



Organizational Culture and Learning: Fostering Learning in Modern Libraries

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Abstract

In the context of modern libraries, organizational culture and learning are increasingly recognized as key drivers of innovation, competitive advantage, and staff performance. This study explores the dynamic relationship between organizational culture and organizational learning within library settings. The study analyzed key studies across different geographical and institutional contexts such as academic and public libraries in Nigeria, China, Taiwan, Pakistan, Vietnamese, the U.S., and Sri Lanka. The paper highlights how cultural dimensions such as shared values, and leadership shape learning processes, knowledge management, and innovation. Findings reveal that collaborative and innovative cultures significantly enhance knowledge acquisition, application, and staff engagement, whereas hierarchical cultures often impede learning by resisting feedback and change. The study identifies leadership, psychological safety, and employee empowerment as key moderators in sustaining a learning-oriented culture. The paper concludes with practical implications for library management, emphasizing the need for cultures that promote openness and continuous learning to maintain institutional competitiveness. This research contributes to the broader discourse on organizational development by demonstrating that a strong learning culture is not just a facilitator but a necessity for long-term success in knowledge-driven environments.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Organizational Learning, Learning Outcome, Library, Librarians

INTRODUCTION

In today's economy, innovation, globalization, technological advancements, and increasing competition have significantly influenced the business environment. To sustain competitive advantage, organizations must develop core competencies, particularly in knowledge generation and dissemination (Zhenjing, Chupradit, Ku, Nassani, & Hafgar, 2022). Specifically, knowledge generation and dissemination are more critical than they have been in the past (Powell & Snellman, 2004; Wilson & Gattell, 2005).

Organizational culture is a powerful determinant of how librarians perceive their roles, collaborate, and perform. It provides a shared sense of meaning and guides behavior through common values, norms, and communication practices (Robbins & Judge, 2017). A positive culture that fosters openness, good communication, and comfort within the library environment directly influences employee engagement and productivity (Abdulrahman, et al. 2022). Similarly, an innovation-rooted culture enhances team success and overall organizational adaptability (Joseph & Kibera, 2019).

Organizational learning, on the other hand, refers to the processes through which libraries acquire, disseminate, and apply knowledge for improvement and innovation. It involves harnessing both internal and external sources of knowledge to enhance decision-making and strategic outcomes (Yang, Dong, Guo, & Peng, 2025). A strong learning orientation, particularly when combined with a growth mindset, the belief that capabilities can improve through effort and experience, drives both continuous improvement and innovation (Yeager & Dweck, 2020).

Organizational culture and organizational learning are a set of organizational values, conventions, processes, and practices that encourage individuals and the organization as a whole to increase knowledge, competence, and performance. To become a learning organization is to accept a set of attitudes, values, and practices that support the process of continuous learning within the organization. It influences library staff engagement, performance, and innovation (Cabrera & Estacio, 2022). The goal of organizational culture and organizational learning is an exchange

of valuable knowledge leading to innovation, improved performance, and sustained competitiveness (Lopez, Peon & Ordas, 2005). Organizational culture and organizational learning have been characterized as one in which all library staff value learning and strive for high performance through the application of learning to progressive, innovative work (Tracey, Tannenbaum & Kavanagh, 1995; Rosow & Zager, 1988). Bates and Khasawneh (2005) observe that much of the learning organization literature emphasizes a shared understanding among members regarding the value of learning, particularly its application toward creative solutions that support organizational goals. They highlight the importance of a culture that “supports the acquisition of information, the distribution and sharing of learning, and provides rewards and recognition for learning and its application,” noting that such a culture is critical for building successful learning organizations. Organizational culture is learned by individuals and groups as they encounter, work through, and resolve problems and challenges. It is a consequence of commonly accepted assumptions and produces ‘automatic patterns of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving’ that ‘provide meaning, stability, and comfort’ (Schein, 1990). The learning organization emphasizes the role of organizational culture to the extent that it indicates that a consensus has developed among organization members about the value of learning and the use of new learning for creative purposes in the pursuit of organizational goals and objectives. In discussing organizational learning, Watkins and Marsick (1993), Marquardt (1996), and others see a culture that supports the acquisition of information, the distribution and sharing of learning, and provides rewards and recognition for learning and its application as critical for successful learning organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Organizational Culture

