Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

The Impact of Social Responsibility and Organizational Accountability on the Performance of Public Librarians in Iran

Soltani-Nejad, N., Jahanshahi, M., Karim Saberi, M., Ansari, N., & Zarei-Maram, N. (2022). The relationship between social responsibility and public libraries accountability: The mediating role of professional ethics and conscientiousness. Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 54(2), 306–324. https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006211014260

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Article abstract

Objective – To determine how librarians' perceptions of public libraries' social responsibility and accountability within society affect their professional ethics and conscientiousness.

Design – Quantitative, survey questionnaire.

Setting – Public libraries in Iran.

Subjects – Survey respondents (N=362) were public librarians* (see note below).

Methods – The authors created a theoretical model based on six separate hypotheses, describing the relationship between the following variables: corporate social responsibility, organizational accountability, professional ethics, and conscientiousness. A questionnaire was distributed to the participants. SPSS 21.0 was used for the analysis of demographic data and SMART PLS 3.0 was used to assess the theoretical model.

Main Results – The results show a significant, positive, and direct relationship between the variables being studied (corporate social responsibility, organizational accountability, professional ethics, and conscientiousness), therefore confirming the relevance of the authors' theoretical model.

Conclusion – The results of this study demonstrate the importance of promoting the social responsibility and organizational accountability efforts of public libraries. The data suggest that doing so will strengthen the positive perception of the library amongst employees, which will in turn have a positive effect on their professional ethics and conscientiousness. The authors suggest that library managers need to create a culture of accountability and ethics within libraries. They can do so by incorporating ethics and social responsibility in decision-making and policies. Additionally, the authors propose that professional ethics training in library curricula and continuing education would provide librarians with the knowledge necessary when encountering ethical dilemmas on the job.

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A Review of:

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Abstract

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Commentary

There is a plethora of literature discussing the four main variables considered in this study: corporate social responsibility, organizational accountability, professional ethics, and conscientiousness. Much of the literature comes from business and management, but these concepts are well established within the library and information science (LIS) literature as well (Esdaile, 1933). In fact, social responsibility and professional ethics are described as core tenets of librarianship by professional associations such as the American Library Association and the International Federation of Library Associations (ALA Council, 2019; Garcia-Febo et al., 2012). This study is the first to consider the relationships between all four variables together.

This study was appraised using the evidence based librarianship critical appraisal checklist developed by Glynn (2006). Key details regarding the population and aspects of the data collection are missing. For example, it is unclear how the participants were selected, how the questionnaire was distributed and in what format and language, what the response rate was, and whether informed consent was received from participants.

The authors adopted four separate questionnaires from previously published literature and combined them to create the survey tool used in this study. The authors state that they chose to modify questions from previously published research in order to ensure the validity of the survey tool. These questionnaires were not from LIS literature and, although an attempt was made to modify the questions to fit the content of this research, several of the questions do not lend themselves to the context of public libraries.

The strength of this study is the rigorous data analysis. The authors used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test their theoretical model. They provide very detailed statistical analysis of the relationship between the four main variables.

The authors are cognizant of the limitations of the study, notably how cultural and societal norms in Iran likely shape respondents' perceptions of social responsibility and accountability. Areas of further research proposed include conducting a similar study in other parts of the world or in other types of libraries (e.g., academic or special libraries), and investigating the relationship between the variables using a qualitative methodology.

Public libraries play an important role within democratic societies. Results from this study are particularly important for library managers and administrators to consider. Managers need to find meaningful ways to strengthen the positive perception of the library by advancing the library's

commitment to social responsibility and improving organizational accountability. Doing so will enhance librarians' commitment to their work and improve their job performance and inner satisfaction, which will in turn benefit the communities they serve.

*Note: The authors refer to the participants as "librarians," "library employees," and "library staff" at various points in the study. According to the demographic breakdown, less than 40% of respondents have a master's degree or higher. I do not know what the requirements are to be a librarian in Iran, but I have also used the term "librarian" in this *Evidence Summary* for the sake of consistency.

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