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Public Librarians' Self Perceptions As Innovators: A US-Based Case Study

Abstract

Public libraries rely on user engagement and must continuously adapt and evolve to meet the needs of users. Research has been conducted on innovation in public libraries; however, studies have not been conducted on how public librarians see themselves in relation to innovative activities. Research on the latter is integral to a more complete understanding of drivers and promoters of innovation within public libraries and any barriers against it.

This case study has taken an inductive approach to investigating public librarians' self-perceptions of their professional identities as innovators by aiming to: understand whether, and how, public librarians perceive themselves as innovators; discover which agents are innovating within public libraries; investigate how innovation happens in a public library environment; and look into how organisational culture impacts innovation in public libraries.. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to conduct the research, with participants invited to engage with a questionnaire and then in semi-structured interviews. The public library system in Idaho, USA has been used as a case study for conducting this research project and research participants therefore have been sourced from Idaho public libraries.

The research found that public librarians innovate regularly within their professional roles also in collaboration with the communities they serve. Degrees and level of innovation depend on a number of influencing factors including job autonomy, organisational culture, and professional priorities.

Introduction

Innovation has become a key strategic priority in many industries and organisations, including the public library sector (Molaro and White 2015). As the needs of communities have changed over time, so have public libraries, in developing new ways of serving and engaging community members.

Public libraries are funded in order to develop and deliver services to their user communities. User engagement is important, and delivering what communities most want and need from their library is vital to libraries' survival. "Innovation is necessary to reimagine libraries' relationships with communities and achieve library goals of being a valued and integral part of users' daily lives" (Nicholson 2019, 332). Thus, successful innovation within libraries is crucial to their survival, and understanding why or why not innovation occurs, as well as how, is paramount.

Defining innovation is challenging across sectors, including librarianship. Molaro and White (2015, xvi) clarify that "...innovation doesn't need to be a big, shiny thing but can also include small tweaks and alterations to existing services, tools, and spaces". Although innovation occurs in the creation of new services and offerings, and changes to existing ones, some librarians may not be aware that their day-to-day responsibilities and practices are innovative. In other words, librarians may be innovating without realising it.

Various factors impact whether, and how, public librarians innovate at work. External factors such as technology developments, evolving user and community needs, and economic and political climates can drive innovation in public librarianship (Williams and Saunders 2020). Internal factors, such as an organisation's culture, priorities, and support provided to staff, can also impact a library's ability to innovate (Molaro and White 2015; Stephens and Russell 2004). All of these factors, therefore, bear an impact on a library's likelihood of maintaining relevance and securing funding.

This study investigates the extent to which public librarians see themselves as innovators, with the state of Idaho in the USA as its research collection area. Research objectives include: understanding whether, and how, public librarians perceive themselves as innovators; discovering which staff members are innovating within public libraries; investigating how innovation happens in a public library environment; and looking into how organisational culture impacts innovation in public libraries. From its findings, readers may recognise such factors in their own frequented libraries and gain an improved understanding of how to promote effective innovation and support ongoing survival.

Literature Review

This review is limited to literature which was published in English. Whilst the review does include public librarianship innovation practices in countries outside of the United Kingdom and the USA, the majority of literature sources consulted and referenced were published within these two countries.

Defining innovation

Definitions of innovation vary widely across sectors, organisations, and individuals (Vaughan 2013). This is also the case within librarianship, and researchers and authors collectively agree that there is no single agreed definition within the sector (Knab 2010, as cited in Potnis et al. 2020). Various terms are often used in place of, or in combination with, ‘innovate’ or ‘innovation’ within the literature. Such terms include: intrapreneur, entrepreneur, change, development, creativity, social innovation, community empowerment practices, etc.

