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Organizational Storytelling in Academic Libraries: Roles, Addressees and Perceptions

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Monica Colon-Aguirre entitled "Organizational Storytelling in Academic Libraries: Roles, Addressees and Perceptions." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication and Information.

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Organizational Storytelling in Academic Libraries: Roles, Addressees and Perceptions

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Dedication

To my parents, Víctor Ramón Colón Fuentes and Olga Ivette Aguirre Vázquez, for all their love, support and patience.

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Abstract

Libraries have survived throughout millennia while retaining particular characteristics that help define them as organizations. This study focuses on academic libraries, by exploring the world of the academic library employee through one of the most recent alternatives to organizational studies: knowledge management. Knowledge management is a relatively new approach to management, which focuses on people as the main components of organizations, and explores ways in which the knowledge created by them allows organizations to innovate and compete successfully. Storytelling is one of the ways knowledge is transferred among employees. This qualitative study explores the perceptions academic reference librarians have regarding the stories that are shared among employees with similar responsibilities. The findings show that the organizational storytelling taking place among the participants centers mostly on: stories as a warning system, stories told for the purpose of finding comfort, stories told in order to prepare others, and stories that explain current working conditions. In addition, this study found that the knowledge being transferred was tacit and emphasized social interactions. Five main themes emerged from the data: unusual patrons, former supervisors, poor administrators, former employees, and past crises. The results also point at the participants' having negative perspectives regarding the role of the stories they share, with many classifying them as gossip.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and General Information

Libraries have historically been the main repositories of human knowledge. According to Goethe, libraries are the memory of mankind (Tolzman, Hessel & Peiss, 2001). The history of libraries is closely related to that of humanity itself; libraries are almost as old as writing, which ties their existence to that of written history (Lerner, 1998). Since ancient times, people have gathered documents containing various works of human imagination and stored them for safekeeping, organization, and future use.

In antiquity there were great libraries such as those that existed in Alexandria and Pergamus where works of drama, law, philosophy, history, oratory, medicine, and natural science, were stored (Taylor, 2004). The image of the library as we know it today, open to all and unrestricted in access to materials, did not really come to existence until well into the 20th century (Lerner, 1998). In their long history, libraries have served different purposes and have been housed in different organizations.

During the middle ages, the main tasks of preservation and reproduction of documents were done in monasteries, which had extensive collections in their libraries; here, materials were not being kept for use by the general population, but mainly manufactured, stored and preserved (Taylor, 2004). The scriptoriums of the dark ages, where books were carefully copied and hand decorated, came to an end primarily because of the popularization of the printing press, giving way to a new episode in the history of libraries (Tolzmann et al., 2001).

Libraries moved from the monastery to the university around the 13th century (Lerner, 1998). With the interest in science and research during the Renaissance, libraries acquired their modern intellectual stamp, making their collections progressively more inclusive and open to selected patrons with the passing of time. Still, universities throughout Europe were very restrictive of the audience they served and the kinds of materials that those who were allowed entrance could access (Tolzmann et al., 2001). By the 18th century, university libraries were more committed to providing the tools for the development and growth of knowledge, both in size and scope. Collections became more open to faculty and students, who could not only use the books in the library, but also in their chambers (Lerner, 1998). In time, libraries developed into the systems with which we are familiar today; that is, repositories of materials that are gathered to serve the information needs of specific communities.

In today's society, the role of libraries as repositories of human knowledge is starting to be questioned (Davenport & Prusak, 1993). Recently, issues regarding the administration of libraries in modern society relate mostly to technological changes that have taken place in the last three decades that have changed the way people approach information. These issues include the advent of the Internet, which has made possible the existence of free online search engines. Other concerns include library anxiety, library personnel's seeming unfamiliarity with marketing strategies, and demographic changes affecting the profession (Curran, 2003; Kaufman, 2007; Onwuegbuzie, Jiao & Bostick, 2004; Singh, 2009).

Online search engines make information easily and conveniently available to the masses. In order for libraries to exist today, they need to be mindful of the wealth of free and easily accessible online information that is available to people. Projects such as Google Books remind us that the role of the library has changed; many see the advent of the search engine as a threat to the existence of libraries (Herring, 2008; Lackie, 2008). It has been contested that libraries today must concentrate on providing their patrons with an inviting physical space they will want to visit, and in which they can interact with others, as well as the tools the new clientele's multitasking and technological infrastructure require (Sandler, 2005; Williams, 2008). Studies have found that college students prefer to find information via an online search engine rather than through academic resources available through their university's library. The main reasons cited were the ease of use and speed with which information can be found using online search engines. The same study also found that students tend to sacrifice the quality of the results in order to save time and effort (Griffiths & Brophy, 2005). These studies' findings imply that the library's space and resources need to be used wisely, and that the days of libraries as document repositories for possible future use are over. It has also been suggested that books and print materials are soon to be replaced by electronic readers, making the printed book unnecessary (Kaufman, 2007; Sandler, 2005).

Another factor to consider when examining a library's role in modern society is what has been termed "library anxiety." This refers to the feelings of discomfort or negative emotional disposition experienced by an individual in a library setting (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao & Bostick, 2004). These feelings can be related to the size of the library, or the individual's lack of knowledge about the location of the resources within the library, which contributes to the individual's lack of knowledge about how to start library research. This aversion to the library's environment can be so strong that some people completely avoid visiting a library. They would rather find information on their own or not at all.

These are just some of the most prominent issues academic libraries deal with today. Libraries function in a fast-paced technological world in which they cannot afford to lag behind, and where learning what is new is essential. The failure to learn and adapt to environmental changes can mean failure to survive (Choo, 1995). Changes must be assimilated, and a strategy to tackle new problems must be prepared quickly, while always keeping the patron's convenience in mind. New services must be easy to use, fast, and adaptable, not only to the patron's needs, but also to their timing and location preferences.

Despite the changes throughout the years in the role of libraries as a provider of information, the administration of academic libraries seems forgotten in time. Some writings in the field suggest strong ties to the business administration literature, without making important distinctions in the purposes of the two types of organizations (Stueart & Moran, 2002). But most importantly, there are some indications that libraries fail to behave as organizations that utilize their talent, or market themselves in order to create a competitive advantage that will help them survive into the future (Singh, 2009; Winston & Hoffman, 2005), or even effectively market their services to their patrons. One way in which libraries can improve their competitive advantage is through the implementation and utilization of knowledge management techniques.

Knowledge management originated as a reaction to the concept of a knowledge society that emerged during the 1970s, with the studies of Daniel Bell, Peter Drucker, Marc Uri Porat, and Yoneji Masuda, among others (Kuhlen, 2005). These authors proposed that a country's gross national product was more highly dependent on the production, distribution, and use of information and knowledge, than on its natural resources and physical capital. They identified employees as the most important carriers of information in organizations, even more important than information machinery and systems (Kuhlen, 2005). However, the information resources available to the organization in the form of its employees' knowledge cannot be managed in the same ways as other organizational assets.

As previously stated, knowledge management has been identified as a way in which organizations can improve their products and services in order to gain a competitive advantage. The administrative literature has focused on ways to capture existing knowledge in organizations. The underlying reason for this interest in knowledge capturing is that knowledge enables creativity, and this produces innovation, allowing an organization to achieve a competitive advantage which enables success (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This success is seen as the key to organizational survival in a volatile environment, and it all starts at the individual level with the organizational member's individual knowledge. This knowledge, in order to be useful to the organization, must be shared with other organizational members, so proper knowledge transfer is also essential for organizational survival, especially the information about best practices and lessons learned.

The knowledge management literature arises from Michael Polanyi's (1966) writings, and divides knowledge in two types: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is that which has been rendered visible or expressed in terms such as words or formulas that can be used by individuals other than the source (Dalkir, 2005) and can be stored in a knowledge repository for future use. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, refers to the hands-on skills and special know-how that is deeply embedded in the human mind, which people develop as they immerse themselves in the flow of their work activities (Choo, 1995). Because tacit knowledge is so rooted in action, and it comes from the simultaneous engagement of the mind and the body, it is particularly hard to formalize and to articulate (Choo, 1995). Therefore, tacit knowledge is even harder to share among employees in an organization. As a consequence, this kind of knowledge is considered more valuable (Choo, 1998).

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), the flow and interaction of both kinds of knowledge are represented in their *Spiral of Knowledge* model. This knowledge management model represents four kinds of patterns in which knowledge is created in any organization: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. Socialization refers to the process of acquiring tacit knowledge through shared experiences, and can be exemplified in organizations as on-the-job training sessions where new employees are paired with more experienced employees in order to learn a process. Here knowledge moves from being tacit knowledge in one person's mind to becoming tacit knowledge in another's. Externalization is the process of converting tacit knowledge into explicit concepts through the use of metaphors, analogies, and models. This is the most important knowledge creation activity, since it is the step in which an individual's knowledge is made accessible so that others can benefit from it. Combination is the process of creating explicit knowledge by bridging together explicit knowledge from different sources. Internalization refers to the process of transforming explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge, internalizing the experiences gained through other modes of knowledge creation in the form of shared mental models or work practices.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) go on to explain that knowledge creation in organizations is the product of the interactions between tacit and explicit knowledge that are induced by several triggers. Socialization starts with interaction; here, members of the organization share experiences and mental models. Externalization is triggered by dialog which relies on metaphors and analogies to articulate tacit knowledge which is difficult to communicate. The combination stage is triggered by networking with other sectors of the organization, and internalization begins with learning-by-doing; it can occur without necessarily experiencing what others experienced, but instead by listening to or reading the story of organizational events (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Organizational storytelling is one way of capturing and disseminating knowledge, through the socialization and externalization stages of the "Spiral of Knowledge," since it allows members of the organization to share their experiences with other organizational members and to communicate the metaphors and analogies that reflect the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Dalkir, 2005). An organizational story is defined as, "a detailed narrative of management actions, employee interactions, and other intraorganizational [sic.] events that are communicated informally within the organization" (Dalkir, 2005; p. 86). Stories are great tools to communicate the organizational culture, as well as an effective medium to communicate valuable tacit knowledge. According to Connell (2006), stories are rich in tacit knowledge which is transferred through retelling.

Research Questions

As previously discussed, libraries today are experiencing constant change. Technology has been the main catalyst in the changing role of libraries in society. The technology used today is without a doubt a big step forward, bringing a lot of advances, and making many services possible. At the same time, it is important to remember that these advances are not available to everyone, and that some are still new and evolving, so it is difficult to know in which way these technological advances will develop. Despite of all these changes, libraries are still important to society. Because of their importance, libraries need to continue adapting to this changing environment. These technological advances create challenges for any kind of organizati, but most especially for one that has been so directly affected by the evolution of information technology and the effects it has had on society.

As previously stated, the relationship between libraries and academic institutions started a long time ago. Today, the quality of an academic institution in many ways is tied to its information sources which are contained and managed in its library. The library has long been recognized to be the "heart of the [university] campus" (Rothstein in Association of College and

Research Libraries, 2010) and its existence directly aligns to the goals of promotion and expansion of human knowledge that academic institutions pursue. Research shows that academic libraries are an important factor when it comes to attracting and enrolling the best students in academic institutions (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010). Libraries also "support students' ability to do well in internships, secure job placements, earn salaries, gain acceptance to graduate/professional schools, and obtain marketable skills" (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010; p. 14), all of which are not only desirable outcomes for academic institutions, but also for society in general. Academic libraries have a strong impact on students, yet faculty and researchers also benefit from them; the academic library provides the materials and assistance necessary for faculty and researchers to deliver high quality teaching to the students, as well as producing quality research and generating grant proposals. These activities are generally what determine the exposure the academic institution gets. In addition, the academic library's materials, facilities and services are important requirements for academic accreditation in the United States.

Because of the technological changes that have allowed for faster and more diverse modes of communication, as well as access to a greater amount of information and information sources, the nature of the work performed by staff in libraries has dramatically changed throughout the years. These tendencies have particularly affected a category of employee in the academic library, the reference librarian, who assists patrons with queries stemming from personal curiosity, coursework, or any problem that moves the person to gather information to find a solution (Cassell & Hiremath, 2006). Currently, most reference librarians in academic libraries do not even have time to absorb the purpose of a request, or to provide much guidance to the patron other than that which was directly requested (Kaufman, 2007).Reference librarians also have to respond to inquiries coming through in various media, sometimes at the same time. Among all library employees, academic librarians working at the reference desk deal most directly with the information needs of clients in the academic setting. It is their job to find answers to questions and search for information in order to fulfill the varied information needs of students, faculty, and researchers working in academic institutions, and sometimes even those of the members of the community in which the academic institution operates. They are, in a way, the ambassadors of the academic library, because of their direct contact with the library clients, and their ability to fulfill information needs in a timely, seamless, and effective manner. Because they are the initial point of contact, the service delivered by the reference librarians is going to be the standard by which the library's clients will judge the value of the library's services.

This study is based on the ontological supposition that human beings create their own perceptions of the world, and that reality is an individual construct based on the lived experiences of each individual. Individual experience is assumed to be socially constructed, so that the findings of the study are the creation of the interactive process of both the researcher's interpretive acts and the participants' stories. The researcher's main effort was devoted to discovering the patterns in human behavior revealed by the data, which allow for the results of this study to be transferrable to other situations, rather than aiming to generalize the results to all instances of storytelling in organizations, or in academic libraries, or even within the same academic institution.

The main theoretical guide for this research was provided by phenomenology, and the Social Construction of Reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Phenomenology posits that the most important way to understand the world is by putting together people's experiences in order to make sense of it (Schutz, 1967; Gurwitsch, 1974). Berger and Luckmann's (1967) Social

Construction of Reality theory posits that knowledge is socially constructed through the mutual interactions of members of social groups, which create institutions and conventions that free human beings from constant processes of decision-making. This theory further asserts that, even if not everyone in society is expected to be a knower in all particular areas of knowledge, it is understood that there are specific knowers in society.

Because of the importance of the continued need for libraries in society, and particularly in academic institutions, this study focuses on organizational storytelling in academic libraries, and more specifically the meanings the stories have for academic librarians working the reference desk. After reviewing the literature available, and conceptualizing the main constructs regarding these phenomena, research questions were formulated focusing on exploring the underpinnings of knowledge management, organizational storytelling and academic libraries. The following three research questions helped to guide and focus this study:

RQ 1: What is the role of organizational storytelling in the academic library setting?

RQ 2: What kind of knowledge is being transferred through the stories shared among librarians?

RQ 3: How is the role of organizational storytelling understood by reference librarians?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Organizational storytelling is discussed in the literature as part of the study of knowledge management. This field started getting increased attention by organizational studies scholars during the 1990s, and focuses on how people's knowledge is the main producer of wealth in organizations (Hislop, 2010). The emphasis on knowledge management today is mainly centered around the perceived need for organizations to cope with turbulent competitive environments presenting multiple threats, which can become crises at any moment if not dealt with properly (Coombs, 2007; Dalkir, 2005; Hislop, 2010). The key to organizational survival from the knowledge management point of view is innovation. Innovation begins at the individual level, in an employee's mind, in the shape of his/her thoughts and ideas that are later shared with others in the organization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1998). Because the individual is the center of the organization in today's society, there is an emphasis in the literature on how to capture that knowledge and properly disseminate it throughout the organization. There is also a group of scholars who study the effects that stories shared among employees have on organizational culture and the organization's ability to survive crises or produce a suitable work environment (McCarthy, 2008).

The study of organizational storytelling in academic libraries in this research begins with defining features and factors of organizations and the place of academic libraries in such a definition, including a brief discussion of the external and internal structure of libraries. The subject of crisis is discussed in this chapter to the extent that it relates to organizations and specifically academic libraries. The subject of knowledge management is situated in the literature, and a discussion of the role of academic libraries in the knowledge management literature, and the ways in which knowledge management is manifested in the library environment, is provided. The place of organizational storytelling is included in the context of knowledge management and more carefully explored, along with other forms of narrative often confused with storytelling. The chapter concludes with a review of studies on organizational storytelling that are currently available in scholarly literature.

Organizations

The currently accepted meaning of the word "organization" came into use during the 19th century and is used to denote the general category of formally constituted medium-sized social systems (Starbuck, 2003). However, the origins of organizations predates their generally accepted use in vocabulary by several millennia, as shown by documents dating from before 2000 BCE, which indicate that organizations were already in existence, and had well-defined hierarchies of authority and rules regarding rights and duties associated with certain positions, somewhat like today's organizations (Starbuck, 2003). By the 19th century, social groups smaller than societies that exhibited organization began to be recognized as such. Further, the word itself started being used to denote a social group rather than a trait presented by a group. The broader definition of the word "organization" became so widely used that it was even included in the dictionaries of the time (Starbuck, 2003).

