer service decisions without getting permission.	3.9438	.94580
My creativity is valued at this workplace.	3.8876	.91002
Our library system continually compares where we are to where we are going.	3.8539	.74697
I believe workers in WCPL share an excitement about our vision.	3.6517	.77020
I don't completely agree with this organization's loftiest vision. ^a	3.5955	.91352
The status quo is okay with me. ^a	3.5056	.94296
My experience at work is exhilarating.	3.4607	.91771

My coworkers and I communicate regularly about our organization's vision.	3.1910	.93998
Political game-playing is part of the functioning of this library system. ^a	2.9551	1.10690

^a Item has been reverse coded.

Items are arranged in mean order, from highest to lowest. The three highest means indicate that employees agree they have a clear vision of what they are trying to accomplish at work, the organization operates with a long-term view in mind, and co-workers experience a strong connection with one another.

The lowest means represent respondents' experiences of exhilaration at work, communication with coworkers about the library's vision, and observation of political game-playing at work. The means for these three items fall closer to the neutral response on the scale than to the Agree response. Of most concern are the two lowest. Perceptions or experiences of political game-playing and a lack of communicating about the library's vision can be detrimental to the practice of the discipline of shared vision.

Frequency. The mean response for all respondents regarding the practice of shared vision in their library was 3.7194. Individual means in this category ranged from 2.50 to 5.00; the median was 3.7083. Figure 4 presents a visual display of these figures. The bell curve on the graph shows a normal distribution based on the mean and standard deviation.

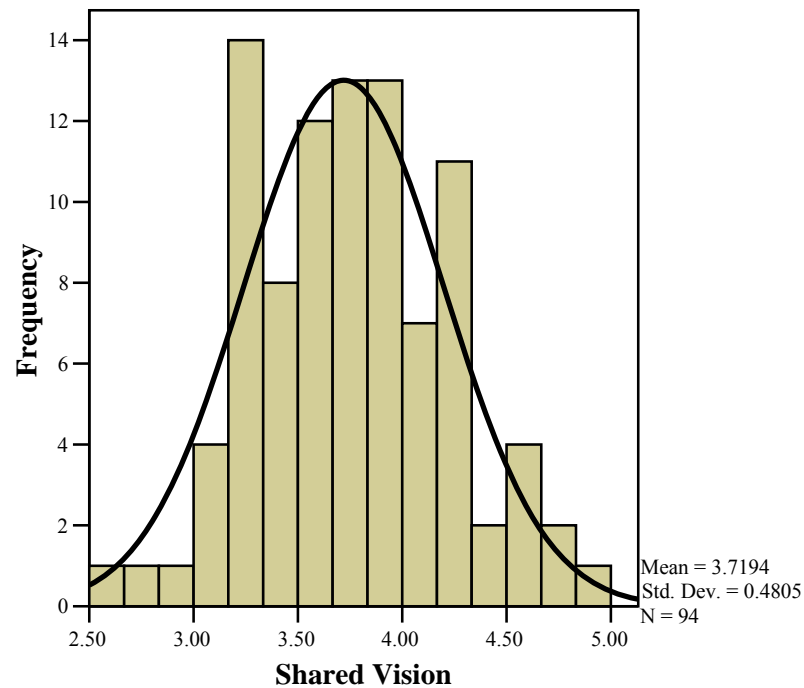


Figure 4. Frequency and distribution of means for shared vision.

Management status. A *t* test compared responses of managers and non-managers to find whether there was a difference in the practice of shared vision according to management status. Table 17 shows the means for the two groups. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at .876, $p < .05$; variances were similar across samples. The *t* test for equality of means was significant at .019, $p < .05$. Managers and supervisors were significantly more likely to practice the discipline of shared vision than were non-management employees.

Table 17

Shared vision practices of managers and non-managers (N = 89)

Management Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	24	3.9148	.50715
Non-management employee	65	3.6480	.45192

Title. With a significant difference being observable between managers and non-managers, was there a significant difference between employees based on their job title or classification? Means for the groups are in Table 18.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was not significant at .071, $p < .05$; the groups were comparable in response variance. An analysis of variance between groups showed a significance of .004, $p < .05$. A Scheffe post hoc comparison found the mean difference between managers and pages, .45116, to be significantly different at .033, $p < .05$, with managers practicing the discipline of shared vision more than pages.

Table 18

Shared vision practices by title (N = 77)

Title	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	19	4.0459	.37792
Circulation clerk	13	3.6859	.36189
Library associate	19	3.9097	.50758
Page	18	3.5947	.28224
Other	8	3.5313	.53626
Total	77	3.7912	.44452

Hours worked weekly. A *t* test compared means for part-time workers and full-time workers regarding their experiences of shared vision. Means are shown in Table 19.

Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at .193, $p < .05$, making the groups comparable. The *t* test for equality of means between the samples had a significance of .100 (2-tailed), $p < .05$, making the means not significantly different. Thus, there was no significant difference between part-time and full-time employees in regard to their practice of the discipline of shared vision.

Table 19

Shared vision practices by full-time or part-time status (N = 84)

Hours Worked	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
Part-time	43	3.6540	.44067
Full-time	41	3.8261	.50749

Years worked. An ANOVA compared means to learn whether there was any difference in respondents' experiences of the practice of shared vision based on how

Table 20

Shared vision practices by number of years worked at WCPL (N = 83)

Years worked	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
0 years to < 5 years	38	3.7817	.38701
5 years to < 10 years	15	3.6167	.48263
10 years to < 15 years	18	3.7727	.58274
15 years and over	12	3.7816	.42141
Total	83	3.7499	.45338

long they had worked for the library. Groups and means used in this analysis are shown in Table 20.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was not significant at .244, $p < .05$, indicating samples were comparable in variance of responses. An analysis of variance between the groups was found not to be significant at .670, $p < .05$, meaning there was no significant difference between groups based on how long employees had worked for the library.