The concept of culture is widely credited to the British anthropologist Edward Tyler with the first 1871 “modern” definition of culture: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

Culture relates to the informal aspects of organizations rather than their official elements. They focus on the values, beliefs, and norms of individuals in the library and how these individual perceptions coalesce into shared meanings. Culture is manifested by symbols and rituals rather than through the formal structure of the library (Bush, 2003). Beliefs, values, and ideology are at the heart of libraries. Individuals hold certain ideas and value preferences which influence how they behave and how they view the behaviour of other members. These norms become shared traditions that are communicated within the group and are reinforced by symbols and ritual. In Schein (2004), organizational culture is defined as a “dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behaviour, and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior”. To this fact, culture is vital to the wellbeing and success of an library, it reduces uncertainty by creating a common language for interpreting events and issues; it provides a sense of order so that all team members in the library know what is expected; it creates a sense of continuity; it provides a common identity and unity of commitment, a sense of belonging; it offers a vision of the future around which a company can rely on. It is, in short, an asset that can and should be managed in support of organizational goals.

Concepts of Organizational Learning

Organizational learning gained prominence in the nineteen fifties when there was an ongoing debate between behaviourists and economists. Learning is argued by industrial economists to affect productivity (Arrow, 1962) and industrial structures (Dosi, 1988). Organizational learning emerged in the 1950s in reaction to the unrealistic claims of neoclassical microeconomists, and although a steady stream of research has been produced in the area, research on organizational learning has intensified considerably since the late 1980s. The concepts of organizational learning and learning organization did not emerge until the 1980s, but their scientific background and principles can be traced back to many perspectives of management (Garratt, 1999). A learning organization is founded on the learning process of individuals in the organization. It is essential to understand the individual learning process to

facilitate understanding of organizational learning. However, individual learning does not necessarily lead to organizational learning (Ikehara, 1999). The ability of a workforce in an organization to learn faster than those in other organizations constitutes the only sustainable competitive advantage at the disposal of a learning organization (De Geus, 1998). It is the task of the learning organization to integrate individual learning into organizational learning. Organizational learning should be where the individuals consciously interact with others through the process of education and because of experience (Kolb, 1984; Honey & Mumford, 1992). Therefore, a learning organization should primarily focus on valuing, managing, and enhancing the individual development of its employees (Scarbrough, Swan & Preston, 1998).

The most widely recognized approaches to individual learning are Behavioural Theory, Cognitive Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Gestalt Theory.

Empirical Studies

Recent studies highlight the critical role of organizational learning in enhancing service innovation within public libraries. Zhou, Duan, Qiu, & Yang (2024) found that knowledge application and acquisition significantly improve service innovation, whereas knowledge sharing has a marginal effect. Interestingly, their study revealed that employee psychological empowerment negatively moderates the relationship between knowledge sharing and innovation, though it does not significantly influence knowledge application and acquisition.

Further reinforcing the importance of knowledge practices, Ugwu and Ejikeme (2023) demonstrated that organizational culture and knowledge management substantially influence librarians' job performance. Their findings suggest that effective knowledge management strategies, when supported by a strong organizational culture, can lead to improved performance outcomes. Notably, organizational culture not only directly enhances job performance but also amplifies the effectiveness of knowledge management initiatives.

Expanding on the role of organizational culture in library management, Bakrin and Tunmibi (2025) examined academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria

and identified three key factors shaping operational efficiency: staff engagement, alignment of cultural values and practices, and adaptability to innovation. These elements foster a dynamic and cohesive environment, facilitating effective institutional repository management. Similarly, [Asante, Baayel & Budu \(2020\)](#) emphasized the significance of staff engagement in driving quality performance in Ghanaian academic libraries. Their study also underscored the contributions of training and development, managerial commitment, and effective communication in optimizing operational efficiency and service delivery.