Today, organizations are understood to be fairly permanent social systems that are meant to achieve a limited set of objectives by coordinating the activities of its members (Presthus in Prentice, 2005). Organizations are small social systems that promote certain approved ideas, values, cultures, attitudes, and behaviors, which can be different from those approved and promoted by society (Prentice, 2005). Generally, organizations will have certain elements in common, despite the varieties exhibited in their focus or structure. These elements include goals, resources, and objectives (Prentice, 2005).

However, the defining characteristics of modern organizations are still based on those that were described by Max Weber in his writings about what he called “bureaucratic organizations.” These characteristics have become the template by which organizations are still defined today. The word “bureaucracy,” was used by Weber to describe rational administration in modern societies, but has been made synonymous with some undesirable aspects of organizations, rather than being a specific form of organization (Starbuck, 2003). Despite this, the defining characteristics of bureaucratic organizations are a roadmap for those attempting to arrive at an operational definition of the term “organization” in modern societies. According to Weber, organizations are generally characterized by: a division of labor, hierarchical authority, administration by rules, specialization, and full-time jobs that become a vocation (Starbuck, 2003).

According to Weber’s definition of a bureaucratic organization, the power of the employees to fulfill their duties is limited to the specific areas defined by the job description. Rational division of labor is the main tool employed to avoid the overlap of work in each division. The organization is also hierarchically ordered, like a pyramid, in which the higher offices supervise the lower offices. Each office has rules and each one of the officials receives special training in order to comply with these rules (Allen, 2004). According to Weber, bureaucracies seek to increase their superiority by encouraging people within the organization to keep their knowledge secret (Weber, 2005). This secrecy is rewarded through a career structure made possible by allowing individuals to aspire for promotions (Allen, 2004). The most important distinguishing feature that bureaucratization has over its predecessors is the separation of the office and the incumbent occupant of that office. In a bureaucratic system, administrators do not own their positions or the means of production.

Contemporary organizational theorists have pointed at structure, rather than general characteristics, as the defining traits of an organization. According to Mintzberg (1979), organizations are characterized by a particular structure, which is “the sum total of the ways in which an organization divides its labor into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them” (Mintzberg, 1979; p. 3). Therefore, organizations exist to perform a specific purpose, or labor, which is then divided into tasks, and these tasks are in turn coordinated. In this last step in the sequence, Mintzberg (1979) identifies five coordinating mechanisms of tasks: mutual adjustment, direct supervision, standardization of work processes, standardization of work outputs, and standardization of worker skills.

Mutual adjustment implies that the task should be performed by more than one person, and that adjustment of the work performed by different individuals is essential for the functioning of the organization. The simple mention of the term “adjustment” indicates that the different individuals will be performing different parts of the job that later must be coordinated, as opposed to everyone’s performing a single job individually and in tandem (Mintzberg, 1979).

The second coordinating mechanism, direct supervision, becomes important in an organization, as it incorporates more members to perform a specific function. Direct supervision means that an individual will be responsible for the work of others by monitoring their actions and issuing instructions to other members. This will be a way to ensure the mutual adjustment of the job performed (Mintzberg, 1979). The next three mechanisms are all standardization mechanisms. According to Mintzberg (1979), the standardization of work processes involves the specification and programming of the contents and the work, while the standardization of outputs deals with the consistency of the results of the work. The standardization of work skills and also knowledge refers to the specifics of the training and abilities required to perform the work.

These five mechanisms described by Mintzberg (1979) occur in a continuum, moving from the mutual adjustment of labor, to the direct supervision and then all three forms of standardization together at the same level. As the work in the organization becomes more complicated, the general tendency will be for it to be more standardized. It is also important to point out that as the organization grows and the work of individuals becomes more complex and varied, and performed by more individuals, it will tend to revert back to mutual adjustment.

Mintzberg (1979) also identifies five levels of managerial structure in an organization: strategic apex, middle line, operating core, support staff, and “technostructure.” Figure 1 shows the arrangement of these five levels in the organizational structure.

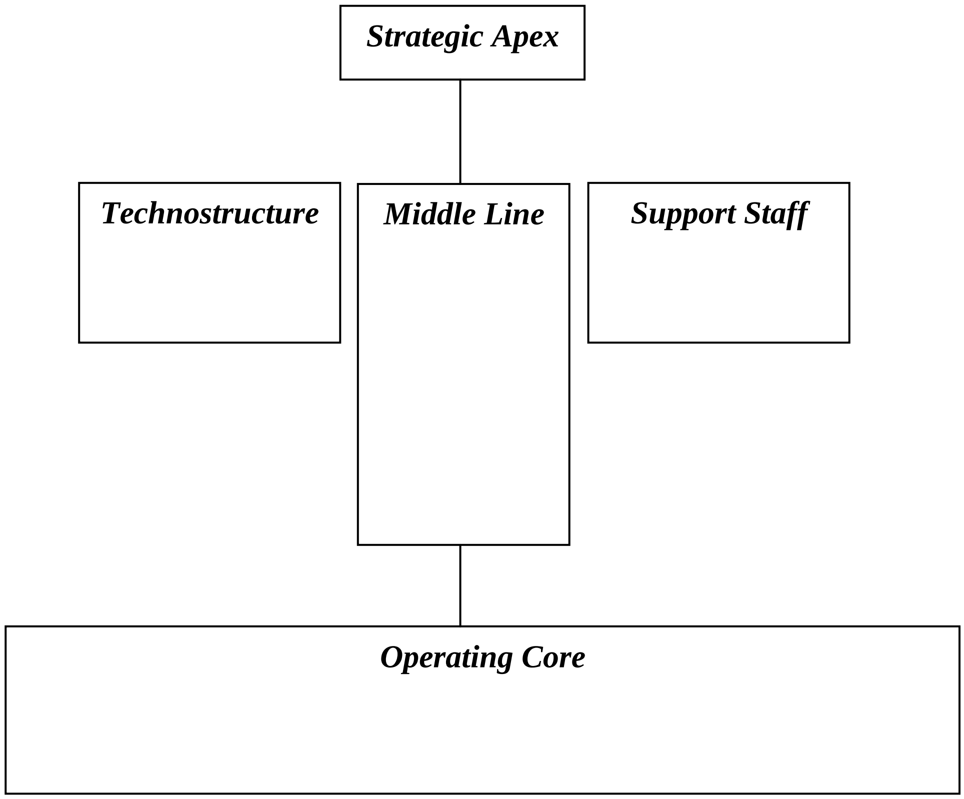

Figure 1.Mintzberg's Conceptual Description of Organizational Structure

The top of the organizational structure is the strategic apex; this is comprised of the people in charge of the organization. These employees make sure that the organization serves its mission in an effective way, while serving the needs of the people who control and have power over the organization. The strategic apex also includes those who provide direct support to the top managers of the organization, including secretaries and assistants. (Mintzberg, 1979). The middle line joins the strategic apex with the operating core, and it is made of managers with formal authority. They provide direct supervision of the operating core and enable communications between these and the managers above them. The operating core, on the other hand, refers to those members of the organization who perform the basic work which relates directly to the organization’s products or services. Their main functions include securing inputs for production, transforming the inputs into outputs, distributing the outputs, and providing direct support to the output. This is the level at which standardization is most clearly manifested.

Another level of the organization, as pointed out by Mintzberg (1979), is support staff. These are the employees who do not perform work that is directly related to the organization’s products or services, but without whom the organization itself would not be able to operate. Some examples of support staff functions include the payroll office, janitorial services, and the security department, among others. Support staff can be found at various levels of the hierarchy in organizations and sometimes are self-contained; that is, they are mini-organizations within a bigger organization. Finally the “technostructure” refers to those members of the organization who affect the work of other employees by designing, planning, changing, or training the people who do the work, even though they do not perform it themselves. Their main purpose is to standardize the processes and products of the organization.

An organization, for the purposes of this study, refers to any group of individuals that comes together in order to perform a task, or series of formalized tasks, with a common objective, and which have the characteristics as described by Mintzberg and Max Weber. These groups of individuals will be characterized by defined hierarchies, mutual adjustment, direct supervision by experts, standardization of work processes, standardization of work outputs, and standardization of worker skills. The objective of an organization will be centered in achieving goals that align with its mission, even when this mission does not include the generation of profit.

Academic Libraries as Organizations

Libraries are very complex organizations that exist in many environments and respond to the various needs of multiple user groups. Libraries are rarely stand-alone entities, but are often part of a larger (parent) organization. As such, libraries typically have also developed both an internal and an external structure related to the way they address stakeholders; this dual structure is at the root of its complex organizational structure. The external structure is used to connect the library to the parent organization. The library's internal structure defines its functions, and connects its overall environment to that of other libraries.

Most libraries are nonprofit organizations; that is, they do not generate revenue as a result of providing their services to clients (Martin, 1996; Prentice, 2005). Some libraries operate outside of this model and are part of a for-profit organization, or are for-profit organizations themselves; however, for-profit libraries are not the focus of this study. As nonprofit organizations, the majority of libraries are classified as service organizations, along with schools, social service agencies, and museums. These organizations offer services to clients according to their identified needs, and their success is generally measured by the satisfaction of users instead of more concrete factors such as sales and revenue (Prentice, 2005).

Libraries have some peculiarities that differ from most organizations, and even contrast with the parent organization. Libraries are auxiliaries to larger organizations, and in most cases are not independent agencies themselves. This role limits library administration to a certain extent, since the library director is dependent on the goals and rules set by the higher hierarchy of administrators of the parent organization (Martin, 1996). Despite their dependency on the goals, objectives, and rules of the parent organization, the organizational structure of most libraries is remarkably similar, regardless of the wide array of purposes and patrons these serve (Martin, 1996). For example, most libraries have circulation, cataloging, reference services, and administration departments that make for very similar organizational structures, regardless of the general name ascribed to each of these departments by the parent organization, or the creation of additional departments in order to respond to specific needs of a particular organization (Prentice, 2005).

It is important to stress that the administration of libraries is made more complicated as a result of certain other factors that are generally characteristic of libraries. One such peculiarity that libraries as organizations present is that these institutions are generally administered by professionals who move up from the service ranks, rather than by career administrators (Martin, 1996). This situation can be problematic since these individuals possess proven service ability, but do not necessarily have managerial ability (Martin, 1996). However, the main factor that makes the study of libraries as organizations particularly complicated is their dual structures. This is evident in academic libraries when their position in the organizational chart is taken into consideration, and can be referred to as the external structure of the academic library. This external structure can be compared with the organizational chart of the different departments and functions that libraries possess that are considered standard for libraries in general, which is considered the internal structure of the academic library.

External Structure and Organizational Character of Academic Libraries

Academic libraries are those that are housed within an institution of higher education, and are a part of the organizational structure of this institution, which functions as the parent institution. This relationship between the library and the rest of the parent institution can be complicated, since the policies and ways of working within the parent institution has a central role in shaping the functions and services provided by the library. However, libraries share among themselves multiple characteristics which makes them remarkably similar despite the variations in the involvement of the main academic institutions which house them. The focus of an academic library is one of its definitive characteristics; this focus is mainly on research (Martin, 1996) or the provision of materials and spaces that enable and promote the creation of research. This focus is a clearly distinguishing characteristic of an academic library when compared to a public library, for example.

Martin (1996) describes the academic library as the “supply agency” of an academic institution, having among its main functions: the acquisition of materials in order to support the courses offered, the organization of the materials acquired, the orientation of users of the library and their bibliographic instruction, and the provision of spaces for study. Historically the placement of libraries in the organizational charts of academic institutions has been confusing; libraries are seen as neither instructional units per se, since they respond to the information needs of all of the academic community, nor are they non-educational support units, because they are directly involved in the educational and research processes that take place in their parent institutions (Martin, 1996).

In order to aid in the proper placement of the library in the organizational chart of the academic institution, some institutions have made the office of the Dean of Libraries or Library Director a vice-president level position. This approach gives the library more access to the President of the academic institution, and by consequence, to the higher levels of the organizational hierarchy. Despite this move by some academic institutions, this kind of hierarchical shift is not the norm for academic libraries (Martin, 1996).

This hierarchical positioning of the academic library in its parent organization and its place in the organizational chart is made more complicated when one considers that academic institutions have dual hierarchical structures. This means that one stream comprises administrative positions, including that of the President and the Board of Trustees, while the other one has an educational focus, which includes faculty members all the way up to the Faculty Senate (Martin, 1996). The administrative hierarchy is in charge of budgets and finances, while the educational hierarchy is responsible for curriculum changes, as well as faculty retention and promotion. There can be some gray areas in this division in which both streams overlap, but in general, the organizational chart of academic institutions presents some sort of divide similar to the one described here. This divide also describes the different interactions between faculty and administrators, which reflect the complicated relationship between the two streams (Martin, 1996).

The confusion regarding the library’s role, emphasizing that it is neither solely an academic unit nor solely a non-educational support unit, is further accentuated when we take into consideration that in many academic institutions librarians are considered faculty members. This designation affects the librarian’s salary, career structure, and benefits, as well as adding additional pressure on librarians to abide by the norms established for faculty members, including obtaining graduate degrees in their areas of specialization and producing and publishing original research (Martin, 1996).

Internal Structure of Academic Libraries

In order to understand the library as an organization, it is not only necessary to see the relationship and the place it occupies in the organizational chart of the parent organization, but also to understand the inner workings of the library and its internal structure. Academic libraries, as with other types of libraries, are basically defined by their functions, that is, the breakdown of work assignments into logical activities that allow the organization to achieve its goals (Martin, 1996). Libraries have generic positions that explain their entire work processes and are present in most types of libraries, not just those in the academic field. These positions include: acquisition librarians, catalogers, reference librarians, and circulation staff. These positions cover the processes facilitating the provision of library materials, which need to be acquired, organized and assigned a specific place in the collection, and located when needed by a user. These positions generally control the flow and use of materials housed in or accessed through the library (see figure 2).

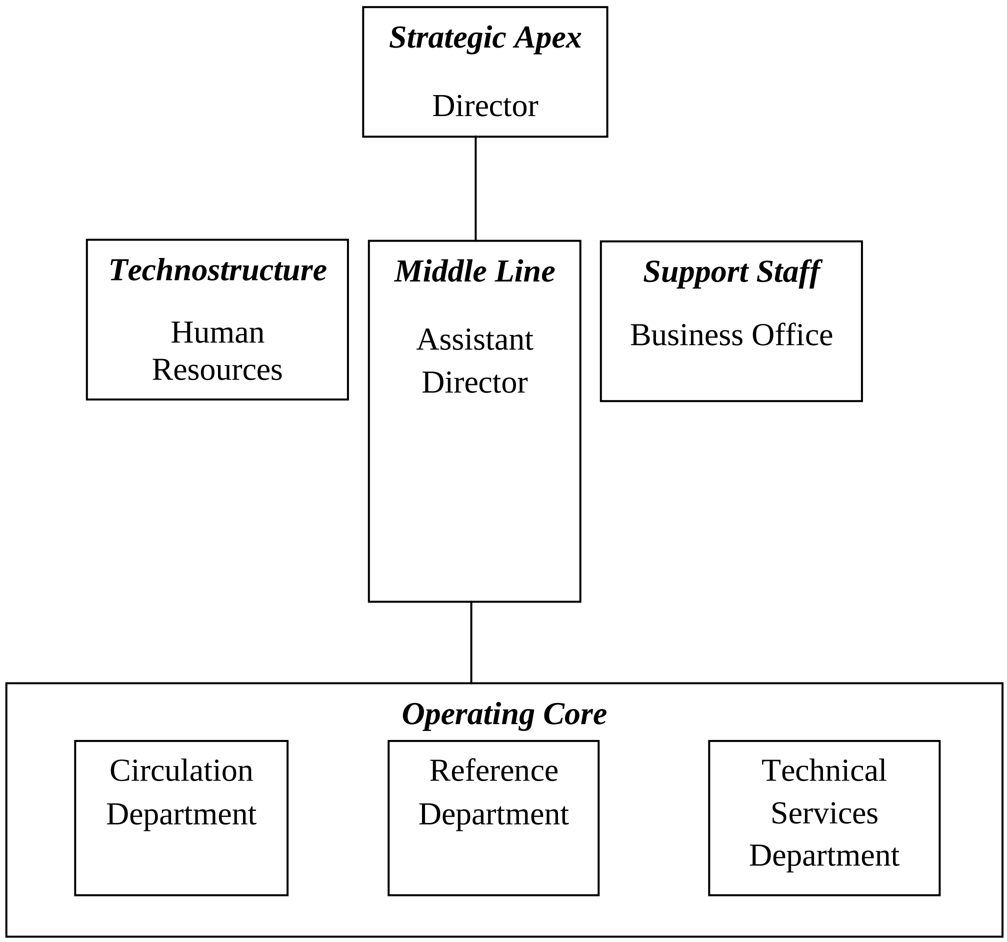

Figure 2. *Internal Structure of an Academic Library Using Mintzberg's Conceptual Description of Organizations Model*

Despite the differences in user demographics and needs, or in the parent organization, from one type of library to another, these positions are very likely to be found in most libraries. They represent a standard, common characteristic among almost all libraries as organizations that transcends the particular environment in which they operate. In other words, it could be said that the internal structure of libraries helps to define libraries as organizations apart from the parent organization of which they are part. This internal structure is also hierarchical in nature, and displays similar structure to that described by Mintzberg's conceptual description of an organization (Stueart & Moran, 2002). Libraries can have an organizational structure that includes a strategic apex, usually represented by a director, and a middle line which can be made of a single position or multiple assistant directors. The library typically has a technostructure, as represented by departments such as the human resource department, which is in charge of functions such as payroll, among others. It also has support staff, as evidenced by some sort of business office in which budgetary decisions and other administrative functions are concentrated. Finally, academic libraries have an operating core that can include departments such as circulation, reference, and technical services. Other departments that may exist in different libraries, and that belong to the operating core are special collections, preservation, and extension. (Stueart &Moran, 2002).