Innovation in public librarianship manifests in a variety of ways. It often occurs in technology, services, support, expertise, and access to information to better serve library users (Gortham and Bertot 2018). Public librarians also innovate service models (Alvarez 2016; Dehpadekani and Pourhamidi 2011), program and service developments (Ralli and Payne 2016), diversity and inclusion (Pugh and Doyle 2019), seed libraries (Peekhaus 2018), library space designs (Lee and Park 2018), and more. ‘Behind the scenes’ innovation occurs away from the eyes of users whilst impacting their library experiences. Such innovations include reorganising staffing models, improving staff intranets and other ‘back-end technologies’ (Rubin, Gavin, and Kamal 2011, 402), reinventing library budgets and funding (Velasquez 2015), and changes in management styles and techniques (Srirahayu, Harisanty, and Anugrah 2023).

Factors Affecting and Influencing Innovation

Many factors influence innovation in public librarianship. Indeed, “...innovative activity does not occur within a vacuum” (Skinner 2017, 140). Digital literacy, early literacy, cultural and ethnic diversification within communities, accessibility needs, technological developments, educational needs, public health concerns, social inequity, legal and information needs of non-native speakers and immigrants, and more are all community factors driving innovation in public libraries (Williams and Saunders 2020).

Increasingly, many libraries are required to justify their existence and secure future funding by demonstrating their value, making it strategically necessary for libraries to innovate to remain relevant (Chad and Miller 2005; Evjen 2015). Indeed, “...innovations can make public libraries more competitive with benefits including but not limited to attracting and retaining patrons, seeking more funding, and enhancing the perceived image of libraries” (Knab 2010, as cited in Potnis et al. 2020).

Organisational culture plays an important role in innovation, often with the power to enable innovative activities or serve as a barrier against them. Factors like job autonomy (Patillo, Moran, and Morgan 2009), professional skill requirements (Boffano 2019) workplace conditions (Castiglione 2008), and organisational priorities (Stephens and Russell 2004) can affect public librarians’ ability and motivation to innovate. Some authors claim that management is responsible for creating a workplace culture that facilitates employees’ intrinsic motivations for innovation (Castiglione 2008).

Long-established organisational cultures such as those in many public libraries tend to prioritise stability and certainty over disturbance or risk. Deis (2004, 23) finds, “Mature or aging organizations generally have a much more difficult time taking risks, experimenting, and creating innovation” due to fears of potential risks and loss related to innovation, engendered by what she terms ‘deep cultures’ which have been built up over time. Ole Pors (2008) also finds that the ‘cultural orientation’ of public libraries bears a significant impact on the successful or unsuccessful adoption of staffing innovations.

Part of creating an innovation-enabling workplace culture includes setting clear expectations of employees. Many studies examine what is included in professional job descriptions as a way of gaining a clear, formalised picture of what is expected and needed from public librarians today (Williams and Saunders 2020). A study on librarians who had been recognised as Movers & Shakers by the Library Journal found that supportive colleagues; adequate time for thinking, exploring innovative services, and creative problem-solving; leadership which encourages risk-taking; and adequate resources for professional development were top factors that Movers & Shakers said they needed from their organisations in order to facilitate innovation (Hill and Farkas 2008). Research studies are also discovering links between play within organisational cultures and increases in innovative activities (Kurt 2010).

Some studies also establish that personality characteristics and mindsets impact a person’s likelihood of innovating (Skinner 2017). It is often stated that those who innovate must be willing to “think outside the box” and take calculated risks, and many librarians encourage aspiring innovators to embrace an open mind-set and take creative,

analytical approaches to current and anticipated issues (Anthony 2014; EIFL, n.d.). One study conducted on the personality traits of librarians found that librarians score higher than average on levels of openness to change, a necessity for innovation, but lower than average on dominance, which can inhibit leadership, a key skill for innovation (Williamson and Lounsbury 2016). Many claim that any professional can become an innovator by cultivating skills which will support innovative thinking and action (Molaro and White 2015; Strahl and Christianson 2015).

Innovation trends

Public libraries are adept at sharing knowledge and practices (Stephens and Russell 2004), and innovations adopted in one public library are often likely to be found later on in other public libraries. Four prevalent innovation trends emerged in the literature review: digital, social, circulation, and neurodiversity-oriented innovations.