[Azadi, Farsani, Rizi & Aroufzad \(2013\)](#) carried out research on the Relationship between organizational culture and organizational learning among employees in physical education organizations in Iran. The result shows that the significant and positive correlations between overall organizational culture with overall organizational learning and its sub-scales. Also, the positive correlations between organizational culture sub-scales and overall organizational learning and its sub-scales were significant. Thus, the strength of the correlations obtained in the present research suggests that organizational learning and its sub-scales have a significant role in organizational culture.

Furthermore, [Joseph & Dai \(2009\)](#) on the influence of organizational culture on organizational learning, worker involvement and worker productivity in Ivory Coast reveals the research model of this study and the findings of the regression analysis which confirm that different hypotheses were verified as correlations exist amid organizational culture and organizational learning (+0.255); worker involvement (+0.497); and finally, worker productivity (+2.068). Hence, it suggests that corporate culture is a driver for organizations in Ivory Coast to make organizational learning effective for employees to be competitive to boost organizational performance. An organization that does not encourage organizational learning cannot be intelligent, as intelligent organizations are those that know that “knowledge is power”. For employees (managerial workers and non-managerial workers) to be motivated and productive for the organizations that they work for in Ivory Coast, those organizations need to have a good corporate culture that gives energy to the

system as a good working environment is a source of employee motivation that can move the organizations in Ivory Coast from mediocrity to excellence.

Theoretical Framework

Behavioural Theory

The Behavioural Theory is an overall guideline to understand principles by which human behaviour is learned and maintained. Four main sub-theories contribute to the whole domain of Behaviourism: Pavlov’s classical conditioning, Skinner’s operant conditioning, Wolpe’s reciprocal inhibition, and Eysenck’s incubation theory.

The Classical Conditioning Theory ([Pavlov, 1927](#)) attributes learning to the association or connection between stimulus and response, i.e., learning happens when a formerly neutral stimulus is paired with an unconditioned stimulus becomes a conditioned stimulus that elicits a conditioned response. Classical conditioning represents reflexive behaviour, whose strength and frequency are subject to the frequency of the reinforcer that precedes the behaviour, and only accounts for a small part of total human learning.

The Operant Conditioning Theory persists that “behaviour is shaped and maintained by its consequences” ([Skinner, 1971](#)). Unlike the classical conditioning theory, which reinforces the stimulus, operant conditioning behaviourism believes that the contingency works upon a response, and behaviour operates on the environment to generate consequences. Thus, the consequences define the properties concerning which responses are viewed as similar.

The Reciprocal Inhibition Theory ([Wolpe, 1958](#)) contributes to both the learning and unlearning process. Two elements are involved in the inhibition of a response during extinction: reactive inhibition, which describes an inhibitory state dissipating with time, and negative conditioning, which leads to a permanent decrease in response probability. Reciprocal inhibition involves eliciting a competing response to bring about a decrease in the strength of a simultaneous response. In other words, old habits are often eliminated by allowing new habits to develop in the same situation. In the organizational context, unlearning occurs when the organization redefines old categories, develops

new concepts and viewpoints, and even changes standards of judgment (Schein, 1999).

The Incubation Theory (Eysenck, 1976) observes that behaviour followed by negative consequences is not eliminated, which cannot be explained by the Operant Conditioning Theory. In many cases, extinction does not fail to occur. In addition, there is an incremental enhancement effect, so the unreinforced conditioned stimulus may produce increases in anxiety (conditioned response) with each presentation of the conditioned stimulus. The Incubation Theory tentatively proposes four elements in the effect of learning: innate, preparedness, modelling, and classical conditioning. The main unconditioned stimulus generating fear responses is not physical constraint, but frustration or ‘frustrative non-reward’ (Eysenck, 1976).