In addition to the structural components, it is important to note that in academic libraries, it is a common practice to have subject specialists (Martin, 1996). Most of the time these specialists work in the reference department and are professionals who possess expert knowledge and academic training in a specific field. They can provide various services related to their specific field of expertise, including the acquisition of materials, or cataloging or reference services, pertinent to that one area of knowledge. Academic libraries themselves consist, in some cases, of sub-groups of specialized subject libraries which form a unified system that is part of the same administrative unit (Martin, 1996), although they may also exist as a single central library housing multiple subject specialists under the same roof. On some college campuses, separate specialized academic libraries have appeared, in response to the growth of the campuses themselves. This situation has made it more convenient to have smaller, specialized libraries housing materials for specific disciplines or areas of study, in close proximity to the academic college of the specific academic disciple, rather than having a single central library building further away from the rest of the academic buildings on campus (Martin, 1996).

The personnel in both of these library structures are mostly standard, and include a librarian with an area of expertise or specialization who selects the materials and acquires them, or sends the discipline-specific orders to the acquisition department. This specialist might also be responsible for providing reference services to the users who are interested in conducting searches of the collection in specialized topics. Additionally, most academic library systems have separate collections and buildings for specialized areas of research, such as law and medicine. These units function as semi-autonomous library systems, and seem to serve as a testament to the trend toward federal decentralization that has impacted many organizations (Martin, 1996). This tendency is also reflected in some of the biggest multi-campus institutions, which have separate library systems for each of the individual campuses. In some cases, these subsystems can function as consortia, especially when it is advantageous for the units to be considered as one multi-part whole, as is the case of resource acquisition and sharing (Evans & Zarnosky Saporano, 2005).

Crisis

Currently, another important factor that should be considered in an exploration of academic library administration, aside from the library's organizational structure, is the effect of dealing with crisis. A crisis is a "perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders, and can seriously impact an organization's performance, and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2010; p. 477). According to Penrose (2000), a crisis occurs when an event increases in intensity, interferes with normal organizational operations, devalues a positive public image, and has an adverse effect on a business's bottom line. Crises are typically caused by an interacting set of human, organizational, and technological failures, combined with regulatory, infrastructural, and preparedness-related shortcomings in the organization's environment (Penrose, 2000). Despite this encompassing definition of crisis, not every single issue the organization faces should be approached as a crisis; instead, this term should be reserved for certain events that are severe enough to have the potential to seriously affect an organization (Coombs, 2010).

Crisis communication scholars indicate other related components of crises, including risk and reputation management. Risk is defined as "things, forces, or circumstances that pose danger to people or to what they value" (McComas, 2010; p. 462). Risk assessment by issues management involves the systematic application of procedures designed to influence the resolution of an issue. If the issues management efforts fail, then there is a great chance that a crisis can occur (Coombs, 2010). Because the concept of a crisis is perceptual and ambiguous, any neglect on the part of the organization when addressing any issues that violate expectations can have negative outcomes (Coombs, 2010).

The main threat an organization faces when dealing with a crisis is how it can affect its reputation. An organization's reputation is defined as the aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organization is meeting stakeholder expectations, based on past behavior

(Coombs, 2007). Stakeholders are any groups of people that can affect or be affected by the behavior of an organization (Angle et al. in Coombs, 2007); the concept can include an organization’s employees, investors, donors, clients, and even society in general. For an organization facing a crisis, the loss of its reputation should be the main consideration when choosing how to deal with the crisis event. According to Coombs (2007), an organization’s reputation is recognized as an intangible asset which provides advantages for the organization, such as attracting top employees, creating competitive advantage, and even improving financial performance. All of these advantages ensure the organization’s continued existence and development, a desirable outcome regardless of the organization’s mission or its category. This means that stakeholders will determine whether or not an organization meets their standards of success, which implies that an organization can face great problems if there is a gap between its performance level and the expectations stakeholders have for it. Crises provide stakeholders with reasons to think negatively about an organization, especially if it is perceived that the organization improperly handled a crisis.

Organizations build what has been referred to in the literature as “reputational capital” by creating quality relationships with stakeholders, and thereby enhancing the regard stakeholders have for the company. (Coombs, 2007). This point is essential when considering organizational crisis management because an organization that is seen favorably by stakeholders before a crisis will be more likely to have a strong prost-crisis reputation. When considering the reputational capital of academic libraries, it is important to keep in mind the importance it has among its stakeholders, especially the library patrons. The results of a recent report by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) reflect that most college students who participated in the study have a positive view of their academic library, a finding which indicates that libraries have a good reputation among college students (OCLC, 2006). The academic library also enjoys a generally good reputation among faculty members (Ithaka S + R, 2010).

According to Coombs (2007) the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization's reputation, or the reputational threat if it is not addressed, will depend on three factors: initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relational reputation. In other words: how much control did the organization have over the actions that caused the crisis, how often did the organization face the same conditions that caused the current crisis in the past, and what was the organization's reputation prior to the crisis?

An important part of crisis management in organizations is crisis communication, which refers to what an organization says after a crisis hits (Coombs, 1999). Effective crisis communication is considered to be essential for organizations and involves different aspects. Communication occurs throughout the entire crisis management process, and its applications can be divided into two categories: managing information and managing meaning (Coombs, 2010). The process of managing information includes the collection and analysis of information, and the dissemination of knowledge both among the crisis management team, and the stakeholders (Coombs, 2010). Managing meaning is related to the organization's efforts to shape how people perceive the crisis situation, including stakeholders both inside and outside the organization. Both of these processes are present at different stages of the organizational crisis: before the crisis (pre-crisis), during the crisis, and after the crisis has taken place (post-crisis) (Coombs, 2010). Each stage of the crisis has a particular characterization in the literature, and also entails different ways for the organization to cope with the events that happen at each stage.

Knowledge Management

The concept of knowledge management originates from the idea of the post-industrial society. It suggests that, beginning around the 1970s, economies around the world became more knowledge-intensive than in previous historical periods, in which the main focus was the production and manufacture of physical goods (Hislop, 2010). This phenomenon can be observed in the increasing focus put on the production of services by organizations, which scholars argue is a much more knowledge-intensive process than the production of tangible goods (Hislop, 2010). Because of this, work in organizations today focuses more on the development and application of abstract, theoretical knowledge than on manual work, and knowledge is seen as the main generator of wealth in societies (Hislop, 2010). Thus, an impetus was provided for the beginning of the study of knowledge in organizations and its many applications.

There are many definitions of knowledge, and the study of what the meaning of knowing is, has occupied many pages in the study of humanity for centuries. According to Ichijo (2004), knowledge has been defined by the scholars Nonaka and Takeuchi as “justified true belief.” Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) define knowledge as “the individual capability to draw distinctions, within a domain of action, based on an appreciation of context or theory or both” (p. 979). However, Davenport and Prusak (1998) provide a very comprehensive definition of knowledge that also takes into consideration the role of knowledge in organizations:

> …[Knowledge] is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories, but also in organizational routines, processes, practice, and norms (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; p. 5).

The typical representation of knowledge is that of a hierarchical progression from data to information to knowledge (Boisot, 1998; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). In this representation, “data” is the most basic form, and is defined by Boisot as the “discrimination between physical states that may or may not convey information to an agent” (Boisot, 1998; p. 12). The concept of data is mainly characterized as a property of things; furthermore, data exist independent of agents. These agents in turn can be human beings, animals, or machines, and they can also be collectives of people rather than individuals, which is the case of organizations (Boisot, 2002).

The next step in the progression of knowledge is “information.” This term refers to the subset of the data residing in things, which activates an agent when it is filtered by the agent’s perceptual or conceptual apparatus, establishing a relationship between things and the agents themselves (Boisot, 1998). Others define information as a perceived difference between the agent and its environment (Case, 2002). When information is processed and adapted by an agent, it becomes knowledge that resides in the agent itself. According to Boisot (1998), knowledge is a set of probability distributions held by an agent, which orients its actions. These actions are consolidated or modified as new information is attained. Because of its nature, information can be observed directly by recognizing the differences in the environment and establishing their connections to the agents. Contrary to information, knowledge cannot be observed directly, and it can only be inferred according to the actions of agents (Boisot, 1998). As Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) explain, the progression from data to knowledge, specifically when dealing with human agents, is defined by the level of judgment involved. Data require minimal human judgment, while knowledge requires maximal human judgment. The inability to observe knowledge assets directly, and the internal mechanisms involved in the acquisition of knowledge, makes these kinds of assets hard to study. Because of this esoteric quality of knowledge, the study of knowledge will require the researcher to seize knowledge assets indirectly in order for them to be studied and measured.

The most important supposition about knowledge for the study of knowledge management is that this is not only a personal phenomenon but a collective one as well. This principle is what makes the study of organizational knowledge possible. The principles of personal knowledge adopted in the study of knowledge management are grounded on Michael Polanyi's writings. Polanyi (1966) proposed that all knowledge is personal knowledge, since it is manifested not only at the collective level, but also at the individual level, since a person has to apply his/her personal judgment in order to "know" something (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001).

However, the study of knowledge management requires knowledge to have a collective component, which is the ability of groups of people to "know" something. Knowing starts with individuals acquiring a knowledge asset and then sharing it with other members of the group or organizational unit. Knowledge management scholars have focused their studies on this duality between personal and collective knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, Choo, 1998).

Most of the knowledge management literature available today is based on Nonaka and Takeuchi's seminal work *The Knowledge-creating Company* (1995). The base of their writings is Polanyi's categorization of knowledge into two types: explicit and tacit. Nonaka and Takeuchi's model represents knowledge as in a constant flux between personal and collective knowledge, a condition which is essential for the creation of knowledge in the organization. This knowledge in turn will produce innovation, and then innovation will produce competitive advantage, which allows organizations to succeed in their markets.

According to Takeuchi and Nonaka (2004), explicit knowledge is that which "can be expressed in words, numbers, or sound, and shared in the form of data, scientific formulas, visuals, audiotapes, product specifications, or manuals." (p. 3) Explicit knowledge can be "readily transmitted to individuals formally and systematically" (Takeuchi & Nonaka, 2004; p. 3) They define tacit knowledge as "highly personal and hard to formalize, making it difficult to communicate or share with others … deeply rooted in an individual's actions and bodily experience, as well as in the ideals, values, or emotions that they embrace" (Takeuchi & Nonaka, 2004; p. 4). At the same time they emphasize that knowledge is neither purely tacit nor purely explicit, but both.

In *The Knowledge-creating Company,* Nonaka and Takeuchi present a model of knowledge synthesis in which the knowledge creation process is represented as a spiral. In the model, knowledge moves through four different phases: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. According to this model, sharing and creating tacit knowledge is done through direct experience (socialization) or by articulating tacit knowledge through dialogue and reflection (externalization), as well as by systematizing and applying explicit knowledge and information (combination), and by learning and acquiring new tacit knowledge in practice (internalization).

Chun Wei Choo (1998) added another type of knowledge in organizations that he called "cultural knowledge." This includes the structures, both affective and cognitive, that are used habitually by organizational members to perceive, explain, evaluate, and construct reality. These structures take the form of shared beliefs, norms, and values which form the framework in which organizational members construct reality and assign value to new information. Reality is not only an individually-defined phenomenon, but also one that can exist as part of a community. Under this assumption, it is not only the employee in an organization who has tacit knowledge, but his/her entire department. This is reflected through the department's accomplishing several tasks using diverse tools. A successful team is one that knows how to work together as a whole to have a full body of knowledge (Badaracco in Choo, 1998).

Cultural knowledge is a form of "organizational knowledge."According to Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001), organizations are three simultaneous entities: concrete settings within which individual action takes place, sets of abstract rules in the form of propositional statements, and historical communities. Based on the triadic nature of organizations, organizational knowledge is then defined as the developed capability of organizational members to draw distinctions in the process of carrying out their work in particular concrete contexts, by enacting sets of generations (propositional statements) whose application depends on historically-evolved collective understandings and experiences (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001).

The study of knowledge in organizations, from the generation of new knowledge to the dissemination and use of existing knowledge, to the application of the lessons learned from past mistakes, and best practices brought forward from past successes in an organization, has given rise to the field of knowledge management. However, the complex nature of knowledge, its place in organizations, its flow among group members, and its duality as both a personal and collective phenomenon, have made the definition of knowledge management a very complex undertaking. According to Dalkir (2005), knowledge management is:

> The deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization's people, technology, processes, and organizational structure, in order to add value through reuse and innovation. This value is achieved through the promotion of creating, sharing, and applying knowledge as well as through the feeding of valuable lessons learned and best practices into corporate memory, in order to foster continued organizational learning (Dalkir, 2005; p. 337).

Today organizations are still looking for ways to improve their products and services in order to gain a competitive advantage. According to Hubert and O’Dell (2004), knowledge management is a systematic process to identify important knowledge, create a space and system for people to share what they know and create new knowledge, capture, collect and manage best practices and useful information in a form for future use, and transfer information, knowledge, and best practices to others who can use it today.

As previously stated, the focus of knowledge management is to bring competitive advantage to the organization by incorporating both best practices and lessons learned into the organizational memory. A best practice is generally understood to be a change in a particular process that brings about an improvement that is good enough to replace this best practice with the already existing process by disseminating it throughout the organization (Dalkir, 2005; Hislop, 2010).

On the contrary, lessons learned are experiences of failed processes that should also be widely disseminated throughout the organization in order to prevent the repetition of the mistakes that caused the failures, while taking advantage of innovative processes that might have worked in it (Dalkir, 2005). As previously mentioned, knowledge management implies that organizations have a memory, in the form of the collectivity of its employees memories, and it is in this memory that an organization’s past mistakes and successes should be incorporated in order to promote the creation of innovation by building upon best practices while avoiding making the same mistakes that are now remembered as lessons learned.

Competitive advantage allows organizations to survive in their environment and allows organizations to foster constant adaptation to environmental conditions. The focus on competitive advantage is generally independent of the organization’s status as either a for-profit or a not-for-profit organization. Competitive advantage is generally understood to be any process, service, or product, regarding which an organization outperforms its competitors. A competitor is an organization offering similar products or services to the same target markets. At the same time, the new focus on knowledge in organizations is rooted in the idea that the real value of an organization is only known when the organization has accounted for its intangible assets, including the knowledge possessed by its employees. These intangible assets comprise what is referred to as an organization's "intellectual capital." In post-industrial societies, intellectual capital is believed to account for the bulk of an organization's capital, or value-producing resources (Hislop, 2010).

Intellectual capital not only represents an organizational member's ability to perform a task based on his/her knowledge, but also the idea that these employees can communicate with others who might have more or superior knowledge of how to perform a certain task or process. Some scholars argue that the best way to learn in an organizational environment is within the social groups that exist within it; this process of learning includes employees' developing skills and gaining awareness of concepts from one another (Brown & Duguid in Prentice, 2005). When employees in the organization learn from each other, and the organization benefits from this knowledge exchange, and it is understood that the organization as a whole has learned. One of the main objectives of knowledge management in organizations is to achieve the status of a "learning organization."According to Peter Senge (2001), the learning organization is one "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge in MacMorrow, 2001). As seen in this statement, the concepts of knowledge and learning in organizations are closely related and considered inseparable from one another, since organizational learning processes include the embedding of individual and group-level learning into the organization's structures and processes (Hislop, 2010).