Innovation Trend	Description
Digital	Supporting digital literacy and technological skill-building as well as migrating library offerings to virtual platforms (Rabina and Walczyk 2007). The need to digitally upskill and innovate also often applies to the public libraries and library staff themselves.
Social	Social innovation involves creating solutions to social problems and aims to encourage greater cohesion, safety, security, and social equity in communities (de Moor and van dem Assem 2013; Kosmicki 2019). Social innovations can include toolkits to alleviate poverty and

	grow economic security, public health programs to support healthy communities, and inviting library patrons to determine how library spaces will be used (Gorham and Bertot 2018; Johnston et al. 2021; Potnis and Gala 2022).
Circulation	Innovations can include assistive technology (library drones and RFID robots), self-service options (self-check stations, 24-hour book kiosks), library apps for easy management of library accounts and e-resource access, and more (Olowofila 2019). Mobile delivery services can be innovated to support circulation and social inclusion objectives (Benstead, Spacey, and Goulding 2004; Jones 2020).
Neurodiversity-oriented	Some public libraries are innovating to improve the participation of neurodiverse individuals visiting their spaces, such as “Autism Friendly hours and sensory friendly services” in public libraries in Cork, Ireland (Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí, Cork City Council, n.d.; Kenna 2023). Sensory-friendly storytimes, sensory items and assistive tools for checkout, and innovations to physical spaces that better meet the needs of neurodiverse individuals can also serve as important ways for public libraries to become more inclusive spaces (Moynihan and Clark, 2022).

Summary

In summary, the current literature on innovation within public librarianship largely focuses on innovative practices and trends, characteristics and traits of innovative librarians, and conditions and factors which influence innovation in public libraries. Very little research exists on public librarians’ self-perceptions of

their professional identities and roles as innovators. In order to address this gap, an exploration into whether, how, and to what extent public librarians see themselves as innovators is required. Such an investigation would require finding out how public librarians view innovation in relation to their professional identities, role responsibilities, and day-to-day professional activities, and factors which support or limit their self-perceptions as innovators.

Method

This exploratory case study utilised an inductive, mixed methods approach using quantitative and qualitative research methods. A survey questionnaire was circulated to participants, after which select respondents were invited to participate in semi-structured, follow-up interviews. 21 library professionals responded to the questionnaire, with 12 of these participants taking part in follow up interviews. The survey questionnaire was used to capture data from the broadest initial sample possible. Follow-up interviews collected more detailed insights and allowed for thematic analysis of qualitative data, bringing a deeper level of understanding to the study. Purposive/convenience sampling was used for the survey questionnaire, and purposive sampling was used for the follow-up interviews. Eligible participants for this study were public librarians who are currently employed, or had previously been employed, as public librarians in Idaho, USA.

In Idaho, public libraries are largely funded at the local level. Public funding for library services can also be provided by state and federal governments, which can “...have important direct and indirect impacts on the local library’s services” (Idaho

Commission for Libraries, n.d.). Library boards are granted exclusive control over library expenditures under Idaho law. Staffing of public libraries in Idaho can range from 1 FTE employee (sometimes covering more than one role; for example, working as both Library Director and Children's librarian in a rural library location) to districts employing more than 100 FTE employees including multiple librarians at various branch locations (Idaho Commission for Libraries, 2023). Study participants represented a range of staffing and resource levels as well as populations served, from single staffed rural libraries to large library districts in high-population communities.

Results

Participant demographics

Participant demographics were as follows: 18 female; 1 male; 1 nonbinary/gender fluid; 1 preferring not to say. The majority of participants self-identified as white: 19 White; 1 White and Latina/Mexican; 1 preferring not to say. A range of ages were represented: 7 aged 31-40 (majority of respondents); 6 aged 41-55; 5 over the age of 56 years; 2 aged 18-24; 1 aged 25-30.

Participant librarian type

The greatest number of respondents self-identified as Children's librarians, closely followed by Information Services, then Teens and Adult/Reader Services librarians. Participants could also customise their librarian type; therefore, Administration and Technology Services, Branch, and Collection Development librarians were included as well as Directors who had formerly worked as public librarians.