In all, the Behavioural Theory believes that “learning is the process by which an activity originates or is changed through reacting to an encountered situation, provided that the characteristics of the change in activity cannot be explained based on native response tendencies, maturation, and temporary states of the organism (e.g. fatigue, drugs, etc.) (Hilgard & Bower, 1966). Therefore, learning involves both acquisition of and, in varying degrees, the retention of behaviours” (Palmer & Nelson-Jones, 1996).

Cognitive Theory

The Cognitive Theory recognizes learning through association between the environmental cues and the expectancy (stimulus) (Edward Tolman, quoted in Luthans, 1998). Learning occurs when certain cognitive cues associated with the choice point may eventually lead to a goal or a reward. This is argued to have a great impact on the early human relations movement. Programs were designed to strengthen the relationship between cognitive cues, such as supervisory, organizational, and job procedures, and worker expectations, such as incentive payment for good performance. Workers would learn to be more productive by building an association between taking orders or following directions and expectations of monetary reward for their effort (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory integrates both social and cognitive processes to understand motivation,

emotions, and action. A typical social cognitive model is stimulus, the organism’s mediating cognitive processes response (Bandura, 1986). It recognizes that humans possess five basic cognitive capabilities: symbolizing capability, transforming experiences into symbols and process the symbols; forethought capability, anticipating consequences of their behaviour; vicarious capability observing other people’s behaviour and consequences; self-regulatory, self-evaluating their behaviour and self-consciousness, analysing experiences and evaluating the adequacy of their thought processes. The main learning modes that the Social Cognitive Theory purports are observational learning to learn from models, enactive learning to learn from experiences, and self-efficacy, self-perceptions of own performance. It emphasises the interactive and reciprocal nature of cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants.

Gestalt Theory

The basis of Gestalt theory is “that human nature is organized into patterns or wholes that it is experienced by the individual in these terms, and that it can only be understood as a function of the patterns of wholes of which it is made” (Perl, Hefferline & Goodman, 1973). From the Gestalt viewpoint, humans do not perceive things in isolation, but organize them through their perceptual processes into meaningful wholes, i.e. “people configure the dominant need at a particular moment and attempts to meet this need by contacting the environment with some sensory motor behaviour” (Ikebara, 1999), through the interplay between ‘figure’, the focus of interest, and ‘background’, the setting or context.

The interaction is dynamic because the same background interplaying with differing interests and shifts of attention may lead to different figures, and a given figure may become a context, rather than remaining as a focus, when some details of its own become a figure (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951).

The Gestalt Theory persists that the mind and body are a united whole of the human organism, and mental and physical activity are inseparable. Meanwhile, an individual and the environment are interrelated and co-exist as a whole. Learning happens on the ‘whole’ person level, and is an interaction between mind and body, between

individual and environment, rather than merely on the cognitive level, the ‘mental act’ (Ikehara, 1999). “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Clarkson, 1995; Clarkson & Mackewn, 1993). It includes not only the cognitive level, but also emotional, physical, and spiritual levels (Ikehara, 1999).

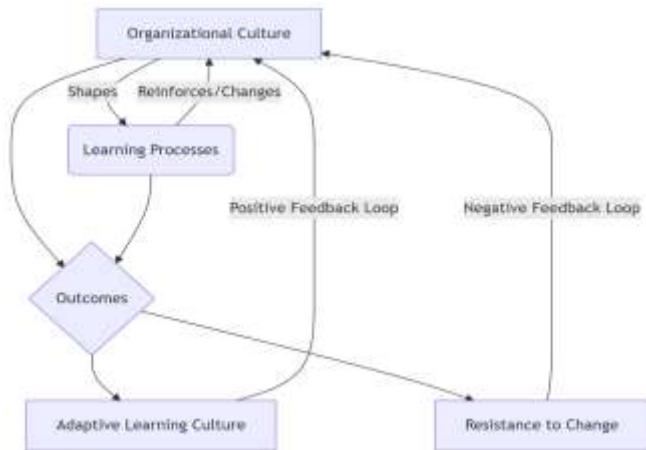


Figure 1: Conceptual framework on organizational culture and learning processes.