Another important factor in knowledge management is the creation of innovation, which implies the deliberate modification of an organization's products or services, along with its processes or structures (Hislop, 2010). Innovation is tightly related to the process of knowledge creation which has been previously explained in the description of Nonaka and Takeuchi's *Spiral of Knowledge* model. Here the understanding is that innovation and learning start at the individual level, but are integrated into an organization only when shared with other members of the organization. However, knowledge management scholars also acknowledge that it is really difficult to share tacit knowledge, because it is highly embedded in the personal experiences of individuals and is contextual in nature (Hislop, 2010). Many scholars argue that tacit knowledge is more valuable to the organization based on the high degree of difficulty involved in externalizing and sharing it (Choo, 1998; Dalkir, 2005; Hislop, 2010). However, there is also the general belief that all knowledge starts as tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The study of knowledge retention and transfer in organizations is centered in three main tools: knowledge repositories, communities of practice, and storytelling (Dalkir, 2005). Knowledge repositories are places where explicit knowledge is stored and can be accessed by different members of the organization. These knowledge repositories can be high-tech databases with search engines designed to navigate its contents, or they can be as low-tech as a set of organized folders filed in a cabinet. The main point is that they contain explicit knowledge put together by organizational members to be used by their colleagues. Communities of practice, on the other hand, are an informal forum where people can exchange tips and generate ideas

(Dalkir, 2005). The organization can have its own community of practice in the form of the social networks formed by its employees, or the employees can belong to a community of practice with members of other organizations that share the same profession or an exposure to common problems and an interest in the search for solutions (Dalkir, 2005).

Knowledge capture and transfer in organizations, especially of tacit knowledge, can also take place through stories shared among employees (Dalkir, 2005). An organizational story is understood to be "…a detailed narrative of management actions, employee interactions, and other intra-organizational events that are communicated informally within the organization" (Dalkir, 2005; p. 86). Organizational storytelling is the focus of this study and will be more thoroughly discussed in another section of this work, but it is generally understood to be one of the best ways organizations can employ to encourage knowledge sharing among its employees, and also to capture and codify tacit knowledge (Dalkir, 2005; James & Minnis, 2004).

Knowledge Management in Libraries

The term *knowledge management* has a dual meaning when applied to libraries, because of the library's historical role as repositories of human knowledge, in addition to their nature as organizations. As Martin (1996) points out, libraries have been referred to as bodies of "organized knowledge" and the study of libraries throughout history is unavoidably linked to their role in the evolution of human thought and knowledge. This duality blurs the line between the library as a repository of explicit knowledge, represented by the items housed in its buildings and in the non-physical materials they make available to the populations they serve. Further, the library as an organization has intellectual capital in the form of tacit knowledge that its employees share by exchanging ideas and developing best practices, in order to optimize their services to the target population.

Generally, when the term “library” is referred to in the knowledge management literature, it is done so as a repository of knowledge, and when a “librarian” is mentioned, it is in terms of being a helpful aide in the knowledge management processes, because the librarian is already familiar with the organization, and its records, and how to guide people effectively to the information needed to expand their knowledge (Prentice, 2005). In recent years, there has been a move to identify knowledge management as an important component of the discipline of information science that can be applied to other kinds of organizations, but not necessarily to libraries as organizations. This literature also has a heavy emphasis on information technology’s (IT) role in knowledge management in general, but not necessarily with library and information science as a whole (Chalmeta & Grangel, 2008; Wu & Lin; 2009). However, libraries can utilize knowledge management processes and practices to enhance their own management practices and improve their services. Although this subject is less frequently mentioned in the library and information science literature, which favors a view of the library as a repository of knowledge and the librarian as a guide to the organization trying to navigate through the glut of information, there is a strong need for libraries to explore their role as an organization, and to advance their own organizational goals and objectives.

The process of applying knowledge management principles in libraries as organizations is further complicated when the attainment of the organizational goals and objectives is considered. As previously discussed, Martin (1996) warned that libraries serve as auxiliaries to larger organizations and, because of this, there is limited identification with the organization and a stronger cohesiveness with other libraries in terms of structures and organizational arrangements. this viewpoint also includes an observation that libraries are guided more by “ambiguous goals rather than clear cut objectives” (p. 12). This statement represents a greater issue for libraries in any context, since one of the most important principles of knowledge management is that it focuses on helping the organization to reach its goals; therefore, it is essential for organizations to have specific and clear goals in order to put processes in place that can help them achieve these goals (Dalkir, 2005; Hislop, 2010).

The focus of this study is on the academic library as an organization, and knowledge management as the collection of practices that can enhance this kind of organization's ability to reach its goals and objectives by operating strategically. The term "knowledge management" is used to depict the creation and flow of knowledge among the people in the organization, with a focus on tacit knowledge, while recognizing that the creation and maintenance of explicit knowledge repositories is a part of the activities, but not necessarily the most cogent. For this research, the manifestation of knowledge management in libraries is definitely not limited to the management of explicit knowledge alone.

Definition of Knowledge Management

For the purposes of this study, knowledge management is defined as the strategies used in an organization as a formalized attempt to improve its services or products through its employees' strategic and purposive acquisition of capabilities and development of already existing talents. Following this definition, an organization can incorporate different methods of knowledge capture intended to identify skills and information regarding the work environment, that employees perceive as pertinent to their jobs and influencing the product of their labor. The most important factor regarding these methods of knowledge capture is to make knowledge available to employees by means of sharing relevant information, which might help other employees to develop capacities and talents that match those of the original source.

Knowledge management's main concern is to help the organization create an environment in which this information is free-flowing and available to all employees. It is in this free flow and availability of information where the organization’s efforts toward product or service improvement lies; information availability and flow signifies the beginning of a process of knowledge creation that adds value to the final product. It is through the knowledge management processes that the organization can foster an environment in which innovation and constant improvement are the main goals. This in turn will make the service or product more desirable to clients than those offered by competitors.

Organizational Storytelling and Related Narratives

Organizational storytelling has been mentioned in the literature as an important way for organizational members to share knowledge. In order to study the role of storytelling as a tool for knowledge transfer in organizations, it is important to have a clear definition of what organizational storytelling is, beginning with the basic nature of stories and storytelling itself. Storytelling is a complex term that becomes muddled with other forms of verbal communication. This study focuses on stories in organizations, particularly the meanings the stories shared in the organization have for the employees working there. The organizations studied here are academic libraries, with a focus on the librarians who work at the reference desk.

Stories do not exist on their own; they are a form of human communication and sense making that is so basic and inherent to the human condition, that studying stories and making differentiations about them is a very complex endeavor. This study considers stories to be a type of narrative. This implies a hierarchy of terms related to the concept of “stories,” and in which the term “narrative “is the most inclusive, higher order. The main concern in this work is with the verbal delivery of stories in organizations. There are other forms of narrative that are closely related to storytelling, which are also important to define, especially in organizational settings.

These terms include: narrative, anecdote, rumor and gossip.

Storytelling

Many authors point out that there are differences between stories and narratives; however, most of them use the terms interchangeably (Czarniawska 1998; Czarniawska 1999; Gargiulo, 2005; Musacchio Adorisio 2009). This may be because of the difficulty of defining one term without using the other. Despite this complication, the literature on organizational storytelling contains a few instances where authors have written a detailed definition of the term "story" or "storytelling," which helps to differentiate this concept from other forms of organizational communication. Some examples include those provided by Yiannis Gabriel and Barbara Czarniawska. According to Yiannis Gabriel (2000), stories are:

> "…*narratives with plots and characters, generating emotion in narrator and audience, through a poetic elaboration of symbolic material. This material may be a product of fantasy or experience, including an experience of earlier narratives. Story plots entail conflicts, predicaments, trials, coincidences, and crises that call for choices, decisions, actions, and interactions, whose actual outcomes are often at odds with the characters' intentions and purposes* [emphasis in the original] (Gabriel, 2000; p. 239)

Other definitions of the term "story" are less elaborate but still express the ubiquity of stories in all facets of human life. As a matter of fact, human beings have been referred to as *homo narrans* because it is argued that the act of telling stories is inherently human and it is what really distinguishes us from other animals (Fisher in Brown, 2006). For Czarniawska, stories are defined simply as "…a plot comprising casually related episodes that culminate in a solution to a problem" (Czarniawska, 1997; p. 78). As we can see from these definitions, examples of stories are found throughout human communication, with their ubiquity being the main reason that coming to a specific definition is so difficult.

Based upon a review of the provided definitions, this research employed Gabriel's definition of "story". Therefore, storytelling will be defined as the verbal exchange of stories by a narrator or storyteller delivered to an audience. An audience can be defined as a single individual aside from the storyteller himself/herself, or any number of people that happen to listen to the story. For this study, the author uses the term "addressee" when referring to the audience, in order to avoid other implications that the "audience" term might have. The term "addressee" is favored by some scholars, especially those in the area of narratology (Toolan, 2001). This definition excludes written stories and interpretations of images as stories, as well as pantomime and other forms of nonverbal communication which an audience might interpret as a story. This incorporation of terms brings us to organizational storytelling, which is the phrase used for this study to refer to stories told in an organizational setting, that relate to work experiences within the organization or are pertinent to them. This concept includes scenarios where the story occurred somewhere else. What matters for the purposes of this study is that the stories are somehow related to the work performed by the employee, or to the organization itself.

Taking these into account, organizational storytelling includes personal experiences that the members of an organization share among themselves that are pertinent to the organization they are part of, or are part of a previous work experience outside of the organization. The story has to apply to their current job. Because of this, personal anecdotes that relate to family members, pets, or other entities with which the member of the organization has had experience, but that do not pertain to the organization, are to be excluded from the study's definition of organizational storytelling.

For this research, in the organizational context, storytelling is treated as a specific type of narrative. As identified by Gabriel (2000), organizational storytelling includes both fictional and factual accounts, as well as factual accounts that have been exaggerated by the storyteller. It is important to stress that, in this study, stories need to possess a plot that includes many types of issues with which the characters must deal, including: conflicts, predicaments, trials, coincidences, and crises that call for choices, decisions, actions, and interactions. Therefore, stories must have certain components, which include: a plot, actors, a sequence of events, and an outcome or closure (Connell, 2006). For this study, some components, such as a wider recognizable context, are not considered essential to establish the presence of organizational storytelling. However, other components are considered essential, including plot, actors and a sequence of events.

Gabriel's (2000) definition differs from Boje's (2001) definition of organizational storytelling, in that Boje is a strong advocate of 'ante-narrative', which he defines as a word that has a double meaning

> …as being before and as a bet…Story is an account of incidents or events, but narrative comes after and adds 'plot' and 'coherence' to the story line. Story is therefore 'ante' to story and narrative is post-story. Story is an 'ante' state of affairs existing previously to narrative; it is in advance of narrative…'ante' is a bet, something to do with gambling and speculation. (Boje, 2001; p. 1-2)

The previous definition for ante-narrative not only seems too inclusive, making almost any form of communication in any setting a form of storytelling, but this definition also contradicts the definition of storytelling provided, in the sense that it reverses the relationship of narrative and story. In Boje's definition of ante-narrative, he sees a narrative as a story which includes plot and coherence, making narrative a more exclusive form of story, and by extension, a more inclusive form of communication. This differs from the definitions of narrative and story provided by Czarniawska (1999), Gabriel (2000), Abbott (2008), and Herman (2009) which make "narrative" a more inclusive term than "story," i.e., in the cases where the terms "narrative" and "story" were differentiated instead of being used interchangeably. For this study, the definition favored by the majority of scholars examined here is preferred, and thus, "narrative" is treated as a wider term than "story." "Story" is the primary term used in the study, more in accordance with Gabriel's definition (2000). Despite this seeming contradiction in terminology, the use of ante-narrative is reserved for cases of stories which lack one of the main components of a story, including plot, actors, sequence of events, and closure.

Boje further mentions two important variants of "story": glossing and terse stories. Glossing, according to Boje, is akin to a marginal note or a digression that can exaggerate, simplify, and shift the meaning of the experience when the story is retold (Boje, 1991). A terse story on the other hand is the shortest form of story, and it is manifested when somebody utters an expression such as "You know the story!" to other members that have shared an experience, or to whom the story is familiar. This familiarity with the experience creates a context in which there is no need to repeat the entire story in order to come to an understanding of its current application to a new situation. Another use of terse storytelling, other than avoiding unneeded repetition, is to prevent the "…story line from being too well understood by the wrong people" (Boje, 1991; p.114). In this case, the terse story becomes a defense mechanism directed towards those who might misinterpret the reasons to share the story.

Narrative

In terms of definitions, "story" and "narrative" are two terms that feed off each other; therefore, defining one without the other seems impossible. For example, Gabriel's definition of "story" includes the term "narrative" in it, yet Porter Abbott (2009) defines "narrative" as, "The representation of a story (an event or series of events)" (p. 237). This differs slightly from a previous definition which specifies narratives as "…representations of events or series of events…" (Abbott, 2009; p. 13). The author further clarifies that others prefer to use the term "action" instead of "event."

Nonetheless, the important distinction here is that a narrative is different from a "description" or an "exposition" or an "argument" (Abbott, 2009). Most organizations, for example, distribute annual reports that provide shareholders and stakeholders with information regarding the history and performance of the organization during the previous year, and expresses this current performance using number figures representing the organization's performance and administration. These figures are provided for the most recent year next to those for previous years, in order to put the most recent results in context. It would be a mistake to call these reports a "narrative" since they are not representing an event or a series of events, but instead are giving a description of the current state of affairs of the organization. These reports address the organization's status both within itself, as is the case of items related to the mission and vision statements and inventories, and also in comparison to its competitors and environment, in the case of external assessments such as an analysis of the competitive threats to the organization.

Herman (2009) provides a more inclusive and significantly more elaborate definition of "narrative" than Abbott by defining it as:

> (i) a mode of representation that is situated in –must be interpreted in light of – a specific discourse context or occasion for telling. This mode of representation (ii) focuses on a structured time-course of particularized EVENTS. In addition, the events represented (iii)

> introduce some kind of disruption or disequilibrium into a STORYWORLD, whether that world is presented as actual or fictional, realistic or fantastic, remembered or dreamed, etc. The representation also (iv) conveys what it is like to live through this storyworld-in-flux, highlighting the pressure of events on (in other words, the QUALIA [what is like] OF) real or imagined consciousness undergoing the disruptive experience at issue. (Herman, 2009; p. 189)

A common point of both definitions is that a narrative involves events, and these events are represented rather than personally experienced or witnessed, since personal experiences or acts witnessed do not become narratives until they are represented to an audience through various media. Another important factor in this definition is that the veracity of the events represented is not an issue to be concerned with, as narratives can be factual or fictional, or even dreamed. The important factor, as suggested by the definition, is that an event becomes a narrative when it is situated in an occasion for telling. This means that an event is not a narrative until it is shared with an audience, or an addressee.

For the purposes of this study the definition of “narrative” that is followed is closer to Abbott’s, and is a more inclusive term than storytelling. Narrative then will be a representation of an event, regardless of the media used, in order to represent this event to an addressee. This means that a narrative can be represented as a single picture, a song, or a logo, among other media. Narratives can also mean thoughts experienced by an addressee when piecing together the events depicted in a painting, as well as the words written on a piece of paper, as long as they go beyond mere description of an entity or situation. In this regard, it is evident that stories are narratives and narratives can be stories, although this kind of mutual relationship will not always be the case.

Anecdote

According to the dictionary an anecdote is, “A short account of an interesting or humorous incident” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2006). In his doctoral dissertation entitled *Text and Contextual Conditioning in Spoken English: A Genre-Based Approach*, Guenter A. Plum asserts that:

> While the anecdote is a narrative, relying on the realization of usuality [sic] to create the tensions which sustain it as narrative, it is also one which must be judged ‘interesting,’ i.e., the definition allows for the narrator’s intrusion on the experiences represented in text by addition of attitudinal meanings (Plum, 1988; p. 256)

In other words, an anecdote is a type of narrative made amusing by the narrator’s inclusion of his/her experiences in the story, which is what Plum refers to as “intrusion.” This intrusion into the narration is a reflection of the narrator’s attitudes towards the situation and the characters, as well as the meanings they have for himself/herself. The main purpose of an anecdote is to entertain the listener, and not explicitly to inform; however, this seems to be one of the effects anecdotes have.

In this regard, sociolinguists have distinguished anecdotes in the workplace from reports by defining the main function of an anecdote as entertainment, and its main characteristic as its “tellability,” which is the characteristic a story has that makes it funny, amazing, fascinating, or peculiar. These characteristics contribute to the success a story has in holding the audience’s attention, and in transcending the potentially devastating question faced by any storyteller: the audience’s judgment of “so what?” (Marra & Holmes, 2004). A workplace anecdote is mostly considered as a diversion from the topic, which must have a business context, so in order to survive, these anecdotes need to be short and eminently “tellable,” as Marra and Holmes concluded (2004).