Interview participants

12 participants were interviewed for the study: 10 females, 1 male, and 1 participant who did not self-identify. 2 participants were aged 18-24, 5 participants were aged 31-40, 3 participants were aged 41-55, and 2 participants were 56+ years of age. 10 participants self-identified as White, 1 participant self-identified as White and Latina/Mexican, and 1 participant did not self-identify. See table 1 for list of questionnaire and interview participants.

table 1

Terms and definitions

This study adopted the definition of innovation as “...the process of generating and implementing new ideas and changes, as well as the application of existing methods, resources and technology in new and different ways” (Nicholson 2019, 331).

Within interviews, participants indicated or discussed terms they used to view, label, or describe their professional identities within the context of the study. Survey participants were invited to select terms which applied to their professional identity in the context of the case study. 9 participants (42.9% of respondents) included the term ‘Innovator.’ The majority (66.7%) of participants identified themselves as ‘Changemaker.’ This term was followed closely by ‘Go-getter’ with 61.9% of participants identifying themselves as such.

‘Service Developer,’ ‘Thought Leader,’ and ‘Creative Professional’ were commonly identified terms as well, and one participant utilised the custom field to include

‘Community Development Leader’. Some interviewees shared other terms which they felt best described their professional identity related to innovative activities or within the context of innovation at work. Included in these terms were: agitator, ‘thorn in the side’, idea person, and change agent.

Participants were also asked to share words or phrases which they would use to identify innovation within public libraries. The full list of words or phrases used to define innovation can be found in the following table.

table 2

Meeting community needs

Fulfilling community needs emerged as a key theme in how participants defined innovation within public libraries. Improvements like adjusting or tweaking current offerings, offering new services, or updating existing services or programmes to better meet community needs were frequently referenced. Participants utilised current awareness practices to meet present community needs and to anticipate future needs.

Adjustments to current offerings and library spaces to increase usability were also acknowledged as innovation. Participants gave examples of rearranging furniture, relocating circulation desks, changing book displays, updating floorplan layouts to mitigate safety issues, etc. as innovating to meet the needs of library users. Organising personal work schedules for greater efficiency, adjusting operational processes, and adapting service approaches amongst staff were all considered innovation and meeting community needs as well. Participant 19 shared, “A lot of people tie innovation to new ideas, something bright and shiny and on the surface, whereas innovation occurs

everywhere.”

Librarians' innovations

Every participant shared examples of ways in which they innovate as public librarians. Participant 16 shared an example of making adjustments to storytimes in order to meet the needs of attendees by incorporating movement, story-based music, physical expression, and hands-on STEM activities. She introduced further adjustments like a visual schedule and verbal prompts to indicate the sequence of activities after observing some parents' hesitation to bring their neurodivergent children to storytimes. Participant 1 established the first seed lending programme in his library and shared how his educational background in agro-ecology and food justice informed that particular innovation. Participant 6 described training library staff to improve their services to people with disabilities, making the change sustainable. Participant 11 shared about creating bilingual storytime programming; and participant 12 discussed integrating new research to improve her library's workforce development, early childhood learning, and literacy programming as a 'lifelong educational resource for the community' as well as innovating her library's spatial layout in order to make circulation and information desks more accessible and inviting

Librarians' Self-Perceptions as Innovators

Research participants cited several factors that impact their professional self-perceptions as innovators. Factors included: contextual associations with the terms

‘innovator’ or ‘innovation’, levels of management support, organisational culture, mental and time capacity for innovation or innovative thinking, budget, personal motivations and values, professional history, and career aspirations.

Of their personal motivation for innovating at work, Participant 19 said:

[Innovation] is a personal value of mine. I do it a lot in my own personal life, trying to do better and to be better. People [with this value] don’t see it as work, they see it as necessary. You just class it as a part of life, and you bring it to the workplace. Why wouldn’t we do that, if it’s going to make something better?