Source: Author’s construct, 2025

The framework presents a dynamic systems view of how organizational culture and learning processes interact through reinforcing feedback mechanisms to produce either adaptive or resistant organizational outcomes. The model integrates three core components that operate in continuous interdependence:

Organizational Culture as the Foundation

The system begins with organizational culture, the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that shape member behaviour (Schein, 2010). This culture fundamentally determines the organization's learning orientation by: Defining what knowledge is valued/ignored (Argyris & Schön, 1978); Establishing norms for information sharing and experimentation (Edmondson, 2018); and Setting boundaries for acceptable challenges to the status quo (Kotter, 1996).

Learning Processes as the Mediating Mechanism

Culture enables specific types of learning processes that either reinforce or challenge existing cultural norms: Single-loop learning (error correction)

tends to preserve culture; Double-loop learning (assumption questioning)

Feedback Loops as Amplifiers

These learning processes create self-reinforcing cycles: Positive feedback loops occur when learning successes strengthen cultural norms (e.g., innovation rewards leading to more innovation attempts). Negative feedback loops emerge when learning challenges trigger cultural antibodies (e.g., change efforts activating resistance behaviours).

The system produces two emergent outcomes based on loop dominance:

1. Adaptive Learning Culture (Virtuous Cycle)

- Characteristics: Psychological safety, learning orientation, change agility
- Drivers: The Interrelationship between cultural values and learning behaviours
- Example: Tech companies institutionalizing "fail fast" mentalities

2. Resistance to Change (Vicious Cycle)

- Characteristics: Defensive routines, competency traps, change fatigue
- Drivers: Cultural rigidities that suppress learning
- Example: Traditional firms struggling with digital transformation

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the relationship between organizational culture and organizational learning in libraries. The research synthesizes existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how organizational culture influences learning processes and outcomes in libraries. 10 key studies (2012–2025) were purposively conducted in countries that have carried out extensive research focusing on cultural dimensions and learning outcomes. The countries were Taiwan, Pakistan, Croatian, Vietnamese, Nigeria, China, Sri Lanka and the US. Thematic content analysis was applied to extract recurring OC dimensions and OL focus areas. However, cross-case synthesis was used to compare patterns across cases, highlighting similarities, differences, and contextual findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Key Studies on the Interrelationship between Organizational Culture and Organizational Learning in University and Public Libraries.

S/N	Author(s) / Year	Library (s)	Organizational Culture (OC) Dimension	Organizational Learning (OL) Focus	Key Findings / Contribution
1	Yu & Chen (2012)	Taiwan University Libraries	Continuous learning, inquiry, and leadership	DLOQ model – knowledge performance	Strong OL culture leads to improved knowledge performance; strategic leadership is crucial.
2	Khan & Ahmed (2020)	Pakistan University Libraries	Shared values, teamwork	Lifelong learning	OC positively correlates with staff's willingness to engage in ongoing learning.
3	Zhou Duan, Qiu, & Yang (2024)	Chinese Public Libraries	Structural openness, innovation orientation	Knowledge acquisition, sharing, and application	Knowledge acquisition and application support innovation; weak sharing due to cultural gaps.
4	De Silva & Weerasinghe (2025)	Sri Lankan University Libraries	Clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, market	Employee engagement & learning readiness	Clan and adhocracy cultures support learning and engagement more than hierarchical ones.
5	Bakrin & Tunmibi (2025)	Nigerian University Libraries	Involvement, adaptability, and mission clarity	Institutional repository management (OL tool)	Culture traits significantly support OL tools like repositories; adaptability is key.
6	Feldvari et al. (2024)	Croatian Public Library	Sociability, solidarity	Knowledge management practices	Trust and interpersonal culture enable better knowledge exchange and learning.
7	Fowler (2019)	U.S. University Library	Shared vision, systems thinking	Learning organization practices	OL tools (team learning, systems thinking) require a culturally supportive foundation.
8	Igbinovia & Popoola (2016)	Nigerian Academic Libraries	Value orientation, emotional intelligence	Job performance via OL behaviours	OC and emotional intelligence improve performance through an enhanced learning culture.
9	Chen & Lin (2017)	Taiwan Academic Libraries	Evaluative openness, hierarchical culture	Learning from external reviews	Hierarchical cultures resist learning; culture must support feedback integration.
10	Tran (2023)	Vietnamese Libraries	Bureaucratic vs empowering culture	Citizenship and reflective learning	Empowering cultures foster OL behaviours; bureaucracy discourages learning beyond roles.