Another characteristic of workplace anecdotes is that they are not required to be distributed in the organizational environment, whereas a report is a required form of communication in organizations. This characteristic accentuates the need for anecdotes to be tellable, and to be richer, more dramatic, and have a stronger impact on the audience than reports do (Marra & Holmes, 2004).

Despite the amusing characteristics that anecdotes must have, David Snowden (1999) places them in the same category as organizational storytelling, and classifies them as "purposeful stories." Snowden claims that anecdotes:

> … have been common elements to effective leadership throughout the ages. Such stories purport to be (and sometimes are) descriptions of isolated incidents in the history of an individual or company that powerfully convey a set of values and/or desirable actions (Snowden, 1999; p. 32).

The usefulness of anecdotes as storytelling, as explained by Snowden, lies in the use of the story as a model for good or bad behavior within the organization. When the leaders of an organization are the ones using their personal anecdotes, this creates a means by which they establish a common identity with the audience, and might also signal a change in attitude (Snowden, 1999). This is congruent with the purposes of organizational storytelling, which indicate that one of the main uses for it is to communicate corporate culture (James & Minnis, 2004).

The anecdotes considered in this study are those regarding the organization, and must be related to the work itself and the everyday functions within the organization, rather than the individual's personal life. This is an important distinction to make since an amusing story centering on the employee's cat or spouse might convey a message about the person's private life, but will seldom contribute to the organization's knowledge or performance.

Rumor

Rumors are found in all levels of human social activity, including the workplace, politics and communities. Rumors are bits of information that are of interest to people, but are not accompanied by secure standards of evidence, and are spread for possible belief (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002). Because of the lack of secure standards of evidence, the information carried by rumors can be partly or completely untrue.

According to some researchers, (Allport & Postman, 1945; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007a; Rosnow, 1991) rumors are a mechanism used by human beings in order to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity, while they attempt to make sense and manage risk in different contexts (DiFonzo & Bordia; 2007a). This characteristic distinguishes rumors from idle talk, since it elevates its category and turns it into a human coping mechanism for situations that are out of the person's control.

DiFonzo (2008) distinguished rumor from hearsay, by referring to one of rumor's main characteristics: doubts about its veracity, even when the rumors are put forth in order to be believed. He states that, the expressions of rumors are usually preceded by the phrase, "I don't know if it's true, but I heard that…" or some equivalent qualifier, while hearsay is passed along as fact. Rumors also differ from news by the lack of secure standards of authentication. News can be verified and authenticated; rumors cannot (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002). Rumors are about important or significant topics that tend to stay away from individual private affairs and are communicated in order to be believed (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002).

Rumors tend to alter outcomes by explaining events, setting the foundation for stable causes that allow us to make predictions, and serving as an advanced warning system, and even altering judgments of fairness (DiFonzo, 2008). In an environment where information does not flow freely, rumors are employed by people trying to make sense of events taking place and to explain those events about which they do not have enough information.

Uncertainty is not the only condition necessary in order to spawn a rumor. The individual has to perceive uncertainty regarding something he/she, or the group he/she is part of, cares about and has the potential to be affected by. This is called the law of rumor, or the tendency of rumors to abound in proportion to the uncertainty or ambiguity of a situation and the importance of that topic (DiFonzo, 2008). Therefore, an event that seems distant, or that addresses a topic perceived to be unimportant, is not going to generate rumors.

Gossip

As with rumors, information classified as gossip also involves bits of information that are of interest to people but, in contrast to rumors, most of the literature classifies gossip as "idle chat" (DiFonzo & Bordia; 2007a). For example, Nicholas DiFonzo (2008) defined gossip as "idle – and typically derogatory – social chatter about an absent individual's personal or private matters" (p. 61). The literature expounds the tendency for human beings to gossip and attributes it to a need for building and maintaining personal relationships and, in some cases, increasing social status within a group. However, gossip has a more recreational purpose than rumor, and it is seldom related to the need to deal with uncertainty. Most writings dealing with gossip do so from a religious, moral, or ethical standpoint, primarily because of the slanderous and derogatory turns that it can take, and also because the secretive nature of gossip makes it a very challenging subject to study (Jaeger, Skeleder, Rind, & Rosnow, 1994).

In its defense, gossip provides a valuable purpose, gathering essential information on the social environment, allowing individuals to better interact with other members of a social group (DiFonzo, 2008). Gossip is also characterized as a way to satisfy curiosity and understand our own lives, through an exchange that does not necessarily involve reciprocity, but that is enjoyed between people who know each other well enough to find a common enjoyment in the discussion of a subject (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994). These characteristics imply that gossip, contrary to rumor, is a form of interpersonal communication, since individuals would only engage in gossip with people that they know fairly well, and would not engage in gossip with someone they dislike, distrust, or do not feel safe with (DiFonzo, 2008).

Organizational Storytelling: Purposes and Characteristics

The current literature on the purposes of storytelling in organizations focuses on multiple areas, including: sense-making, communication, learning/change, politics and power, and identity and identification (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Other studies offer other applications for storytelling in management which include: exemplifying corporate culture, modifying and controlling behavior, problem solving and decision making, change management, strategic planning, leader image enhancement, knowledge transfer, and training future leaders (James & Minnis, 2004).

The main idea gathered from the literature is that organizational storytelling is purposive storytelling (Boje, 1991; 1995; Gabriel, 1991; McCarthy, 2008; Musacchio Adorisio, 2009; Orr, 1996; Tyler, 2007). Contrary to other forms of storytelling, the main purpose of organizational storytelling is not to entertain an audience; but rather to educate, persuade, warn, reassure, justify, explain, or console (Gabriel, 2000). However, the fact that a story is entertaining does not make it any less purposive, or any less effective at getting a message across. Researchers have studied the purposeful telling of stories in organizations, and the advantages that stories have when management is trying to get certain messages across to others in the organizational setting.

In one of the most important studies of organizational storytelling in the literature, Julian Orr (1996) examined the stories shared among photocopier technicians and how these stories helped disseminate knowledge, by allowing other technicians to identify certain complex problems that would arise when trying to fix a machine. The storytelling events described by Orr are spontaneous rather than planned; however, he found them to be the main contributors to the knowledge base of the repair technicians.

David Boje (1995) explored The Walt Disney Company's use of organizational storytelling to craft an image of the organization, while at the same time acknowledging the unflattering picture of the organization painted by the people who worked there. These stories are not generally known to the public, but present an image of a paternalistic organization, directed by a controlling leader, who enriched himself and built an empire while conducting an enterprise plagued by discrimination, violations of worker's rights, and exploitation of talented individuals who were later fired when they voiced their opinions and tried fighting for their rights.

In yet another study, Boje (1991) followed employees at an office supply firm by sitting in on meetings. He identified the main purposes of the stories told at those meetings as: sense making, introducing change, and gaining political advantage. A more recent study by Musacchio Adorisio (2009) revealed that storytelling is a very important factor in the employee's life in the organization, as stories provide a central contribution to the process of creating collective memory that can later impact the organization's decision-making process. More in line with what had previously been suggested by Boje (1991), Musacchio Adorisio found that organizational stories are not organized into coherent narratives, but instead are more like ante-narratives or fragments of narratives, imbued with a new order and a new configuration to the story.

McCarthy's (2008) study of storytelling and organizational commitment tried to determine if the stories told by employees at all levels of hierarchy and tenure signaled the degree of unity that members of an organization built in order to cope with bad times in the organization. He found that storytelling is highly related to organizational commitment and that stories continue to play an important role in conveying those values and complex messages among employees across organizational boundaries (McCarthy, 2008). A recent study by Tyler (2007) examined how human resource practitioners in the for-profit sector apply storytelling as a means of advancing organizational goals. This form of storytelling is referred to as "strategic storytelling," and is identified as a different form of storytelling than that aimed at entertaining or healing. Tyler (2007) defined strategic storytelling as that which has "clear strategic relevance or connection to an organizational goal" (p. 576).

Other studies of organizational communications center on more informal forms of storytelling, such as anecdotes or the dynamics and advantages of organizational storytelling. For example, in their ethnographic study of anecdotes in the workplace, Marra and Holmes (2004) concluded that anecdotes are digressions in the core business interaction. Contrary to reports, anecdotes are typically brief, they occur at the margins of business meetings or at discursive boundaries within meetings, and they are relatively infrequent when compared to business reports. These findings cement the status of anecdotes as de-formalizing agents within organizational communications; however, the study does not indicate what social function this form of communication can have (Marra & Holmes, 2004).

The focus on the dynamics and advantages that organizational storytelling provides to organizations include a way to communicate knowledge among employees (Orr, 1996), to create a corporate image (Boje, 1995), to act as coping mechanisms for employees (Gabriel, 1991) and to create shared collective memories that can influence the way an organization reacts to crises, makes decisions, and advances organizational goals (McCarthy, 2008; Musacchio Adorisio, 2009; Tyler, 2007). However, not all organizational stories produce beneficial effects. For example, Geiger and Antonacopoulou (2009) found that organizational stories can cause organizational inertia. The authors found that organizational narratives construct a self-sustaining frame of reference which prevents organizations from questioning the principles underlying its past successes, to form what they called "blind spots," This in turn leads to the organization's silencing or ignoring any divergent narratives that might emerge, which potentially limits the capacity of organizations to deal with change, specifically adapting to a changing environment (Geiger & Antonacopoulou, 2009). This situation can affect how organizations adapt and respond to volatile environments, as their survival can be jeopardized by inertia.

The study of organizational storytelling presented by the scholarly literature has focused on the study of for-profit organizations, whereas this study explores the implications in academic libraries as organizations. The rapid pace of change to which libraries have had to adapt in the last couple of decades is only a sign of things to come. At issue is the impact on libraries as a result of these rapid changes in technology and demographics, which are possible risks that if not addressed soon have the potential of becoming crises.

Past crises faced by the academic library as an organization, and the stories available from that time, might aid in how librarians approach new crises that have not fully manifested in the current environment. This can happen because the people telling the stories may use past anomalies or crises to help make sense of current events in the organization, through the sensemaking discourse regarding the anomaly or crisis. The stories might be shared among academic library employees themselves, as stakeholders in the organization, as well as with people from outside the organization. According to the research available, it is very likely that the organizational members will talk about an event in order to make sense of it.

Academic Library Issues

The general consensus in the literature seems to indicate that the technological changes that have occurred in recent decades have led to a generation of college students who expect greater amounts of information to be provided instantaneously, and via more convenient means of access. Scholars are now focusing on the new generation of college students who are making use of the academic library, by examining the students' habits, needs, and expectations (Deitering, 2008; Kaufman, 2007; Markgren, 2008; Williams, 2008). Most identify the challenges these technologically-savvy library users represent for the librarians who must meet the patrons' needs. Williams (2008) suggested that college students today need more space, because they are more likely to learn collaboratively. As such, they want to have access to experts and tools that will aid in their tendency to multitask. These new kinds of library patrons also require computer and network connectivity in order to have access to electronic resources, as well as to printing equipment (Brown in Williams, 2008).

Academic libraries are left with the challenge of serving these high demands in a world of shrinking budgets and retirement surges that may cause a drain of the most experienced library personnel (Curran, 2003). Academic librarians working on the reference desk are the "face" of the academic library to many of these students. They are the ones who deal with the information needs these clients have; and they are the ones charged with finding answers in an up-to-the-second fashion, since the technology has changed at a pace that does not leave room to absorb the purpose of a request or to provide much guidance other than that which was directly requested by the client (Kaufman, 2007). In addition, these requests come in through multiple media, and avenues such as ‘live chat’ and e-mail, as well as by other traditional media such as phone calls and face-to-face interviews (Cassell & Hiremath, 2006).

It is important to consider the challenges academic libraries are facing today in this rapidly changing technological environment. In addition, internal changes are also occurring, from patrons’ expectations of services and products offered, to changing demographics that threaten to drain the field of its most experienced and valuable employees. These changes are causing libraries to face multiple risks that, if not properly addressed, can develop into crises. Therefore, in addition to an examination of the study of academic libraries’ storytelling, this study considered the perceptions of crisis among internal stakeholders, particularly the academic librarians who represent the face of the library and are in direct contact with its patrons. Because many of these employees have a vested interest in their organizations as a result of their long-term careers, they are committed enough to earn an advanced degree in order to further their careers in these organizations. By improving our understanding of how these employees perceive the situations their institutions are facing, their perceptions of what a crisis is, and its possible manifestations in their organizations, we can better comprehend how to deal effectively with these situations. In this way, we can help to ensure a future for academic libraries in which they are able to better adapt to changes while providing optimum service to their target population.

By addressing these basic issues, it is the hope of this author that a new way for libraries to respond to this fast changing environment can be identified and will aid in providing an alternative way by which libraries can be organized to better meet the new challenges. By refocusing their efforts away from physical capital to human capital, libraries will be able to develop their human resource base, which will further enhance the library’s ability to continue providing services that their clients demand. By specifically focusing on the transfer of knowledge in an adcademic library setting, this research paves the way for a new area of inquiry focusing on academic library management. Addressing this gap in the literature moves the study of libraries as organizations toward a closer alignment with the study of other types of organizations.

Chapter 3

Methods

Paradigmatic Suppositions

Any scientific inquiry starts with the researcher's views and beliefs regarding the most basic components and assumptions about the world, and how these beliefs manifest themselves regarding the phenomenon of interest. Guba (1990) suggests that any set of beliefs that guides action is a paradigm. A paradigm can be characterized by the way its adherents view the world, in terms of their ontology, epistemology, and methodologies, or by the inquirer's beliefs regarding the nature of what is to be known, what is the relationship of the known and the knower, and what are acceptable ways to go about the process of exploring it (Guba, 1990).

Some scholars suggest that there is no such thing as a qualitative paradigm, only multiple views that coincide in certain points (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Other researchers have described a paradigmatic approach opposite to that of the current dominant post-positivistic paradigm. Some refer to this alternative approach as the humanistic paradigm, while some refer to it as constructivism (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). While using different terms, they all refer to the basic belief that individuals are active participants who create their own world rather than just reacting to environmental signals (Morrison, Haley, Sheehan, & Taylor, 2002). Others go even further by assuming that reality is a human construction based on individual perceptions, and as such there are therefore multiple realities, each existing in each person's mind (Guba, 1990). Therefore, researchers must seek to find shared meanings among individuals which allow the discovery of patterns of human behavior (Morrison et al., 2002).

This paradigm subscribes to a relativist ontology, because it recognizes realities to exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, which are based on individual experience that can be socially constructed and depend on the individual (Guba, 1990; Gurwitsch, 1974). Constructions and realities according to the constructivist paradigm are also considered to be alterable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This paradigm is also subjectivist in its epistemology, indicating that the inquirer and the inquired are fused into a single entity, so that the findings are the creation of the interactive process of the two. This paradigm also views objectivity as impossible, because of this fusion between both the inquirer and inquired (Guba, 1990). This paradigm also tends to favor a hermeneutic and dialectic methodology, since it attempts to depict individual constructions in order to compare and contrast them, in order to come to terms with the confrontation of the constructions of others (Guba, 1990).

Theoretical Orientations

This study follows a phenomenological philosophical approach to the study of organizational storytelling in academic libraries. The main principles of phenomenology are based on Husserl's observation of the world as "directly and immediately given in human experience" (Gurwitsch, 1974; p. 6). This principle inspired Alfred Schutz (1967), to develop the phenomenological approach to the study of the social world around us. According to phenomenology, the most important way to understand the world is to focus on how people develop a world view by putting together their experiences in order to make sense of the world around them.

As suggested by Patton (1990), as far as humans are concerned, the only way that the world exists is through the individual experiences of the people living in it; it is not an objective reality outside of the person, but only that which is put together by many persons, as members of social groups, in terms of their experiences and meanings. Phenomenology implies that the only way to understand experience is by seeing it through the eyes of the people experiencing it, including the shared experiences of members of society. Therefore the most important thing to know is how people interpret the world (Patton, 1990).

This study relies on the theory of the Social Construction of Reality as developed by Berger and Luckmann (1967). According to this theory, knowledge is socially constructed through the mutual interactions of people in social groups by processes of institutionalization. Institutionalization is based on the repetition of an activity, which turns it into a pattern, with the main purpose of freeing individuals from the constant process of decision making (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Berger and Luckmann (1967) maintain that certain activities are repeated by certain types of actors, in certain kinds of circumstances, so that, over time, these activities become roles that are assigned to specific actors, in what the authors call a "reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors" (p.54).