In summary, employees' responses about their experiences practicing the discipline of shared vision at WCPL averaged 3.7194 on a scale of 1 to 5. Managers were significantly more likely to experience the practice of shared vision than were non-managers. When considering the difference across job titles, the significant difference was between managers and pages. There was no significant difference between employees' experiences of shared vision based on their full-time or part-time status, or based on how many years they had worked for the library.

Systems Thinking

Reliability. Five indicators of systems thinking are shown in Table 21. A sixth item, *I do not always have information about what's going on in other branches*, with its reverse coded mean of 2.333, was excluded from the category. A lack of systems thinking is not the only reason a person would not know what is going on at other branches, and responses indicated this item should not be included in the systems thinking category. The five items that were included had a Cronbach's alpha of .620, not the .70 recommended, but acceptable, given small number of items.

Table 21

Systems thinking practices (N = 93)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
The work I do affects the work of others.	4.4839	.61878
This library system is not responsive to the changing needs of our users. ^a	4.4516	.58078
Every aspect of the work I do has an effect on customer service.	4.2366	.71320
When I work to solve a problem, I try to anticipate all the effects of potential solutions.	4.0968	.64377
Before acting, I consider the potential effects of my actions.	3.9785	.70678

^a Item has been reverse coded.

Responses in the category of systems thinking indicate that respondents are aware that the work they do affects the work of others, but they do not always practice considering the potential effects of their actions before acting. Respondents agree that the library system responds to the changing needs of its users.

Frequency. Questionnaire responses about systems thinking at WCPL had a mean of 4.2521. Individual averages on the systems thinking questions ranged from 3.40 to

5.00; the median was 4.2000. Figure 5 is a visual representation of the numbers. The bell curve on the graph shows a normal distribution based on the mean and standard deviation.

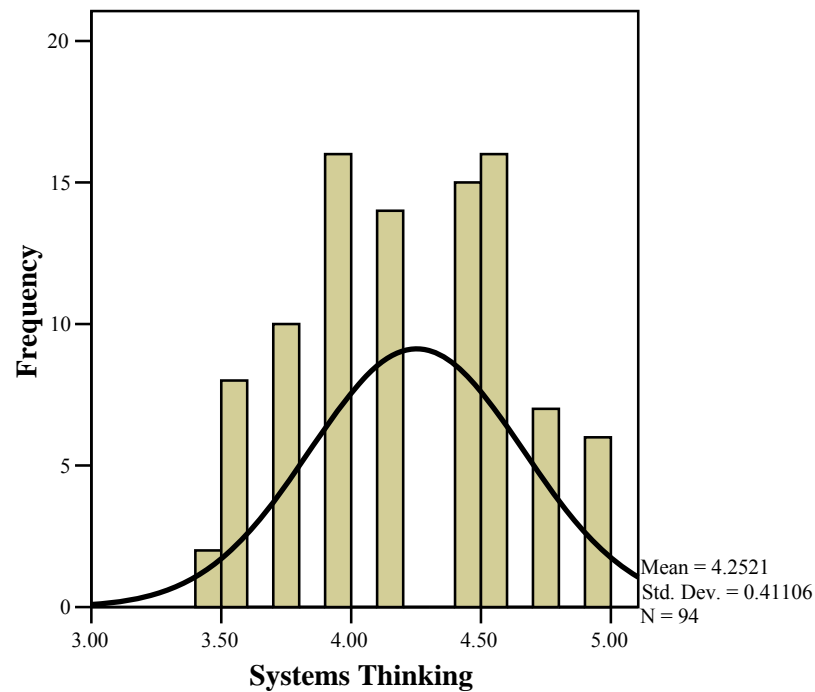


Figure 5. Frequency and distribution of means for systems thinking.

Management status. A *t* test was run to see whether there were differences between managers and non-managers in the practice of systems thinking. Numbers analyzed are shown in Table 22. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at .647, $p < .05$, indicating that means could be compared between groups. The *t* test for equality of means found a significant difference of .028 (2-tailed) between

managers' and non-managers' practice of systems thinking. Managers were significantly more likely to practice systems thinking than were non-managers.

Table 22

Systems thinking practices of managers and non-managers (N = 89)

Management Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Manager or supervisor	24	4.3958	.38502
Non-management employee	65	4.1846	.40048

Title. Mean responses to statements about systems thinking are organized by job title in Table 23. An ANOVA comparing means across job titles was run, and a significant difference of .048 was found. Levene's test for homogeneity of variances had a significance level of .050; homogeneity of variances is assumed if significance is *above* .050. Since equality of variances could not be assumed, Tamhane's T2 post hoc test was run in order to determine where the differences between means lay. The result was that significant differences were found between responses of managers and circulation clerks, .039, $p < .05$, and between managers and pages, .031, $p < .05$. As before, the category of Other was used to classify everyone whose titles did not fit any of the other major title groups. The eight respondents in Other were far enough apart in their titles that their responses realistically could not be compared to one another. As a result, the responses in Other can be disregarded.