Source: Author's construct, 2025

Discussion of Findings

The table on comparative analysis of key studies on the interrelationship between organizational culture and organizational learning in university and public libraries shows the analysis of ten studies conducted between 2012 and 2025 on how different types of culture support or hinder learning in modern libraries:

Yu & Chen (2012) examined university libraries in Taiwan using the Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ). They found

that a culture emphasizing continuous learning, inquiry, and strategic leadership led to enhanced knowledge performance, and leadership emerged as a critical driver of OL. Khan & Ahmed (2020) conducted research in Pakistan's university libraries, emphasizing the importance of shared values and teamwork. Their study demonstrated a strong positive correlation between these cultural traits and lifelong learning behaviors among library staff. Zhou, Duan, Qiu, & Yang (2024) investigated public libraries in China, focusing on knowledge acquisition, sharing, and application. While knowledge acquisition and application were strong,

knowledge sharing was weak, highlighting how cultural barriers, such as a lack of openness or collaboration, can limit OL.

De Silva & Weerasinghe (2025) used the Competing Values Framework to study Sri Lankan academic libraries. Their findings suggested that clan and adhocracy cultures, which emphasize flexibility and collaboration, were more conducive to learning and engagement than hierarchical or market cultures. Bakrin & Tunmibi (2025) explored the influence of culture on institutional repository (IR) management in Nigerian university libraries. Cultures characterized by adaptability, involvement, and mission clarity significantly enhanced the management and utilization of IRs as learning tools. Feldvari et al. (2024) studied a Croatian public library, focusing on sociability and solidarity as cultural traits. A culture rooted in trust and interpersonal relationships enabled more effective knowledge management practices and informal learning. Fowler (2019) analyzed a U.S. university library, identifying shared vision and systems thinking as critical cultural factors in sustaining learning organization practices. The study emphasized that OL initiatives require a culturally supportive foundation to be effective. Igbinoia & Popoola (2016) investigated Nigerian academic libraries and found that value orientation and emotional intelligence within the organizational culture were significant predictors of job performance, primarily due to their positive influence on learning behaviors.

Chen & Lin (2017) focused on Taiwan's academic libraries and the ability to learn from external evaluations. They found that hierarchical cultures often resisted incorporating feedback, whereas learning-oriented cultures were more likely to engage in reflective improvement. Tran (2023) studied Vietnamese libraries, comparing bureaucratic cultures with empowering ones. The study reflects the empowering cultures that promoted reflective learning and organizational citizenship behavior, while bureaucratic structures suppressed proactive learning engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the critical relationship between organizational culture and organizational learning, demonstrating how these interconnected elements shape performance and innovation,

particularly in library environments. The findings underscore that organizational culture is not merely a passive backdrop but an active force that either enables or constrains learning processes. Libraries with collaborative, innovative, and learning-oriented cultures exhibit stronger knowledge acquisition, dissemination, and application, leading to improved service innovation and staff performance. Conversely, rigid hierarchical cultures often hinder learning by discouraging open communication, experimentation, and adaptive change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To build and sustain a learning-improved culture, librarians and management should:

1. Promote open communication, collaboration, and encourage cross-departmental knowledge exchange through forums, mentorship, and digital platforms.
2. Implement reward learning and recognition systems for staff who contribute to organizational learning, whether through training, process improvements, or creative solutions.
3. Train leaders to invest in leadership development model learning behaviors, facilitate reflective discussions, and create an environment where feedback is constructive and actionable.
4. Regularly align culture with strategic goals, assess whether cultural norms support or hinder learning objectives, and adjust policies and practices accordingly.

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