The typifications of habitualized actions are available to all members of a social group and the relationship among institutional typifications and the actors in institutions is a reciprocal one, with individual actors and actions typified in the institution (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This implies that certain actions will be performed by certain actors. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), actions become crystallized by repetition until they attain a reality of their own outside of the human actors who created them; that is to say, they become objectivated. Language is the primary tool used by humans to construct reality and also to spread knowledge - or more specifically, what is believed to be relevant knowledge - according to institutionalized roles. Language supplies the rules that mediate the exchange with reality within any social space (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The knowledge transmitted in society, which helps solidify the institutionalized roles is also what creates the typology of knowers versus non-knowers. The knowledge gathered by knowers is not necessarily believed to be part of the stock of knowledge at hand that is available to anyone in society, but the general understanding that there are knowers in the social group is. This implies that individuals in society are not required to be knowledgeable on everything, but they are expected to be able to locate the knowledgeable individual who is, according to their need and role in society. Based on these basic principles, Berger and Luckmann (1967) stress that knowledge is socially constructed and is situated at the core of any study of society.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) further posited that knowledge in society is the product of legitimation processes, as well as of objectivation processes. In legitimation, the products of the processes of objectivation are assigned new meanings. These complex processes are considered important in the context of this study, because it provides four process levels. The first level provides objectivated meanings explanation, but also provides a second level of legitimation. This addition of a second level includes several explanatory schema, including narrative forms, such as proverbs and moral sayings, which are transmitted in poetical forms, including legends and folk tales, among other forms of storytelling. The third level creates differentiated bodies of knowledge in legitimation, and level four creates symbolic universes through which realities, other than those of everyday experience, exist.

Considering these knowledge levels, it can be argued that the act of knowing is a socially constructed reality, to which the entire organization responds. Some organizational scholars propose that the mere act of organizing implies generalizing; or the subsumption of heterogeneous particulars under generic categories (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). These categories are then created through processes of institutionalization of roles that are explicitly defined according to the assignment of types of activities and types of actors who create rules by which different actors in the organization must abide (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001).

Research Design

The study of organizational storytelling in the academic literature is relatively recent; most studies found date back to the 1980s and 1990s. Of particular interest are the studies conducted in the mid to late 1990s on organizational communication by David Boje, Julian Orr, and Barbara Czarniawska. Literature on library administration, on the other hand, is scarce. Most of the titles available in this area come from the business management literature with very little, if any, application as to how libraries themselves are managed, and little if any consideration given to libraries' particularities, both functional and structural. In addition, the literature that is available on the subject is mostly anecdotal, with a heavy emphasis on case studies (Howze, 2003; Kisby & Kilman, 2007; Winston & Hoffman, 2005). When knowledge management in libraries is discussed, the main focus is on the library as a knowledge center and its role in advancing the knowledge creation process in the rest of the organization (Davanport & Prusak, 1993; Wagner-Döbler, 2004). Rarely is the library studied as an organization in terms of how it can advance by helping its people share their experiences and knowledge.

Because of the existing gap in the literature this study provides exploratory research into the use of organizational storytelling among academic librarians working the reference desk, and the meaning these stories have for the participants. Qualitative research methods are an ideal tool for conducting exploratory research in areas of social studies where little work has been conducted before, including areas of study with few definitive hypotheses, when little is known about the phenomenon or when there is no guiding theory (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Patton, 1990).

Exploratory research is very valuable when developing specific categories or relationships regarding a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Past research relating to organizational storytelling in the business, organizational science, and organizational psychology fields have mostly employed qualitative research methods, such as participant observations, textual analyses, and interviews. In order to explore the phenomenon in the academic library environment, this research will also follow the principles of qualitative research.

The main purpose of this research is to understand and explain the phenomenon of organizational storytelling in academic libraries. This is accomplished by describing how organizational storytelling occurs in the day-to-day operations of academic library settings, and understanding the reality of the people experiencing the phenomenon, in order to contribute the groundwork that can help expand and advance studies in the field of library and information science. It is important to emphasize that this study operates under an emergent design model in order to remain flexible and allow an open exploration of new patterns discovered; which are subject to further inquiry in future research endeavors. This principle aligns with the goals of qualitative research of isolating and defining categories during the process of the research (McCracken, 1988) and focuses on the central role that context plays. It also allows for the exploration of multiple realities rather than the researcher's own construction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Method

This study employed the long interview method, based on McCracken's (1988) supposition that no other research method provides the researcher with the opportunity to go into the mental world of the individual. This allowed the researcher to examine the participant's logic and to identify the categories through which the participants see the world. This research method addresses practical implications since it reduces the concerns regarding privacy of the participant and time limitations of the researcher (McCracken, 1988).

According to Kvale (1983), the qualitative interview is centered on the life-world of the participant by seeking to understand the meaning of phenomena in the participant's world. The information gathered from this interview process is descriptive in nature, which allows the researcher to focus on specific themes and situations without including the researcher's own presuppositions. However, this lack of predetermined ideals causes the results to be ambiguous at times. In order to respond to this ambiguity, interviews evolve from one participant to another; allowing the same participant to change his/her descriptions and the meanings a theme has for them, because of the personal nature and focus the research takes (Kvale, 1983).

This research method allows the researcher to place emphasis on principles the researcher may define, including the need to recognize the role of the researcher as a research instrument, creating a balance between obtrusion and unobtrusion, manufacturing distance among the researcher's beliefs and the participant's account of the world, whether to use a questionnaire or not, and the relationship between researcher and participant (McCracken, 1988). The generally accepted practice of dealing with such issues include staying away from the typical expectations of quantitative research and devoting conscious effort to seeing the world in a new light by questioning, probing, and allowing participants to express their thoughts and feelings while keeping the interview on topic. Aids help to accomplish the research goals of the long interview, particularly the use of a questionnaire.

The principle of the researcher as instrument in qualitative research refers to the use of the researcher's personal experiences, imagination, and intellect to assist in the long interview process (McCracken, 1988). Qualitative research also requires the researcher to use techniques of observation to assist in identifying and categorizing data patterns of association and making assumptions about the data being analyzed. All of these processes are hard to mechanize; thus the qualitative researcher must become an instrument of research. In its simplest form the self-as-instrument is employed when the researcher matches his/her own experiences, ideas or actions to those described by the participant. However, when there are no matching experiences, the researcher then engages in imaginative reconstruction, which includes holding all the propositions made by the interviewee to be true and then attempting to reconstruct the participant's world as seen through these truths (McCracken, 1988).

The main goal of qualitative research is to discover the meanings associated with each person's reality; therefore, it is important that the research remains unobtrusive and nondirective. However, because the researcher has to ask questions to help guide the discussion towards a specific subject, his/her interaction with the participant compromises the unobtrusiveness of the research. According to McCracken (1988), the success of an interview in capturing the participant's world is dependent on the interviewer's ability to find a balance between the unobtrusiveness of the qualitative research and the obtrusiveness of their guidance of an interview. He suggested that the researcher should avoid "active listening," because this process can destroy any good data that are obtained by the long interview method, as it feeds the participant their own words back via the interpretation made by the researcher. This results in an interview that reflects the researcher's own terms and experiences instead of that of the participants. McCracken (1988) suggested that the researcher should prepare a series of 'prompts' in order to help control the interview and guide it towards a specific subject of interest without leading the participant.

Another point McCracken identifies as important when employing the long interview method of research is that of creating a critical awareness of matters with which the researcher might be too familiar, or “manufacturing distance” (McCracken, 1988; p. 23). It is important to point out that the other side of manufacturing distance is that of allowing research participants to manufacture distance themselves. This stems from an individual’s beliefs becoming his/her assumptions, which in turn become his/her reality. Because of this perception of reality by the participant, it is important that the researcher helps participants recover their beliefs and actions from their “taken for granted state” (McCracken, 1988; p. 23). This can be accomplished by “violating expectations” through surprise, humor, and stimuli. Stimuli can include the use of props, including visuals.

The use of a questionnaire is described as indispensible by McCracken (1988). He further posits that the use of a questionnaire will ensure that the researcher covers all the main points in the same order with all of the participants. In addition, a questionnaire aids the flow of the interview by scheduling the prompts necessary to manufacture distance, establishing channels for the direction and scope of discourse; thereby avoiding an interview that is too chaotic while also allowing the researcher to pay full attention to the participant’s testimony (McCracken, 1988).

One way to focus the participant’s testimony is to establish a relationship between the researcher and the participant. Some factors that can influence this relationship include the way the participant perceives the researcher, including the institutional affiliation, the project description, mode of dress, and patterns of speech (McCracken, 1988). These factors can be controlled when the researcher strikes a balance between formality and informality. This reminds the participant that the researcher is a scientist performing research and asking questions in order to satisfy professional curiosity, while at the same time reassuring the participant that the researcher is not distant about or indifferent to the complexities of the respondent’s life world (McCracken, 1988).

Employing long interviews as a research method has some limitations, including that it is time consuming and less conducive to keeping the participant's privacy and anonymity, especially when compared to other research methods, such as the survey research method (McCracken, 1988). However, long interviews provide the participants with the opportunity to engage in sociality with "the perfect conversational partner," in which they are allowed to state a case otherwise unheard of. This process allows the participant to experience a kind of catharsis (McCracken, 1988). This experience might occur because an interview is a conversation between two people who have an interest in the theme under discussion. A catharsis can also occur because it might not be a common experience to hold such a conversation with someone who is interested, sensitive towards, and seeking to understand what one experiences (Kvale, 1983).

Another perceived limitation of qualitative research in general is that the results of the research are not meant to be generalizable to different cases or populations, because of its heavy dependency on context (Guba & Lincoln in Patton, 1990). This is further addressed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) by appealing to qualitative research's transferability instead of its generalizability. Their main argument is that the original researcher cannot know where the transferability of research results might be sought, and because of this, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide sufficient descriptive data to enable the possibility of other researchers' making similar judgments which will allow the transferability of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Interviews in qualitative research aim at obtaining descriptions of the participant's actions, and the reasons that underlie these actions (Kvale, 1983). Specifically for this research study, the long interview method of research afforded the unique opportunity to create a descriptive meta-narrative with possible organizational implications that helps one to better understand the world as it is experienced by highly-educated individuals performing a complicated yet rarely recognized job (Martin, 1996), in a field which is itself seldom researched in the information science literature.

Sampling

As with all qualitative research, this study employed purposeful sampling, selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study, and those from which the researcher learned the most about the main issue according to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). The main idea behind purposeful sampling in this study was to select the appropriate information sources (or participants) to explore meanings (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002) and to detail the multiple specifics that enrich the context in which the storytelling takes place (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because of its purpose, sampling in qualitative research focuses on maximizing the information that can be obtained through the collection of data, stops when there is redundancy in the information gathered. The main purpose of the research for this study was to uncover the meaning of organizational stories for reference librarians, also referred to in the literature as "information service." Reference services in libraries include assisting library patrons with queries stemming from personal curiosity, a class assignment, or any problem that moves the person to gather information to find a solution for it (Cassell & Hiremath, 2006). Today, this kind of service is not limited to face-to-face interactions, but also includes providing assistance through a variety of media, such as telephone calls, electronic mail, and live chat.

This study employed criterion sampling; participants were chosen based on the fact that they possessed an important criterion for the research being conducted (Patton, 1990). That criterion in this specific research was that the participants were reference librarians working in large academic institutions in the southeast region of the United States, belonging to the

Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL). Librarians who participated in this study worked at the reference desk as part of their duties. Participation in this study was voluntary and included a small compensation in the form of gift cards.

Participants

The participants in this study were all academic librarians working in the library system of institutions who are ASERL members. This criterion includes libraries of educational institutions with doctoral degree programs in the southeastern region of the United States that meet certain requirements. The membership requirements for the parent institution include: maintaining significant research collections and services, conferring a doctorate degree in one or more fields, and spending a minimum of one-half of the mean expenditure of member educational institutions on the libraries per year (ASERL Membership Criteria, 2011).

The four institutions chosen will be identified here by the generic names: University A, University B, University C and University D. These institutions provided a good representation of the environment in which academic librarians work, with an equal representation of schools with Library and Information Science (LIS) programs among their academic offerings (as with University A and University B), as well as institutions without LIS programs (like University C and University D). The institutions were chosen by the researcher based on the list of ASERL member institutions; however, the list was modified when the researcher could not conduct the research in some of the institutions originally picked, mainly as a result of an inability to establish contact with the proper administrators by electronic mail or phone call. In this case, the institutions that were originally picked but unresponsive were replaced by another comparable institution from the ASERL member's list.

According to the census information provided by ASERL, the four institutions chosen have comparable numbers of staffed library service points, which are designated locations where staff give service to the public, and can include a number of staffed public service points in the main library and in all branch libraries, including reference desks, information desks, circulation, and reserve rooms (Association of Research Libraries, 2010). The institutions were chosen according this criterion since the ASERL member libraries vary widely in aspects such as the number of full-time employees, collection size, and populations served. However, by focusing on the number of staffed library service points, this study ensured that the number of people providing service to patrons will be similar across all four organizations.

The criteria for participation in the study included: being an academic librarian with at least a master's in library science (M.L.S.), or an equivalent degree, and working at the reference desk as part of their responsibilities. These criteria respond to the particular situation that academic librarians face in some academic institutions, where they are considered assistant professors and go through processes of selection and tenure comparable to those experienced by any other potential faculty members. It is important to note that many academic librarians have graduate degrees in other areas of study, in addition to their library and information science degree, which in the United States is a master's degree (Martin, 1996). This level of education, and the option of tenure track positions, distinguishes librarians from paraprofessionals, or library assistants, who are well educated individuals who do not have a master's degree in information sciences, but work in libraries completing tasks that are more complex and more demanding than those of a clerk (Martin, 1996). The researcher provided each participant with a $20 gift card as an incentive for their participation in the study.

The total sample size was twenty librarians: four at University A, five at University B, six at University C and five at University D. This small sample size provided enough insights into the life-world of academic librarians working in the reference desk, and allowed the researcher access into the cultural categories and assumptions through which they construct their world (McCracken, 1988). Interviews were conducted until redundancy, or the point of saturation was reached; that is, until additional interviews were not providing new information, but rather just confirmed the information gathered from previous interviews (McCracken, 1988; Morrison et al., 2002; Patton, 1990). According to the literature on qualitative research methods (McCracken, 1999; Morrison et al., 2002) a sample of twenty librarians is enough to reach redundancy, which is usually accomplished anywhere between the 8th and the 15th interview.

The researcher began the process by establishing communication with the head of libraries for each of the institutions chosen and informed them of the purposes of the study and the fact that people at their institution were going to be contacted by the researcher in order to recruit them for the study. The initial contact with the directors or deans was performed by electronic mail (See Appendix A). However, telephone calls were made when some of the heads of the library did not provide an answer within seven days of sending the initial request. In order to facilitate the process of identifying qualified participants for the study, the researcher requested that a list to be provided with the names of potential participants. Most deans referred the researcher to either a research or reference department director, who then provided the names of those people who fulfilled the criteria to participate in the study. The researcher then picked from the list provided taking into consideration the areas of specialization of the candidates. The researcher contacted the potential participants and recruited them for the study.

The participants were recruited through electronic mail contact stating the nature of the research and asking if they were willing to participate (Appendix B). Their electronic mail addresses were obtained through their institutions' web page or were provided by the department directors in their list of potential participants. Most of the chosen participants contacted the researcher within hours or days of receiving the electronic mail and accepted the invitation to participate in the research. In the only case where the initial contact was not possible to be established, the researcher replaced the original participant with another one from the list provided by the department director.

Table 1. Number of Staffed Reference Points and Reference Librarians per Academic Institution

Academic Institution	Number of Staffed Reference Points	Number of Reference Librarians on Online Directory
Institutions With LIS Programs		
University A	20	9
University B	19	9
Institutions Without LIS Program		
University C	22	21
University D	17	32

Instrument

When the long interview research method is used, the researcher is believed to be the research instrument (McCracken, 1988). Because of the complexity and depth of this kind of method, the researcher is part of the research when he/she taps into personal experience, intellect, and imagination at all stages of the research process. This principle involves the researcher's treatment of the participant's answers to the questions as being 'true,' allowing the researcher to reconstruct the participant's view of the world as it is experienced by him/her (McCracken, 1988).

It is essential to capture the participant's world view in the most unobtrusive way possible. This can be achieved by avoiding active listening; allowing the participant to tell their own story in their own terms. In order for the research to conform to this principle the researcher must do as little talking as possible so as to not impose their own concepts or judgments on the participant's story, while gently guiding the participant through the discussion (Morrison et al., 2002). The right balance of guiding the participant, without using leading questions or imposing the researcher's world view, requires the researcher to exercise some control over the interview. In order to achieve this balance between non-obtrusion and control a semi-structured questionnaire was used in this research (see Appendix C). The use of this kind of interview guide ensured that the same information was obtained from a selected number of people by asking the same questions, while still allowing the researcher to remain free to build conversation, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style (Patton, 1990).