Table 23

Systems thinking practices by title (N = 77)

Title	N	Mean	Standard
			Deviation
Manager or supervisor	19	4.4895	.29230
Circulation clerk	13	4.1538	.29613
Library associate	19	4.3263	.49982
Page	18	4.1222	.39490
Other	8	4.2500	.41057
Total	77	4.2818	.40482

Hours worked weekly. Mean responses for full-time and part-time respondents are in Table 24. A *t* test was run to learn whether there was a significant difference between the responses. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at .081, $p < .05$, indicating that variances across groups were similar, and that the groups could be compared. The *t* test for equality of means had a significance of .027 (2-tailed), $p < .05$, indicating that full-time employees had a significantly higher practice of systems thinking than part-time employees.

Table 24

Systems thinking practices by full-time or part-time status (N = 84)

Hours Worked	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Part-time	43	4.1674	.43190
Full-time	41	4.3585	.33983

Years worked. An ANOVA was run to test whether there was significant difference in responses based on how long employees had worked for the library. Data and groups analyzed for that test are in Table 25.

Table 25

Systems thinking practices by number of years worked at WCPL (N = 83)

Years worked	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
0 years to < 5 years	38	4.2053	.41975
5 years to < 10 years	15	4.1733	.42673
10 years to < 15 years	18	4.3611	.37438
15 years and over	12	4.3833	.37618
Total	83	4.2590	.40726

Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was not significant at .693, $p < .05$, indicating that groups could be compared. When the ANOVA between groups was run, the significance level was .315, $p < .05$, indicating that there was no significant difference in responses between groups based on how long respondents had worked for the library.

To summarize, the overall mean response for participants reporting on the discipline of systems thinking was 4.2521. Managers and supervisors were found to have significantly higher average responses than non-management employees. A comparison of responses based on respondents' titles found that managers had significantly higher responses than circulation clerks and pages. There was also a difference depending on how much respondents worked in a week; full-time employees had higher mean responses than part-time employees. However, there was no significant difference noted between respondents based on how long they had worked for the library.

A overview of the findings of the first part of the questionnaire can be seen in Table 26.

In four out of five disciplines, managers had significantly higher mean responses than non-managers. Only in the practice of mental models was there no significant difference between managers and non-managers.

In four out of the five disciplines, a significant difference between means according to job titles could be found. Those differences were between managers and pages and circulation clerks or simply between managers and pages. Only in the practice of mental models was there no significant difference across job titles.

Table 26

Overview of significant differences by discipline and group

Variable	PM	MM	TL	SV	ST
Management status	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Title	Yes ^a	No	Yes ^a	Yes	Yes ^a
Hours worked per week	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Years worked	No	No	No	No	No

Note. PM: Personal Mastery; MM: Mental Models; TL: Team Learning; SV: Shared Vision; ST: Systems Thinking.

^aDifferences were found using post hoc analyses.

In three out of five disciplines, there was no significant difference between means based on whether respondents worked full-time or part-time. The two disciplines that did see a significant difference--team learning and systems thinking--showed full-time employees having higher mean responses.

The number of years worked at the library did not factor into any of the findings. New employees as well as long-time employees had comparable experiences practicing the disciplines of the learning organization at WCPL. Evidently the years of dramatic change and the times of unhappiness in the early 1990s were not enough to undermine the library's efforts to change and evolve.

A note about significant differences is important at this point. While significant differences were found in several of the comparisons, the differences are not necessarily

substantive or meaningful. For example, significant differences between managers and non-managers were found to be either between managers and pages or managers and circulation clerks and pages. However, pages and circulation clerks work part-time and usually have less experience with the library's learning organization practices. The fact that there was any difference between their responses and managers' is not particularly informative. Similarly, significant differences found in comparisons between full-time and part-time employees can be attributed to the fact that part-time employees have fewer opportunities to participate in learning organization activities. More notable is how *few* significant differences were found.

Overall means for the five disciplines were 4.2521 for systems thinking, 4.033 for personal mastery, 3.8434 for mental models, 3.7618 for team learning, and 3.7194 for shared vision. On the scale of 1 to 5--from strongly disagree to strongly agree--two of the disciplines had means greater than 4, and the other three disciplines had means between 3 and 4, but much closer to 4 than to 3. These means indicate respondents are generally in agreement with the questionnaire statements representing learning organization disciplines in their organization.

At this point, the discussion will shift to the findings of the first of two open-ended items on the questionnaire. Item 51 of the questionnaire invited respondents to comment if they were inspired to do so by any of the statements in the questionnaire. Below is a general summary. The complete text of comments is in Appendix D.

Under the topic of communicating, respondents covered a variety of themes: the importance of listening, feeling as though one's opinions are heard at work, the idea that there are circumstances in which some people are reluctant to express their opinions, and

the belief that some supervisors gladly listen to opinions but never let others' opinions change their minds. Two people wrote of the challenges of communicating between branches.

Item 31, about feeling compassion toward patrons, elicited two comments. One revealed frustration dealing with difficult patrons, and the other expressed frustration about the library's policy of condoning loud behaviors that keep the library from being a quiet place for concentrating and learning.

Creativity, trying new ideas, risk-taking, and change were seen to be valued at WCPL. One respondent, however, wondered if people higher in administration might overlook or simply tolerate creativity.

Customer service was remarked on by two respondents. One said customer service is and always has been important at WCPL, and staff work hard to find the best ways to serve their patrons. The other indicated that good service extends to internal customers also.

Decision-making was noted by two people. Comments indicated that being able to make decisions without fear of criticism and judgment is important, and that support for independent decision-making is given at WCPL.

The question about disagreements drew one comment. The respondent proposed that as a primarily female organization, staff are more likely to try to solve disagreements.

