Designing the Information Commons: A Library Perspective on Determinants of Intra-Organizational Structures

The library administration literature regarding the management of merged library and computing center services, while extensive, is largely composed of “surveys of practice, speculation about practice, and recommendations regarding suitable organizational and management strategies” (Lynch, 1990, p. 218). To the library administrator designing or re-designing library units, the value of this material lies in its identification of issues; unfortunately, its lack of methodological rigor limits its generalizability and thus its prescriptive value. Managers who seek more theoretical materials for insight will find it scarce and difficult to locate (Howard, 1984; Lynch, 1990, p. 218; McClure & Samuels, 1982, p. 21). This presentation summarizes both the theoretical and empirical materials in a manner which typifies how librarians have conceived of organizational design.

To guide this review, this paper builds upon the domain of organizational theory, specifically contingency theory. The field from which this material will be drawn is library and information sciences. The research presented shares the following characteristics: (1) an emphasis on the organization as the unit of analyses; (2) similar conceptualization of structure; (3) publication in the library literature. The paper breaks the resulting materials into three overlapping sections characterized by their emphasis on size, technology, or power as determinants of unit level structures. It should be noted this organization is an artificial distinction and should not mask the fact that these theories share many common theoretical assumptions both amongst themselves and with other organizational theories. Therefore, while this paper will focus on the ideas of size, technology, and power, additional theoretical perspectives will be mentioned in order to both critique and suggest additional areas of research.