(P19)

Several participants expressed hesitation to apply the term ‘innovator’ when describing their professional identity. Participant 2 shared:

I think ‘innovator’ as a word...it just sounds way too strong. Or ‘I’m an innovator’ is almost egotistical. I know I’m an innovator, I know I’m coming up with ideas that are trying to make things better, but I’m just like, ‘Oh, I’m the ideas person’. (P2)

Responsibility for innovation

Participants were asked about who holds the responsibility for innovation within their libraries. 2 interviewees stated that it is not anyone’s particular responsibility within the organisation but that public librarians often do take on that responsibility and that it can be ‘a good idea’ to do so. 5 participants felt that innovation is the responsibility of all employees within a public library, including

public librarians. 4 interviewees stated that it is a public librarian's responsibility to innovate, but did not clarify whether this responsibility rested solely with them.

Participant 8 felt that innovation is the responsibility of all employees within a public library but added:

“Management definitely has even more responsibility to be innovative, because they have a bigger responsibility pool. I feel like the larger your responsibility pool, the more you have to think about innovation.” (P8)

When asked whether it is a public librarian's responsibility to innovate,

Participant 19 answered:

“100%. Because we are responsible to the public. It's different for other sectors in librarianship, but [public libraries] are tied to public funding. We serve the public, so they come first. It's important to be using those dollars as efficiently and as innovatively as possible as long as it's in line with the patrons and the community.” (P19)

Some participants also viewed innovation as a responsibility for public librarians in order to progress in their career. Participant 11 shared:

“I think of it almost as, ‘This is an expected thing in my career, to innovate, to look at things and try to figure out what's a better way of doing it...[Innovation] is a must in your career, and if you're not finding new ways to be innovative, then you're not really proving yourself as a necessary component of the library you're serving.’” (P11)

Organisational Culture

Survey and interview participants were asked about their managers' roles in innovation and how the organisational cultures of their libraries impact their ability and desire to innovate. 15 respondents (71.4% of survey participants) stated that their managers are supportive or collaborative (or both) regarding innovation within the public library. 2 respondents said managers are a "vital part of innovation" (P13) and "key to supporting innovative employees and innovative change" (P19). Several participants cited organisational culture as a key factor in enabling and facilitating innovation, or restricting it. 16 survey respondents (76.2% of survey participants) said they are encouraged within the organisation and by managers, directors, or library boards to bring new ideas or innovate. 3 interviewees identified change or uncertainty within organisational culture as being a barrier to innovation. Burnout, structural rigidity, and upper leadership styles were also cited as factors which can discourage innovation.

Discussion

Librarians' Self Perceptions

Research findings revealed that the majority of participants do ultimately view themselves as innovators within the context of their professional role. However, their levels of comfort with claiming the actual term 'innovator,' as well as how often they view themselves as such, vary and are influenced by a number of factors. The majority of research participants were hesitant to claim the label 'innovator' when describing their professional identity, despite citing concrete evidence of regular innovation within

their professional activities.

It is likely that public librarians are not often, or not explicitly, encouraged to see themselves as innovators. Librarianship, especially in the public sector, is often viewed as a ‘helping profession,’ rather than one in which professionals promote their own achievements. In contrast, beyond the librarianship sector innovation is often widely perceived as relating to a competitive context (Knab 2010, as cited in Potnis et al. 2020). In this case study, many participants did not realise they were innovating on a regular basis until they were in discussion about what constitutes innovation and directly asked about their innovative activities.

It is possible that public librarians who move into managerial or leadership roles may be more likely to self-identify as innovators. Research participants working in these types of roles seemed more confident about including ‘innovator’ when describing their professional identity. This could be related to leadership and strategic responsibilities within their roles.

These findings preliminarily address the current gap in research literature on public librarians’ self-perceptions related to innovation or their professional identities as innovators. A substantial amount of literature has been produced on innovation within public libraries, innovation guides and materials for public librarians, the impacts of innovation within public libraries on users, and more (Anderson 2003; Deiss 2004; Mathews 2012; Scott and McNamee 2015; Olden 2003; Winberry and Potnis 2021). Conducting research on drivers of innovation

within public libraries, such as public librarians' self perceptions and organisational cultures which inhibit or encourage their innovation, is necessary to construct a comprehensive understanding of public libraries' activities related to their relevance and ongoing survival.