The question about failure providing an opportunity for learning drew one comment from a person who struggles with the concept. However, the respondent believes that WCPL supports the idea.

Learning was the main topic of comment for two respondents. One stated that organizational support of learning at WCPL is exceptional. The other wrote of learning activities at her branch: sharing of ideas, the sharing of learning, and staff preferring to learn together as a group.

One person stated that the performance evaluation process takes too long and involves too much paperwork. The person also mentioned that a team is looking into this matter.

The question about political game-playing brought two comments. One remarked about cliques that cause tension between coworkers. The other commented that every organization has politics.

Two people offered comments on the questionnaire itself. Each involved the wording of the statements.

One person made an observation about systems thinking at WCPL: In spite of all efforts toward system awareness, some people do not like to help outside their own territory.

The subject of teams brought the most response. Two mentioned the importance of working together and the benefits gained by working in teams. Others commented that so much time is spent in meetings and in team activities that other obligations suffer. Three respondents gave specific observations about the negatives of team activities. One said that some people give lip service to the ideas of teamwork (and creativity and innovation) but undermine their goals. The second person said a team can be formed to make a decision, but one person can change that decision. The third view was that teams can be formed to examine a potential new procedure when, in reality, the decision has

already been made to implement it. Devil's advocates are considered "negative," according to that respondent. A final note by a substitute indicated that she had never been on a team because she was a substitute.

The subject of technology drew comments from two people. The first welcomed use of new technologies in the learning process but declared frustration at not being comfortable with one thing before another new thing comes along. The second person said that new technologies were to benefit customers and further the library's mission; new technologies were *not* for making employees better learners, as Item 19 had stated.

In regard to the topic of shared vision, three people offered opinions. One indicated that the library's vision and mission are clear and guide the work of employees. Another, a page, could not comment on the library's vision since it is not communicated to her regularly. The third respondent expressed a lack of connection with coworkers because they don't have a clear view of her and the various roles she tries to maintain in life.

The final five comments were about working at WCPL in general. Most of them addressed more than one theme. All five people expressed pleasure at working at WCPL. Reasons for that pleasure are the ability to help the public, to contribute, to learn, and to care. While there can be too much red tape and discussion, too many rules and regulations, the library offers an incentive to improve communication and learning styles.

The final questionnaire item to be discussed in this section is Question 52, *Use three words to describe your experience of working in this library system*. Appendix E contains the full enumeration of responses in alphabetical order; and Appendix F presents the words, in threes by respondent, categorized by job titles.

The presentation of information about this question was determined by the shape of the data. There were five terms used much more often than any other to describe work at the library. In Table 27 are those five most frequently used terms. The occurrences are broken out by job title.

The five most frequently used words expressed positive experiences working at the library. In terms of occurrence, circulation clerks expressed one of these five positive-experience words less often than did respondents of any other job classification.

Rounding out the top 10 most frequently used terms were *learning* (9), *enjoyable* (8), *satisfying* (7), *educational* (6), and *frustrating* (4). The remaining 74 terms--ranging from *awesome* to *worthwhile*-- were used either three times, twice, or once.

Table 27

Most frequently used words to describe work, by job title

Word	M	LA	CC	P	O	Total
Fun	4	7	3	4	4	22
Challenging	7	6	2	3	3	21
Interesting	2	3	1	5	4	15
Rewarding	5	5	1	2	1	14
Fulfilling	3	3	1	0	3	10
Total	21	24	8	14	15	

Note. Job titles are Manager, Library Associate, Circulation Clerk, Page, Other.

Out of all the words used to describe working at the library, five could be considered reflective of a negative experience: *frustrating* (4 responses), *indifferent* (1 response), *just a job* (1 response), *unappreciated* (1 response), and *unproductive* (1 response). The four people who used the word *frustrating* also used positive words such as *rewarding*, *enjoyable*, and *interesting*. In other words, frustration can be seen as a negative, but it does not preclude positive experiences.

In a final note, it is worth mentioning that only three people wrote about being underpaid or wanting a raise. While managers worry about the lack of financial compensation for employees, their hopes that other benefits of working at WCPL will somewhat make up for lower pay are seemingly being realized.

Questionnaire respondents provided a wealth of information about working in a learning organization. The concluding section will discuss the findings of both the questionnaires and the manager interviews in light of the literature reviewed for the study. Suggestions for further study will complete the section.

Discussion

The interviews and questionnaire data provided by participants in this study have shown that WCPL is a public library thriving as a learning organization. The library has institutionalized the practice of the five disciplines of the learning organization described by Senge, and offers an affirmative endorsement for practicing learning organization disciplines in a public library environment.

The experiences of WCPL have been similar to those of other libraries who have embarked on this journey. A look back through some of the literature reviewed for this study quickly reveals similarities.

First of all, a precipitating condition or event usually requires a change that sets a library on the road to becoming a learning organization. This was the case at Queens University's Humanities and Social Science Library (Lavery & Burton, 2003), and at North Suburban Library System (Hayes, Sullivan, & Baaske, 1998). Such was the catalyst for WCPL's change as well.

Second, organizational approaches to practicing the disciplines of the learning organization are unique to each organization. There is no formula by which we would judge one library to be a proper learning organization and another not to be. In the case of WCPL, the library had already adopted teamwork and team learning as a way to put more control in the hands of employees. When the library was introduced to the five learning organization disciplines a few years later, team learning became the foundation

discipline on which all the others were built. Every article about libraries that become learning organizations describes approaches, needs, and designs for adopting learning organization practices that are tailored to library's individual circumstances.