The interview guide for this research included an outline of the main issues to be explored with each of the participants. Each issue was accompanied by a set of open-ended questions meant to explore specific aspects of the librarians' experiences in their jobs at different stages. The wording and sequence of the questions varied according to the flow of each individual interview. In this regard, the questionnaire aided the research by also assisting in the process of manufacturing distance, since it is important to remember that the interview process is not a conversation between two individuals, but a research method designed to gather the most information about the participant and his/her life-world. The process of manufacturing distance is meant to ensure that both the researcher and the participant separate themselves from the culture they are immersed in and allow them to explore new implications on the subject being discussed (McCracken, 1988).

The researcher had an example of a story ready as a stimulus in case the questions used in the interview guide did not produce any or sufficient stories from the participants. The story used was *The Cat's on the Roof* (James & Minnis, 2004) (see Appendix D). In this case the stimulus was to be used as a projective, or enabling, technique in order to aid the interview process. Projective techniques are those which enable research participants to respond to questions when they do not feel able to respond or when answers are hard to access using direct questioning (Boddy, 2005; Boddy & Ennis, 2007). Projective, or enabling techniques, work by asking the respondent to react to the stimuli in the hope that they will project aspects of their thoughts and feelings through it (Boddy, 2005). The prop story was used once, with Librarian Number 8, and it served its purpose by allowing the participant to open up and talk more freely about stories shared in the organization.

All the interviews were conducted face to face in a place chosen by the participants in order to preserve a natural setting for the interview. The importance of a natural setting when conducting interviews stems from the primacy that qualitative research assigns to context; therefore, when interviewing participants regarding the meaning of job-related events and organizational stories to them, it is easier to find that connection in a natural setting (Morrison et al., 2002), such as their offices or places they prefer in the library building or university campus. The participants chose locations such as private meeting rooms, their own desks or offices, and a semi-private space at a small library café. All the participants requested to meet with the researcher within their regular work hours.

The researcher conducted the interview and preserved it for transcribing by making an audio digital recording. The interviews were audio recorded in a digital file, downloaded to the researcher's password protected personal computer, and transcribed verbatim by her. This process allowed the researcher to become more familiar with the data, which in turn proved to be very helpful in the process of data analysis (Patton, 1990). The interviews lasted an average of 49 minutes, with the longest one lasting 76 minutes (or 1 hour and 16 minutes), and the shortest one lasting a few seconds over 30 minutes. This falls within the expected length for an interview as described in the literature, which is anywhere between 30 minutes to two hours (Morrison et al., 2002).

Participant's Privacy and Identity Protection

The participants signed an informed consent form stating the purpose and the details of their participation in this study before the interview started. By signing this document they agreed to participate and recognized that as part of the study, fragments of their interviews can be used in any research documents resulting from the study. Once the informed consent forms were signed, the researcher proceeded with the interview. After the each interview was completed, the researcher provided each participant with a $20 gift card.

After the interviews were transcribed, each participant received the transcript of his/her interview in order to review and edit it. Only the texts that participants reviewed, edited, and gave permission for use were included in the study. The audio files were identified with a code name, the key to which was contained in a separate document. The researcher had exclusive access to the consent forms, recordings and all digital and paper copies of the interviews. All personal identifying information was purged from the transcript of each interview. This information included personal names mentioned, as well as the specific names of units and departments and some key administrative positions; these identifiers were replaced with generic names assigned by the researcher.

After the participants reviewed the transcript of their interview, they were asked for their approval. Each participant had the option of requesting to have parts of their transcript eliminated or reworded according to their wishes, in keeping with the participant's best interest and respecting their privacy. All audio materials related to this research were destroyed as soon as the transcription of each recording was completed. All transcriptions will be destroyed three years after the research project is completed.

Data Analysis

Once the participants approved the transcript of their respective interviews, the data analysis process began. Two coding strategies were used to interpret the data collected: the process of open coding and the process of axial coding, or "relating concepts to each other" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; p. 198); this process of research involves taking data apart, rearranging it and putting it back together in a manner by which the concepts and categories are related to each other in meaningful ways (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Dey, 1993). This additional coding process helped build a structural synthesis of core elements of the participant's experiences (Fossey et al., 2002).

The initial data analysis involved a process of open coding. According to Corbin and

Strauss (2008), this form of coding begins with a brainstorming approach to analysis by opening up the data to all potentials and possibilities. This researcher began the process of open coding with the initial reading and line by line analysis of the interview transcripts ,which enabled the development of categories through the concepts identified from the data. The first step in the process of data analysis was that the researcher treated each utterance as an entity of its own (McCracken, 1988) and extracting concepts after considering the possible meanings and examining the context carefully (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), in order to identify the natural variations and patterns in the data gathered. Then the researcher assigned codes to the concepts, creating categories based on these, and then arranging these categories into a cohesive research narrative. It is important to point out that some of the codes were assigned by the researcher based on the analysis of the raw data, while some others were provided by the participants themselves in what is referred to in the literature as "emic terms" (Patton, 1990) or "in-vivo" code (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

After reading the interview transcripts, and completing the open coding, the researcher observed an emergent pattern related to the role of the organizational stories shared by the participants. As the data were being reviewed, the researcher kept notes, or memos, in order to record the relationships among the themes that emerged from the codes created from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memos are also annotations the researcher makes about the data in order to remember anything from the first impression of the data, to link them to any themes that emerged (Dey, 1993). The researcher identified potential themes using open coding in order to distinguish real examples from the text. Then the concepts that were identified in the data and assigned codes were further grouped into categories or themes according to shared properties; i.e., the process of axial coding was performed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These categories were later expanded by dividing them into various smaller categories or collapsing them into broader categories depending on the themes that emerged from the data, as shown in figure 3.

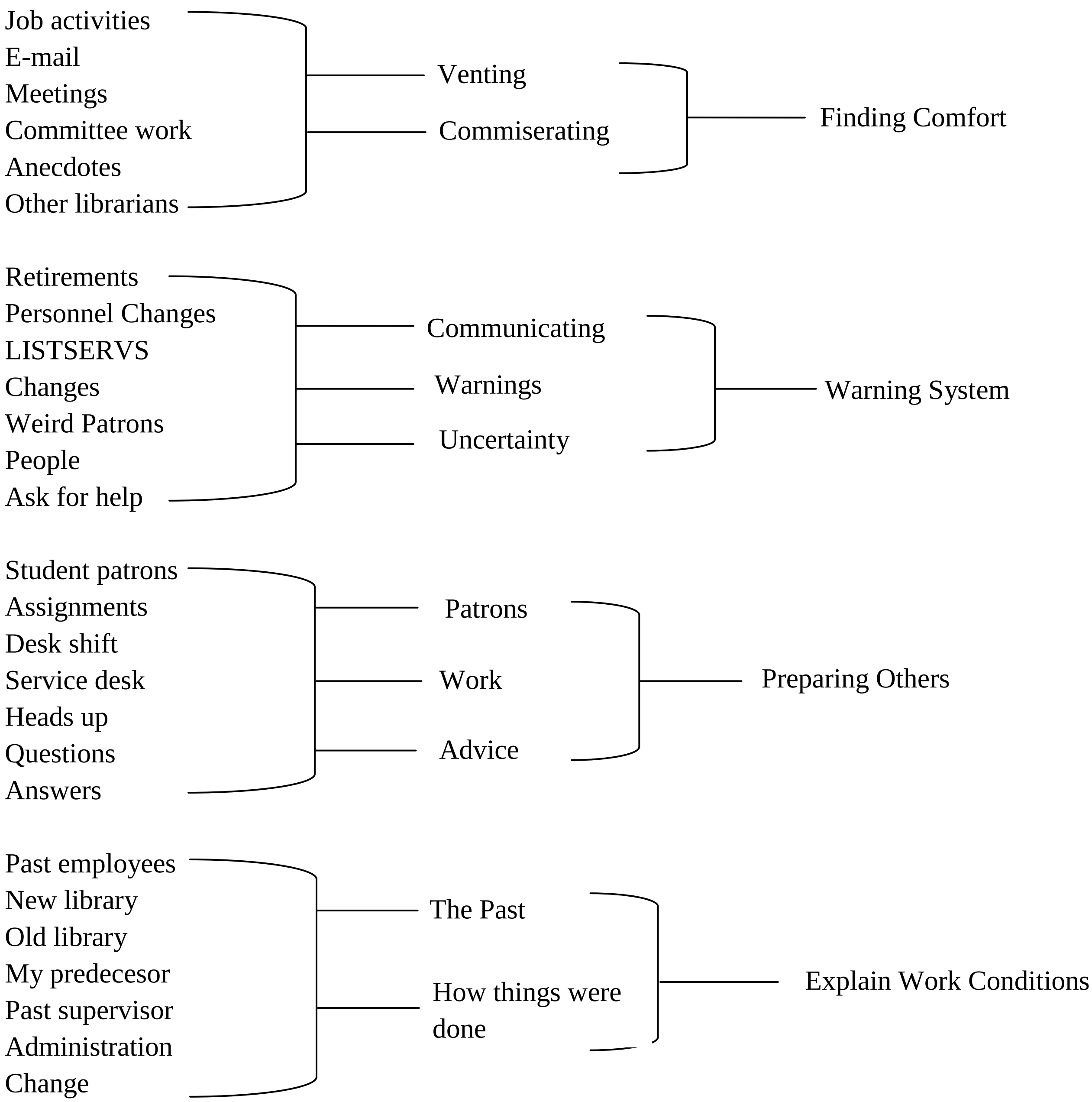

Figure 3. Coding for Organizational Storytelling Roles

The process of grouping data into categories according to the revealed patterns is also referred to as “splitting and splicing” by Ian Dey (1993). According to Dey (1993), splitting refers to the process of refining categories by subcategorizing data, and splicing refers to “combining categories to provide a more integrated conceptualization” (Dey, 1993; p. 131). For example, the researcher identified a pattern relating to the different themes in the stories shared by the participants. These themes related to the type of knowledge shared among the participants and their coworkers and emerged from the categories created out of the open codes. These codes were also grouped into categories that related to each other as displayed in figure 4. Corbin and Strauss (2008) warn that both processes of open and axial coding are closely related, and that the distinctions made are for explanatory purposes only, because the data must be taken apart and pieced back together in accordance with the related concepts.

The final results of this research were represented with verbatim quotes from the participants, arising from excerpts of the interview transcripts, accompanied by descriptive explanations provided by the researcher (See Chapter 5). This method assists in maintaining a balance between reflecting the participant’s voice and providing enough description and analysis (Patton, 1990). This balance is of particular importance since the aim of qualitative research is not to produce results that are generalizable to a larger population, but instead to understand a phenomenon in the context in which it takes place and to provide as much description as possible in order to facilitate the future application of the findings for anyone attempting to make judgments of similarity (Guba & Lincoln in Patton, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

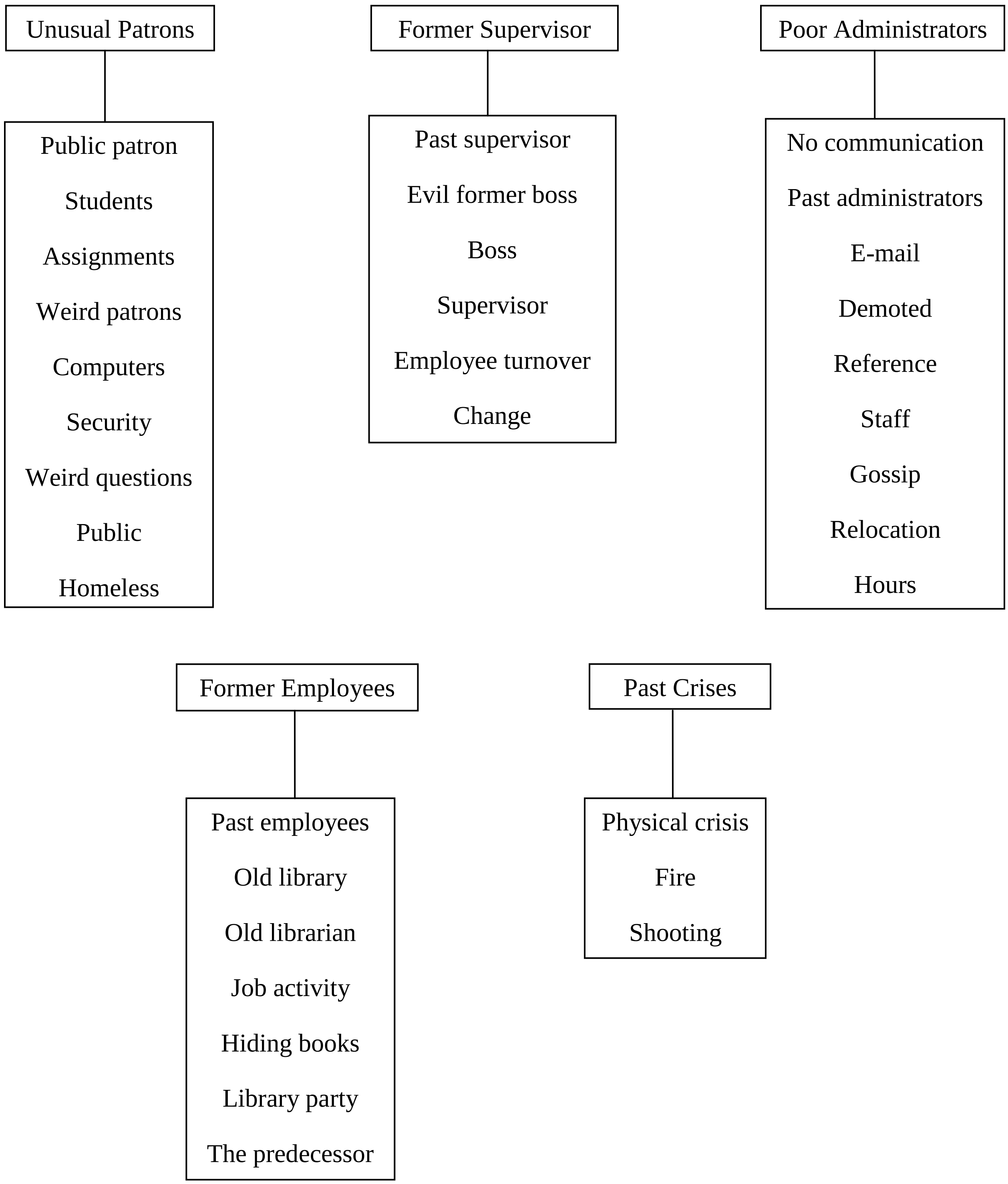

Figure 4. Coding for Organizational Storytelling Types

Ensuring the Quality of the Research

The ways in which the researcher has ensured the quality of the qualitative methods used to produce this research are not as obvious as that of other research methods. While there were not as many extensive quality control measures to assist the investigator or the audience in identifying good research methods, there are some techniques that were employed to ensure the research produced was of good quality. According to McCracken (1988), the most important criteria are to maintain clear distinctions between the purposes of qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research. Thus the main indicator of quality was accomplished by avoiding the use of quantitative research wording or interpretations of research results, to avoid mixing research methods that differ in their philosophical nature (McCracken, 1988; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It was also important to remember that the purposes of each form of research are different. The goal for qualitative research is to capture complexity and to search for patterns of interrelationship between categories, while the goal for quantitative research is for the researcher to find a very precise relationship between a limited set of categories (McCracken, 1988).

According to McCracken (1988) the main indicators of quality in qualitative research include those presented by Bunge (Bunge in McCracken, 1988; p. 50), which include:

- Exact so that there is no ambiguity in explanations;
- Economical so that an explanation doesn't force us to make unnecessary assumptions;
- Mutually consistent, so that no assertion contradicts another;
- Externally consistent by conforming to everything known about the topic and consistent with most of the important guiding principles of the social scientific style of inquiry;
- Unified as a set of organized and interrelated ideas;

- A powerful explanation by explaining as much as possible without compromising undue specificity ;
- Fertile so that it is of value outside of its narrow context.

The quality of the research also depends on the successful capture of the participant's stories and analysis of their relevance to their day to day work activities. This was achieved by ensuring that the data reflected the world of the librarians as participants in this research, not that of the researcher herself. The accomplishment of this goal can be verified by analyzing the participation of the researcher in the interview transcripts. The researcher's participation should be kept at a minimum, while optimizing the involvement of the participant; an accepted ratio is for the participant to be talking for 80 percent or more of the total duration of the interview versus 20 percent or less for the researcher (Morrison et al., 2002). An analysis of the transcripts of the interviews conducted for this research show that the participation of the researcher was kept to a minimum, mainly when attempting to keep the conversation on topic or clarifying some statements, and that the participants were allowed to express themselves.