Indications of Innovative Activity

Despite most librarians' reluctance to readily label themselves as innovators, evidence exists that librarians are innovating regularly. Examples of innovation included: creating seed lending programmes; creating neurodiversity-friendly storytimes; offering bilingual storytimes; adapting staff approaches to better connect with a wider variety of library users; adjusting staff use of software to maximise working hours; and more.

However, views on responsibility for innovation within public libraries vary. Some librarians see themselves as bearing a responsibility to innovate, alongside other employees within the organisation. Others do not view innovation as a formal, dedicated responsibility for themselves or others within the organisation, but see it as best practice if time, energy, and resources permit. Some allocate responsibility for innovation based on the amount of time different employees spend at the public library in combination with their other job responsibilities (e.g. managers should be devoting more time to innovation compared to part-time library assistants).

50% of interviewees stated that they think of innovation on a daily basis when approaching their work; 40% stated they think of innovation often; 10% said they think about innovation on at least a weekly basis. This suggests that innovation is top

of mind for librarians and a significant consideration when approaching their work. Participants cited regular instances of ideating new ways to meet user needs, adjusting their work processes for greater efficiency, reimagining existing services, challenging outdated or ineffective practices, and seeking consistent improvement at work.

Defining Innovation

Similarly to other fields of practice, there is no single definition of innovation within the librarianship sector. Various terms are often used in place of, or in combination with, ‘innovate’ or ‘innovation’ within the literature, and participants also utilised a variety of terms to describe and identify innovation within public libraries and to describe their professional identities. The majority of participants self-identify professionally using additional or alternative terms related to innovation and innovative activity, such as ‘changemaker,’ ‘go-getter,’ ‘thought leader,’ and more. (See Table 2)

Leonard and Clementson (2012) assert that existing research on innovation and innovation adoption should not be generalised as applying directly to libraries, at the risk of overlooking the significance of libraries’ unique characteristics and how they relate to innovation. Similarly, it is possible that applying the terms ‘innovator’ or ‘innovation’ within public library contexts may minimise other terms which library professionals may accept more readily and collectively, which they find to be a more accurate reflection of their professional identities and work.

Participants varied in their personal definitions of innovation. Some librarians regarded originality as an essential qualifier for innovation (in other words, an

innovative activity may not count as innovation unless the original idea was generated by the librarian themselves) whilst others viewed adapting ideas from other libraries or making changes to existing services and offerings to be innovation despite the ideas originating elsewhere. Some librarians focused on patron-facing programmes and offerings whereas others honed in on changes to staffing models, staff approaches, or operational models.

Factors Influencing Innovation

Associations

The term ‘innovator’ often bears associations which can become barriers against librarians claiming the term more widely. Some librarians stated outright that the label ‘innovator’ feels more applicable within technological or business contexts. For many participants, use of the term also carries a level of pressure or is associated with exceptionalism. Despite misgivings about using the term ‘innovator’ due to the associations listed prior, participants did also claim that innovation can be conducted independently of business contexts or introducing new technology, ‘bells and whistles,’ or being part of a big vision or scheme. Though these associations are top of mind for public librarians, further reflection and discussion resulted in greater recognition of their librarianship innovation and innovative work on a more widespread, day to day basis.

Community Needs

47.6% of survey participants independently referenced community needs when describing their innovative work activities, and 100% of interviewees referenced community needs when defining or identifying innovation in their public libraries. This strong community focus may indicate a wider prevailing attitude regarding professional identity. Public librarians may allocate the majority of their time, resources, and focus to serving users over contemplating their professional identity or their professional development needs. Combined with limited resources within public libraries, this may result in a lack of adequate support, time, and resources for critical professional reflection and progression. In other words, the commonly held ethos of ‘jump in and do’ within public libraries, whilst successfully user-focussed, may keep public librarians from fully crediting the active role they play in innovation as well as their professional identities as innovators.