Third, the literature reviewed for this study frequently addressed the important attributes of staff in library learning organizations (Hayes, Sullivan, & Baaske, 1998; Rapple, 2001; Giesecke & McNeil, 2004). WCPL staff share many of those attributes, including a commitment to lifelong learning, flexibility, an ability to continually transform, an ability to teach others, an inclination to see the big picture, an unwillingness to accept the status quo, an interest in being part of the decision-making process, a willingness to take risks, and a desire to be able to understand others and to express one's own opinions.

Finally, the literature reflects the importance of staff development in a library's conversion to learning organization practices (Phipps, 1993; Hayes, Sullivan, & Baaske, 1998; Giesecke & McNeil, 2004). Learning begins with the people who work in an organization. When individuals learn, they share their knowledge with coworkers and teammates, generating new knowledge throughout the organization. Promoting this individual learning, sometimes equated with personal mastery, is a priority in learning organizations. Whether it comes from library-sponsored training or through the encouragement of individuals' independent learning pursuits, continual learning is vital to a learning organization. At WCPL, individuals access learning opportunities via several levels of organizational support, but they are ultimately responsible for setting and meeting their own learning and development goals.

There is another angle from which we can view the relationship between the enlightened management practices of the learning organization and the personal growth of the employees. The philosophical approach to this study was based on Maslow's basic needs hierarchy and the idea that people are motivated to and have a need to reach their fullest potential, or, to use Maslow's term, to self-actualize. WCPL is an environment in which the preconditions for satisfying basic human needs exist. But what sorts of traits characterize self-actualizing people? Maslow describes them as individuals who are growth-motivated; are comfortable with reality; accept themselves and others; focus on problems outside of themselves; lack defensiveness, game-playing, and pretense; are spontaneous and natural; derive satisfaction from basic experiences of life; have a feeling of sympathy or identification with others, even when those others are not pleasing; have a democratic character and the humility to know they can learn from anyone; are creative; have an unhostile sense of humor; and are ethical (Maslow, pp. 180-200). Certainly many of these characteristics have been seen in the data provided by the participants of this study. From what the employees of WCPL have shown us, their learning organization activities not only promote successful service to their users, but they also provide a work environment where employees' own basic needs for personal growth can potentially be met.

Frederick Herzberg (1987) made a connection between personal needs and what employees want from their work. He found that the factors that lead to job satisfaction, and, therefore, motivation, are distinct from the ones that lead to dissatisfaction. He found that job enrichment was a great satisfier and motivator. On the other hand, salary increases, fringe benefits and reduced work weeks simply kept people from being

dissatisfied; those factors did not lead to job satisfaction. In other words, there are factors that can cause dissatisfaction, such as low salary, but an increase in salary will not cause satisfaction; satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposites. Herzberg found that factors leading to satisfaction at work are personal achievement, responsibility, growth, and learning. And it is these factors that help people generate their own motivations and enthusiasms for their work.

It seemed appropriate to mention this classic article in light of the fact that employees at WCPL, and at other public libraries, do not receive salaries that reflect the value employees bring to their jobs. However, only three people responding to the questionnaire even mentioned low salaries in their comments. The general feelings of satisfaction seemed to outweigh that particular dissatisfaction. Managers' hopes that job satisfaction is somewhat making up for low pay are seemingly being met.

Libraries working as learning organizations are actively involved in the process of learning, adapting, changing, anticipating, sharing learning with others, and growing and creating in order to meet the needs of their users. This is all built upon the learning and growth of individuals working for the library. It appears that operating as a learning organization not only benefits service, but it is good for the library's employees as well.

At this time, it would be useful to shift to a discussion of the reason for the study, changes that might have benefited the study, and questions raised by the study.

Because there is little other literature on public library learning organizations, it was important to start at the beginning: to find a learning library and to find out how it worked. The results of this study contribute to the general literature on library learning organizations, particularly in a public library setting. The study provides a thorough,

detailed account of one library's operation and employees' perceptions and experiences working there. A variety of representatives from the organization, from top managers to part-time pages, have all given voice to their experiences and observations at their workplace so that others may learn from them.

In spite of an excellent response rate of 59 percent of regular, salaried employees, this study could still have been enhanced by an even greater response rate. One imagines that the non-respondents might have offered significant additional insight. Perhaps there were strong dissenters, for example, who felt disinclined to offer their voice, or people who could offer unique points of view that could not have been expressed by anyone else.

On the other hand, respondents were open with their comments, and did not hold back from expressing their opinions. I did not get an impression that respondents were trying to give information they thought I might want to hear.

This study, of course, brought to mind more questions that deserve investigation. What would be the findings if the same study were conducted in a library that does not call itself a learning organization? Would glaring differences be found? How would users of WCPL rate the service and responsiveness they receive from their library? How would a larger library or a library with a more diverse workforce function as a learning organization? Could a public library with unionized employees successfully become a learning organization? Is it possible to measure employee transfer of learning from class or workshop to the job? Perhaps researchers interested in the topic of public library learning organizations will be inspired to take up the challenge of finding out.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What is the background to your library's decision to transform itself into a learning organization?
2. How do you define a learning organization?
3. How are the principles of learning organization at work in your library?
4. How does being a learning organization affect overall organizational (a) communication, (b) problem-solving, (c) decision-making, (d) learning, (e) autonomy, and (f) handling of mistakes?
5. Tell me about teams and teamwork in your library.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

This five-page questionnaire is designed to provide information about your experiences and perceptions of working in a learning organization, the county-wide library system.

The following 50 responses will take about 15 minutes. For each statement, please circle the number to the right which most closely reflects your thoughts about your work:

Circle 1 if you strongly disagree with the statement.

Circle 2 if you disagree with the statement.

Circle 3 if you neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Circle 4 if you agree with the statement.

Circle 5 if you strongly agree with the statement.

Question Number		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I am committed to my own lifelong learning.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I welcome others to ask me about my opinions.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Our working in teams is beneficial to WCPL.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I believe workers in WCPL share an excitement about our vision.	1	2	3	4	5
5	The work I do affects the work of others.	1	2	3	4	5
6	After team meetings, we review what we learned from the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I am comfortable making customer service decisions without getting permission.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I don't completely agree with this organization's loftiest vision.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9	When I work to solve a problem, I try to anticipate all the effects of potential solutions.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am comfortable having my opinions scrutinized by my coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Sometimes working on a team brings out defensiveness in me.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Failure is an opportunity for learning.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Before acting, I consider the potential effects of my actions.	1	2	3	4	5
14	The status quo is okay with me.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I welcome a chance to learn from a conflict situation.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I do my work with a clear sense of purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I tend to jump to conclusions without considering all the facts.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I am afraid of getting into trouble if I make mistakes at my work.	1	2	3	4	5
19	WCPL embraces new technologies that will help employees be better learners.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I do not feel a strong connection to the people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
21	Teamwork inspires me to examine my assumptions about how the world works.	1	2	3	4	5
22	Our library system continually compares where we are to where we are going.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I feel uncomfortable dealing with change at work.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Failure makes me feel powerless.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I have the skills to articulate my opinion when it is an unpopular one.	1	2	3	4	5
26	Employee development is an important value at WCPL.	1	2	3	4	5
27	Political game-playing is part of the functioning of this library system.	1	2	3	4	5
28	Teamwork diminishes our ability to meet library goals.	1	2	3	4	5
29	I am interested in understanding the thoughts of others when I disagree with them.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I will sometimes change my goals so they more closely match reality.	1	2	3	4	5
31	I have compassion for library patrons.	1	2	3	4	5
32	This organization does not operate with a long-term view in mind.	1	2	3	4	5
33	In a disagreement, I am willing to take in new information that might change my opinion.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
34	I practice listening “deeply” in order to understand others.	1	2	3	4	5
35	Working at WCPL inspires me to push beyond my comfort zone.	1	2	3	4	5
36	Every aspect of the work I do has an effect on customer service.	1	2	3	4	5
37	I don’t really have a clear vision of what I’m trying to accomplish at work.	1	2	3	4	5
38	I genuinely care about my work.	1	2	3	4	5
39	Disagreements rarely occur among workers in this library system.	1	2	3	4	5
40	My workplace is a safe environment for honest expression.	1	2	3	4	5
41	My experience at work is exhilarating.	1	2	3	4	5
42	This library system is not responsive to the changing needs of our users.	1	2	3	4	5
43	I sometimes manipulate conversation so I won’t have to reveal my thinking on a topic.	1	2	3	4	5
44	I enjoy experimenting with innovations in library work.	1	2	3	4	5
45	I regularly avoid letting others know what I really think.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
46	My creativity is valued in this workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
47	I try to understand the assumptions behind the thinking of my coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5
48	My coworkers and I communicate regularly about our organization's vision.	1	2	3	4	5
49	I seek out learning opportunities that will help me do my job better.	1	2	3	4	5
50	I do not always have information about what's going on in other branches.	1	2	3	4	5

The next two questions are to help give you a chance to communicate more about your experience working in this library system.

51. If any of the above statements have inspired you to elaborate, please feel free to do so below. You may continue on the back of any of these pages.

52. Use three words to describe your experience of working in this library system.

The final questions are about you. Please be assured that your identity will remain anonymous.

Please mark the box next to the appropriate option:

Please check whether you are

- ☐ Non-management employee
- ☐ Management
- ☐ Volunteer

Your job title _____

How long have you worked (or volunteered) for WCPL? _____

How many hours do you work at the library in a week? _____

If you have further questions about the questionnaire or the study, please contact me, Cynthia Pierce, at cpierce@email.unc.edu, or my faculty advisor, Barbara Moran, at moran@ils.unc.edu.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix C

Sample Team Activities at WCPL

Team	Activity
Assistive Technology	Explore the needs of disabled residents and improve the library's service to them by implementing assistive technologies, training staff, marketing services, and building and expanding partnerships.
Central Telephone Reference	Investigate re-routing reference telephone calls away from branch reference desks and to a central office.
Evaluation	Create a new performance evaluation tool.
Family Fair	Collaborate with a local enterprise the celebration of the summer reading program.
House and Garden	A branch initiative to help with housekeeping and maintenance.
Leadership	Branch team anticipates problems and fixes things before they break.
Learning Libraries	Bring learning organization training to library staff.
Learning Philosophy	Develop the library's learning philosophy.

Team	Activity
On the Same Page	Coordinate annual one book/one community events and activities.
Promotional Data	Investigate alternative ways of promoting library services.
Shared Collection	Investigate feasibility of housing books at the branch where they are returned, not where they came from.
Summer Reading	Coordinate summer reading program.
TrendWatch	Look for trends in the world that library service providers should be paying attention to.
Web Site Usability	Analyze customer use of the WCPL homepages and make any changes needed for improved access and usability.
Young Adult	Branch teams, instead of YA specialists, support learning activities for young adult users.