Personal Motivations

Personal motivations and past work experience also impact public librarians’ innovation and self-perceptions of their professional identities. This finding supports Castiglione’s and Skinner’s identification of intrinsic motivations as a key factor for driving innovation (Castiglione 2008; Skinner 2017) and existing studies which show that librarians’ personality traits impact their innovative activities (Williamson and Lounsbury 2016). Participants also identified personality traits such as introversion and extroversion as impacting their experiences in innovation and how they see themselves as innovators.

Professional/Educational Background

Public librarians' professional and educational backgrounds can also impact their innovative activities. Participants shared how knowledge from past career experience or educational degrees informed how they approached innovation and brought up new ideas, providing contextual understanding and critical thinking skills that helped them identify innovation opportunities and develop changes.

Organisational Culture and Innovation

Study findings indicated that the organisational culture of a public library bears a significant impact on public librarians' ability and motivation to innovate, as well as their self-perceptions of their professional identities. Public librarians who would otherwise carry out more innovative activities at work can be stifled or hampered by non-supportive managers, bureaucratic approval processes, and uncertainty caused by organisational changes.

As Deis (2004) found, the 'deep' organisational cultures of some public libraries which had been built up over time were more risk- and innovation-averse. Participants cited instances of proposing innovations based on needs they saw within their communities and being met with resistant attitudes from management or having their ideas rejected due to a perceived lack of alignment with upper leadership's goals for the organisation. Furthermore, some participants cited instances of having their proposals for innovation rejected on the basis of being unconventional or not part of standard practice.

In line with the findings of Hill and Farkas (2008), many participants cited a personal motivation to be innovative despite organisational pushback or limitations.

However, their innovative practice and self-identity were not untouched by organisational culture. Many participants felt that organisational cultures which limited their ability to take innovative action or carry out new ideas also lessened the strength of their identities as innovators.

Participants saw managers as vital to the process of successfully bringing innovation from the ideation stage into implemented practice. 76.2% of survey respondents reported that they work within organisations which encourage and welcome innovation. Organisations which openly recognise and award innovation are also more likely to see innovative practice from their librarians as well as increased job satisfaction (Hill and Farkas 2008). Additionally, organisations which promote a collaborative culture of open communication are more likely to experience innovation.

Although organisational culture is impacted by setting clear professional expectations of employees (Williams and Saunders 2020), the research within this case study was inconclusive on formal expectations. Some participants felt an expectation to innovate as a way to successfully fulfil their role or prove their value to the public library, whilst other participants considered innovation at work to be best practice but not necessarily an expectation to fulfil.

Conclusion

This case study has taken an inductive, mixed methods approach to investigating public librarians' self-perceptions of their professional identities as innovators. It serves to preliminarily address the current research gap on public librarians' self-perceptions of their professional identities in relation to innovation, thus contributing to the development of a comprehensive picture of innovation in public libraries.

The study discovered that public librarians do ultimately view themselves as innovators; however, librarians vary in their willingness to claim the label 'innovator' due to factors including pre-existing associations with the term, differences in how innovation is defined or identified, job autonomy range, higher levels of comfortability with other terms describing professional identity, and organisational culture.

Public librarians innovate regularly within their professional roles, and their innovations are influenced by a number of factors including community needs, current awareness, personal motivations, and professional and educational backgrounds. They also innovate in collaboration with the communities they serve. Nonetheless, public librarians working in environments which limit their innovative activities experience lessened connection to their identities as 'innovator' which may continue to limit their capacity for innovation over time as they turn their time and attention to other responsibilities within their professional role.

This research project has limitations in respect of it having been conducted on a small scale and focused on library services within a single U.S. state. It is recommended that further research be conducted to explore public librarians' professional

self-perceptions on a wider scale. It is also recommended that further research be conducted into how innovation in public librarianship is defined and identified, as definitions of innovation greatly influence individuals' self-perceptions related to innovative activities. The results of such research may produce key insights regarding changes that can be made within organisational cultures of public libraries, including management styles and organisational communication practices, to facilitate and encourage effective innovation which increases library relevance, demonstrable value, and position in local communities for years to come.

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