Appendix D

Responses to Question 51

Communication

1. It's important for everyone to listen to each other with an open mind. For things to run smoothly, I feel that we must understand each other and feel comfortable communicating with one another.
2. I always feel as though my opinion is important here at X.
3. Certain individuals make free expression not an option.
4. Although opinions can be expressed, supervisors rarely consider and never change their minds.
5. At least one branch manager uses anger as a management tool. Staff feel reluctant to voice opinions, ask questions, or make mistakes because they are afraid of being chastised, sometimes in public areas.
6. It's hard to know what's going on at other branches. There is some degree of protection (from admin or from other staff) at information. I don't know if this is because people will feel they'll "get in trouble" with administration, or they fear criticism from staff at other branches, or both. Or something else.
7. Staff from other branches do not have any idea of what we deal with on a day to day basis. They may have to deal with a drunk every couple of months; we deal with it every day at the X Branch.

Compassion

8. Question 31 was too general. We have a majority of lovely patrons, but there are others who can absolutely ruin your day. I also have compassion for young mothers

with small children, but a number of them have obviously never taught the children to gently handle these wonderful books. Plus, I have no compassion or understanding of the library system's allowance of loud talking, yelling, and cell phone users conversing as if they were home. I truly consider the library a place of learning, concentration, and quiet peace. That's not happening!

9. Dealing with the large number of problem patrons at this branch (homeless, drunks, drug abusers, wild teens), it is easy to have little to no compassion toward patrons. Having run-ins with three or four of those patrons over the course of a few hours takes away any enjoyment of this job you may have had. This brings me to Question 50. Staff from other branches do not have any idea of what we deal with on a day to day basis. They may have to deal with a drunk every couple of months; we deal with it every day at the X Branch.

Creativity

10. Creativity is, I hope, gaining more respect, but at higher levels may be overlooked or tolerated.
11. It is a pleasure to work in an organization that supports risk-taking, creativity, and change--even when it's been painful--it helps us to be better.
12. Creativity and trying new ideas seems to be greatly valued.

Customer Service

13. Customer service is very important. I feel that most staff that I work with really care about our customers and work hard to figure out ways to best serve them.

14. WCPL has always stressed the importance of customer service. Providing excellent customer service extends from the way we treat the public to the way we treat each other as staff.

Decision-Making

15. Support for making decisions independently is given.
16. I also believe it is important for everyone to feel they can make confident choices and decisions at work without fearing criticism and judgment.

Disagreements

17. I do think we have a fairly homogeneous work force; perhaps HR and selection process is responsible. Being primarily a female organization, I feel we are more likely to try to work things out.

Failure

18. The concept of failure as a learning experience is still difficult for me as a person (thank heavens I don't do brain surgery!), but I do think the system supports the concept.

Learning

19. Organizational support of learning is exceptional.
20. In my department we are very sharing with ideas and assistance. Those who learn something new are eager to share it with co-workers, i.e., this worked really well, or did you know ... We also prefer to learn together.

Performance Evaluations

21. Our job evaluation process involves far too much time and paperwork (a team is exploring this matter!).

Political Game-Playing

- 22. Tension between co-workers is the result of cliques.
- 23. No matter what the organization, there is always politics.

Questionnaire

- 24. Question #8 is very poorly worded so your responses will be invalid.
- 25. I would have liked to have “sometimes” on several of the questions.

Systems Thinking

- 26. Despite all the talk about systems thinking, some people act as though they have their own little territory and act put-upon when asked to help in other areas.

Teams

- 27. Teams give employees a chance to work together on a common goal that supports the library’s vision, while enabling employees to better understand each other as individuals and better understand the workings of other branches or departments. This knowledge increases our ability to best use the library’s resources to serve customers.
- 28. It is very important to work together.
- 29. Too much meeting time.
- 30. Sometimes we have so many team meetings that we feel we don’t have enough time left to do our work.
- 31. Being so involved in teams and other obligations makes it hard to keep up with the regular duties.
- 32. Some employees give lip service to ideas of teamwork, creativity, and innovation, but undermine those goals through their actions.

33. Teams are formed with a charter to implement or make a decision, but that decision can be changed by one person's choice.
34. Teams are sometimes created or assigned to "examine" potential new procedures when administrators have already decided to implement them. Team members who voice concerns or play "devil's advocate" are considered "negative."
35. As a substitute, I have not actively been a member of a specific team.

Technology

36. I welcome using new technologies in the learning process, but sometimes the technology changes so quickly I feel frustrated because I haven't really felt comfortable with the last one before a new one is put into place! That's the way things are today, though, I guess.
37. The new technologies WCPL embraces for the most part benefit our customers and further the accomplishment of our missions, and do not make employees better learners.

Vision

38. WCPL has a clear mission and vision, and it guides our work.
39. At times I do not feel a strong connection to the people I work with because they do not see me as a person who is struggling to give the library 100 percent and maintain other roles in life as well.
40. As a page, it is hard for me to comment on the "vision" of the library as it is not conveyed to me on a regular basis.

Working at WCPL

41. I like it here because I get to help the public, and it helps me to grow as an individual while expanding my knowledge.
42. WCPL is the best organization I have worked for; it is a caring environment and gives employees a chance to contribute and to grow.
43. I do enjoy working here, but I can't say that it is "exhilarating."
44. I can really only speak for my branch, but it is a great place to work. They encourage staff growth and want you to grow yourself as well as learn to be able to help the patrons. I need to spend time myself to be more aware of all the services we do offer!
45. Do I love what I do? Yes. Do I think that sometimes there is too much red tape and discussion? Yes. But I don't think WCPL is in any way unique in this. This is true of all employers/employment. There are rules and procedures I follow that frustrate me personally because I'm a kinesthetic/hands-on learner with poor auditory skills. But WCPL offers me the incentive to improve my learning and communicating styles.

Appendix E

Terms Used to Describe Work at WCPL, Organized Alphabetically

Term	Occurrence
Appreciated	2
Awesome	1
Camaraderie	1
Caretaking	1
Cautious	1
Challenging	21
Changeable	1
Comfortable	3
Comforting	1
Community service	1
Convenient	1
Cooperation	1
Cooperative	1
Creative	2
Customer oriented	1
Customer service	1
Customer service, good	1
Diverse	1
Driven	1

Term	Occurrence
Easy	2
Educational	6
Encouraging	2
Enjoyable	8
Enjoyment	1
Enlightening	1
Ever-evolving	1
Evolving	2
Exciting	2
Exhilarating	3
Eye-opening	1
Family	1
Fantastic	1
Friendliness	1
Friendly	1
Frustrating	4
Fulfilling	10
Fun	21
Fun, tons of	1
Good work environment	1
Grateful	1

Term	Occurrence
Great co-workers	1
Greatest working experience	1
Growing	1
Hard work	1
Helpful	1
Helpful to others	1
Indifferent	1
Informative	2
Innovative	2
Inspiring	3
Interesting	14
Interesting, always	1
Just a job	1
Learning	7
Learning opportunities	2
Long time friends	1
Lucky, I so.	1
Meaningful	1
Pleasant	3
Positive	3
Potential	1

Term	Occurrence
Problem solving	1
Productive	3
Professional standards	1
Purposeful	1
Relaxing	1
Rewarding	14
Safe	1
Satisfied	1
Satisfying	7
Serving	1
Stimulating	2
Supported	1
Supportive	3
Teamwork	3
Tiring	2
Unappreciated	1
Underpaid	2
Unique	1
Unpredictable	1
Unproductive	1
Unrestricted	1

Term	Occurrence
Useful	3
Valued	1
Want a raise	1
Wonderful	1
Worthwhile	1

Appendix F

Terms Used to Describe Work at WCPL, Organized by Job Title

Departmental Managers and Supervisors

1. Satisfying, challenging, family
2. Professional standards
3. Exciting, fulfilling, tiring
4. Challenging, rewarding, fulfilling
5. Inspiring, challenging, rewarding
6. Rewarding, cautious, (being of) service (to community)
7. Exhilarating, challenging, rewarding
8. Fulfilling, fun, worthwhile
9. Unrestricted, changeable, supported
10. Rewarding, frustrating, educational
11. Enjoyable, challenging, interesting
12. Fun, challenging, always interesting
13. Fun, exhilarating, satisfying
14. Fun, educational, productive
15. Evolving, stimulating caretaking
16. Greatest working experience
17. Learning, growing, serving
18. Satisfying, enjoyable, challenging

Library Associates

19. Fun, useful, fulfilling

- 20. Challenging, rewarding, stimulating
- 21. Fun, interesting, unpredictable
- 22. Unique, challenging, diverse
- 23. Challenging, underpaid, cooperative
- 24. Rewarding, challenging, interesting
- 25. Enjoyable, fulfilling, encouraging
- 26. Challenging, fun, rewarding
- 27. Enjoyable, rewarding, challenging
- 28. Supportive, fulfilling, fun
- 29. I so lucky.
- 30. Tons of fun!!!

- 31. Creative, supportive, interesting
- 32. Learning, problem solving, creative
- 33. Fantastic, exhilarating, rewarding
- 34. Positive, purposeful, potential
- 35. Wonderful, valued, appreciated
- 36. Fun, educational, grateful

Circulation Clerks

- 37. Camaraderie, innovative, driven
- 38. Hard work, fun, learning
- 39. Great co-workers, teamwork, learning opportunities
- 40. Learning, fun, customer service
- 41. Great learning opportunity

- 42. Comfortable, satisfied, enjoyment
- 43. Educational, eye-opening, comforting
- 44. Challenging, satisfying, interesting
- 45. Positive, supportive, encouraging
- 46. Fun, fulfilling, rewarding
- 47. Enjoyable, frustrating, challenging

Pages

- 48. Comfortable, safe, productive
- 49. Helpful, inspiring, awesome
- 50. Useful, interesting, fun
- 51. Want a raise.
- 52. Exciting, interesting, useful
- 53. Good work environment
- 54. Helpful to others, fun, challenging
- 55. Interesting, informative, challenging
- 56. Enjoyable, pleasant, rewarding
- 57. Enjoyable, challenging, informative
- 58. Enjoyable, friendly, interesting
- 59. Cooperation, friendliness, teamwork
- 60. Teamwork, learning, pleasant
- 61. Interesting, tiring, meaningful
- 62. Fun, easy, rewarding
- 63. Fun, satisfying, educational

Undeclared or Other Non-Managers

- 64. Interesting, frustrating, indifferent
- 65. Pleasant, satisfying
- 66. Fun, challenging, learning
- 67. Positive, innovative, customer-oriented
- 68. Challenging, fun, comfortable
- 69. Challenging, satisfying, fulfilling
- 70. Convenient, interesting, ever-evolving
- 71. Inspiring, enlightening, fulfilling
- 72. Frustrating, underpaid, interesting
- 73. "Just a job," unproductive, unappreciated
- 74. Good customer service
- 75. Interesting, fun, long-time friends
- 76. Fun, easy, relaxing
- 77. Educational
- 78. Fun, fulfilling, rewarding