To capture the stories of the participants in the most accurate way, while protecting their identities, an additional step of sending the transcripts to the interviewees for their revision and approval was taken. The only version of the interview transcripts used for this research were those that were properly revised and approved by the participant. This process of the member check not only helped to protect the participants' privacy, but also helped to ensure the study's trustworthiness, which contributed to the overall quality of the study by adding to the research's transparency (Fossey et al., 2002).

By interviewing academic librarians in different institutions belonging to the same peer group, the quality of the research was enhanced through the triangulation of data sources (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The integrity of the data analysis is also emphasized as an important factor in ensuring the quality of research, and this was accomplished by looking at opposing explanations (Patton, 1990; Fossey et al., 2002), especially those from existing research on the subject of storytelling in other types of organizations. This will be further considered in subsequent sections of this document.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

Some of the literature available on organizational storytelling suggests that this phenomenon has a higher level role, which is that it informs and guides employees' actions. Linde (2009) refers to this type of organizational storytelling episode as the 'paradigmatic story.' This is the type of story told in organizations that "offer[s] patterns for a model life course in the organization" (Linde, 2009; p. 141). According to Linde (2009), paradigmatic stories are told by someone with authority in the organization. These stories also have evaluations that exemplify the core values of the institution, and they are also tied to the reward system at the organization, particularly in relation to the stories of successful organizational members. In addition, paradigmatic stories are most likely to be heard at special and formal occasions in the organization, versus being only infrequently used in the day-to-day routines of an organizational member's work. These characteristics contrast sharply with the stories found in this study, which were mostly shared by organizational members at the same level, and were not centered on the organization's values, and did not show explicit connections to the reward system of the organizations featured, and were shared at any time.

One characteristic the paradigmatic stories did share with those expressed by the participants of this study was the general pattern of the story's construction. Paradigmatic stories may be told in a way that recounts idiosyncratic events or instances of general patterns that are exemplified explicitly, as with the use of phrases such as "this usually happens," or implicitly as with the conditions presented in stories which are only understood by individuals familiar to the particular organizational culture. Some of the stories presented here were understood by the participants to be instances of general patterns in the same way Linde (2009) described in her study. However, this similarity is not the only trait that is characteristic of paradigmatic stories, and the results of this study diverged in most traits, compared to those in which there were similarities with those described by Linde (2009). The findings of this study suggest that the main role of organizational storytelling among academic librarians working the reference desk is more primordial than those presented by other narratives such as ‘paradigmatic narratives’. The findings align better with a cultural understanding of storytelling than with some of the roles the literature assigns to phenomena such as strategic storytelling, or that which has a “direct link between the goals of the business and the stories” (Tyler, 2007; p. 580).

It is clear in the findings of this study that the bulk of the stories shared by participants were closely aligned with another type of organizational storytelling, which Linde (2009) refers to as the ‘narrative of personal experience.’ This is the type of personal narrative told and retold by the individual, but also includes non-personal narratives that “become part of the speaker’s personal repertoire” (Linde, 1997; p. 283). This type of story is distinguished by other forms of storytelling when it is described as not being “the product of expert storytellers that have been retold many times, but the original products of a representative sample of the population” (Labov and Waletzky in Linde, 1997; p. 282).

When participants in this study were asked about stories in their organization, the accounts provided were mostly related to spontaneous storytelling episodes of past events in the organization, shared among its members who do not have an administrative role in the organization, and was initiated in both informal and formal settings. These characteristics place the stories closer to Linde’s description than to that of other examples in the literature which are more polished, purposeful, and elitist types of organizational storytelling. I will refer to the more polished style here as structured organizational storytelling, since it requires a specific style, an alignment with the objectives of the organization and even a specific type of narrator in the form of an administrator in the role of organizational leader (Marek, 2011; Simmons, 2001; Tyler, 2007).

The only mention of a structured organizational storytelling account that aligns with the definition provided by Tyler (2007) for strategic storytelling and Linde (2009) in her description of the paradigmatic narrative, was that shared by Librarian Number 4. The account provided was a clearly negative assessment of the use of this type of storytelling by managers in organizations, although Librarian Number 4 states that it does not necessarily occur at her institution:

> I have sometimes seen library administration try to invent stories or push certain stories to try to create some sort of uhm narrative or some kind of I don't even know what the word is but some sense of something is going on or some kind of message that they want their employees to have so if you say it often enough it's going to become true and so they will tell these stories sort of imposed from the top and not really coming up from the bottom or from the sides so it's sort of an organizational, more of a formal uhm type of storytelling because you are talking about informal storytelling but this is more of a formal story that is coming down and I don't want to say propaganda necessarily but that's the word that keeps popping into my head that can be organizational storytelling can be used as sort of a propaganda tool to say, this is where the organization is going, here's a story that backs up where this organization is going.'
>
> (Librarian Number 4)

In light of the finding about the type of storytelling identified by this research, this section presents the results of the interpretive analysis of the twenty interviews, in relation to the study's three research questions:

RQ 1: What is the role of organizational storytelling in the academic library setting?

RQ 2: What kind of knowledge is being transferred through the stories shared among librarians?

RQ 3: How is the role of organizational storytelling understood by reference librarians?

The results of this study address the roles of organizational storytelling in academic libraries by examining the four main thematic categories of stories that were shared by the participants, including the purpose behind those stories, as well as the main categories of addressees for these stories. “Addressees” is the term used for those who become the learners or consumers of a narrator’s stories (Toolan, 2001).

In this chapter, the kind of knowledge that the organizational stories transmit to the addressees is identified using a classification schema created for the stories mentioned by the participants, and the librarians’ perceptions of the role played by these stories is explored. Finally, a review of the librarians’ perceptions of organizational crises and their associated narratives is provided.

Roles of Organizational Storytelling

After interpreting, coding, and analyzing the interview transcripts, the researcher identified a pattern related to the basic role of the stories that had been shared among academic librarians working at the reference desk. The roles of these stories can be grouped into four main categories: stories serving as a warning system, stories told for the purpose of finding comfort, stories told for the purpose of preparing others, and stories that explain current working conditions.

Stories that serve as warning systems tend to relate to general situations, and are mainly directed toward newer members of the organization, or those about to join the profession, and focus on making these newcomers aware of the possible tribulations that public service in an academic library can bring. For example, Librarian Number 7 explains how he and a fellow librarian are in charge of supervising the graduate assistants that work in the library, and how they tend to share stories of unsavory incidents with patrons that they have either faced themselves, or have heard from colleagues, as a way to prepare these future library professionals for what they might expect to face in their future career:

> …we share stories like these with them as well, just kind of saying 'These aren't the ideal situations and they are not always going to happen, but you get a chance to, you'll get stuff along these lines because…' I mean in a public service area you get all kinds of people, so I think it's important to share these kind of, these anecdotes with especially those people who are looking into joining the field uhm. I think it's quite pertinent for them to know what kind of stuff they might get into. (Librarian Number 7).

At another institution that does not have a library and information science program as a major, and therefore does not tend to employ graduate students in that area of study, Librarian Number 16 expressed the same idea regarding the practice of sharing stories about "weird patrons" in order to help those who are entering the profession or the organization. (It is important to note that the adjectives "weird" or "crazy" were emic terms used by the participants to describe some patrons mentioned in the stories; the researcher is using the term "unusual patrons" to refer to this category of story theme):

> …we don't want to scare them off but we want to inform them and I think that with the newer the people are the more that you want to say 'There are weird patrons.' You are going to get questions where you can't understand a word the

> person is saying. There's communication issues; or they're weird people.' You know, there are all these weird people out there and how do you handle you know, how do you handle them and do the best you can and don't be afraid, I think one of the most important lessons we can give to a new person is don't be afraid to call somebody for help.
>
> (Librarian Number 16).

The use of storytelling as a warning system is not exclusively reserved for new employees or new professionals. The data suggest that storytelling also acts as a warning system when an employee senses that a situation can be dangerous to a colleague and decides to share a story of an incident they think is suspicious in order to protect the colleague. For example, Librarian Number 10 began noticing some similarities between the way a colleague with a minor disability was treated by a former supervisor and how a previous employee had been treated the same way. She decided to let the colleague with the minor disability know what had happened to the previous employee. This story was shared as a way to warn the new person that this situation had a precedent, and that there was something of which the employee should be cognizant. According to Librarian Number 10, after sharing the story of a previous colleague:

> …I think it made him, I wouldn't say cautious, but I don't know if it would have, like there's a lot of things that might have happened that he might have just blown off but instead he knew to pay attention to them.

Organizational stories also have a purpose for people looking for comfort from fellow organizational members. Here the role of organizational storytelling is to allow the storytellers to express to their colleagues what they are experiencing, and to allow their colleagues to express their feelings of sympathy or solidarity towards the storyteller. When participants were sharing stories about stressful work incidents, some explained that they tend to share these stories with coworkers in order to commiserate or look for sympathy, but not necessarily a solution to the problem.

Storytelling allows organizational members to vent and helps the librarians talk about the more challenging or frustrating parts of their job with others. In these cases, the stories relate to the day-to-day incidents that a librarian has to face and that are not necessarily typical for people working in other areas or different professions. This category also relates to the small, everyday snags that a particular individual has experienced, but that may not be experienced by others. For example, Librarian Number 15 expressed her experience with a projector in the middle of a user instruction session:

> …I was using a projector and the projector was working and I hit the little thing that turns the projector, the lamp off briefly and then I turned it back on and it doesn't work at all and of course this is when I'm trying to explain to them the most complicated thing to use so I have to describe [it] to them…
>
> (Librarian Number 15)

This kind of story is more likely to be shared among colleagues since, as Librarian Number 15 put it "…who else is going to appreciate it other than another librarian?"

Organizational stories are also used among librarians working at the reference desk to prepare others for typical situations that they are likely to encounter. In a manner similar to the stories that serve as a warning system, the role of organizational storytelling can also be to help to prepare others for their job, but this category of stories is directed at a more basic, "every day," hands-on level. For example, librarians who have had an encounter with a particularly challenging reference question can share the story of their experience with their colleagues or mentees. This allows the story to be a means for sharing one librarian's solution with others, about a successful way to handle this particularly challenging question or situation. Acquiring this knowledge from this type of organizational story allows librarians to become more efficient and to provide more effective service to the patrons:

> …because we switch [shifts] out on an hourly basis so you know, if you know from Thursday to this Sunday you may [have]students coming and asking about this particular thing is nice to have heads up so everyone doesn't have to start fresh trying to figure out what are they asking. Particularly when it's a confusing subject.
>
> (Librarian Number 5)
>
> Well I think we all understand the nature of repetitive questions and that, why reinvent the wheel? If someone found an answer, let's share the wealth because it's a time waster to you know have six people on the desk going for the same answer…
>
> (Librarian Number 19).

This example exemplifies the principle of organizational storytelling as a manifestation of knowledge management in the context of an academic library. Here organizational storytelling is used as a vehicle for capturing, collecting, and sharing one librarian's new tacit knowledge with others in need of this knowledge, as well as developing new best practices to be used in the future, actions which promote knowledge reuse. This process has been identified as the essence of what knowledge management in organizations is designed to accomplish (Dalkir, 2005; Hubert & O'Dell; 2004).

Another role organizational storytelling can take is to explain the current working conditions. These stories usually refer to past events in the organization that have been passed along by different organizational members, even if some of the people sharing the stories did not actually witness the original events. The events themselves tended to be traumatic in nature, or at least particularly memorable, and often represented threatening situations in the work environment and for the employees themselves. For example, Librarian Number 18 mentioned a shooting that took place many years ago at his organization and how he understood a colleague's bizarre behavior resulting from that event, through the story of the events that took place:

> …one of my colleagues who's now retired… he was never in his office, he was always running here and there, he would do his work in other parts of campus always on the move, always you know, excellent bibliographer, you know nationally, internationally known for his work but you could never know exactly where he was [laughs]. What I learned was that when this man came up and he shot the director he was actually looking for [my colleague]…
>
> (Librarian Number 18)

Organizational stories in this role also help explain the way organizations currently operate, or how decisions are made in the current working environment. In this excerpt, Librarian Number 11 explained how a poor administrator's legacy affected the organization by somewhat traumatizing people working under his supervision; and how Librarian Number 11 got a better understanding of the current administrative situation through hearing the stories told by his former supervisor, who had worked directly with the poor past administrator:

> …I didn't actually pay attention to it the first time I heard the story but then you know once I started getting hired, and my career here and started bumping into the, what I call the "adminisphere" more and more then it explained a lot of the

> resistance that the, just because it was going back to the, the way he [past administrator] tried to change things.
>
> (Librarian Number 11).

The roles of organizational storytelling among librarians working at the reference desk can also be understood according to the stories' addressees. The interviews revealed that the participants share organizational stories mainly with three categories of audiences or addressees: student workers (Graduate Assistants/Student Library Assistants), coworkers, and family members (including a spouse). The data indicate a strong relationship between the role of the story and the addressee.

Many participants mentioned sharing stories with student workers both at the graduate level (at institutions where there are library and information science graduate schools), and with undergraduate student library assistants (mainly at schools that do not have graduate programs in library and information science). The role of the organizational stories told to these types of addressees is mainly centered on warning and preparing. Librarian Number 5 speaks about how she tends to share the stories with graduate assistants at the library in order to prepare them for the possible situations that they might face while working on the reference desk:

> …I would say particularly for graduate students kind of a heads up of these are things that happen you don't necessarily plan for, for probably my more experienced colleagues it's probably happened to them on one or more occasions but at least, you know, an awareness that you're not, 'cause I think that getting blindsided that's difficult…
>
> (Librarian Number 5).

The stories shared with undergraduate students working as library student assistants have the main role of warning and preparing particularly for those situations that they might encounter when they are by themselves in the library, as Librarian Number 11 explains:

> And we do [share stories] with the students actually because uhm like we tell our students on the desk that's kind of an example of the, something that you know could conceivably happen and then here's how you deal with it. Because we don't even work past 8 [pm] now, so a lot of the time is just [undergraduate] students on the desk. So kind of let them know 'Listen call the campus police and you don't get paid enough to watch some guy stab himself.'
>
> (Librarian Number 11).

Another group of addressees mentioned by the participants was their coworkers. The stories shared with these addressees ran the whole gamut of roles for organizational storytelling from warnings, to stories told in search of comfort, to those told with the purpose of preparing others. For example, Librarian Number 3 expressed sharing his experience of a particularly stressful work event with his colleagues. Librarian Number 5 admitted sharing stories about particularly odd reference desk encounters with her office mate and asking for feedback on their course of action: "I have two different office mates so yeah, usually kind of after something like that comes up you're kind of like 'Check out this wacky situation that I just had' [laughs] and you know 'What would you have done?' (Librarian Number 3). "Yeah, I did talk about it with some of uh some of my coworkers…" (Librarian Number 5).

Among the participants in this study, one of the most common groups of people they shared organizational stories with were people from outside the organization with whom they share their lives, mostly family members such as spouses or significant others. The role of the stories shared among the participants and people in this category was almost exclusively to seek comfort. There was no mention of stories being shared in order to warn or prepare, mainly because these people are not colleagues, they don't work in the field, nor are they part of the institution. These stories have a cathartic value for the storyteller, more than a specific organizational purpose.

When Librarian Number 12 was going through a tough time at work with a direct supervisor who did not approve of most of her ideas and projects, she would not share what was going on with her coworkers because "…I don't like feeling like a grouser you know, this is kind of my problem and I'll deal with it." So when queried as to whether she shared the stories during that time with anyone in the organization she noted, "Probably my husband, you know, the spouse always hears all the crap [laughs]." (Librarian Number 12).

Some participants explained how they were trying to make sense of a situation at work, so they shared the story with a family member, like Librarian Number 2 did when she shared the story with her father of an incident involving an employee, a supervisor and a nasty e-mail, even though he was not a librarian, didn't work at a library, and didn't know the people involved in the incident: "…it didn't have the same impact because you know when people know the two individuals involved it's shocking when, but yes I was talking to my dad who was an executive…" (Librarian Number 2).

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the role of the stories and the addressees. The smallest circle represents the Family/Spouse addressees, the participants in this study usually shared stories with them for the exclusive purpose of finding comfort. The second circle represents the Student Library Assistants and the Graduate Assistants that work at the reference desk (SLAs/GAs) with whom the participants tended to share stories more likely to have a warning or preparatory role, and to a lesser extent to find comfort. The biggest circle represents the coworkers, or other librarians that work at the same institution; this group of addressees got to hear stories that involved all four roles, including those that explain work conditions.

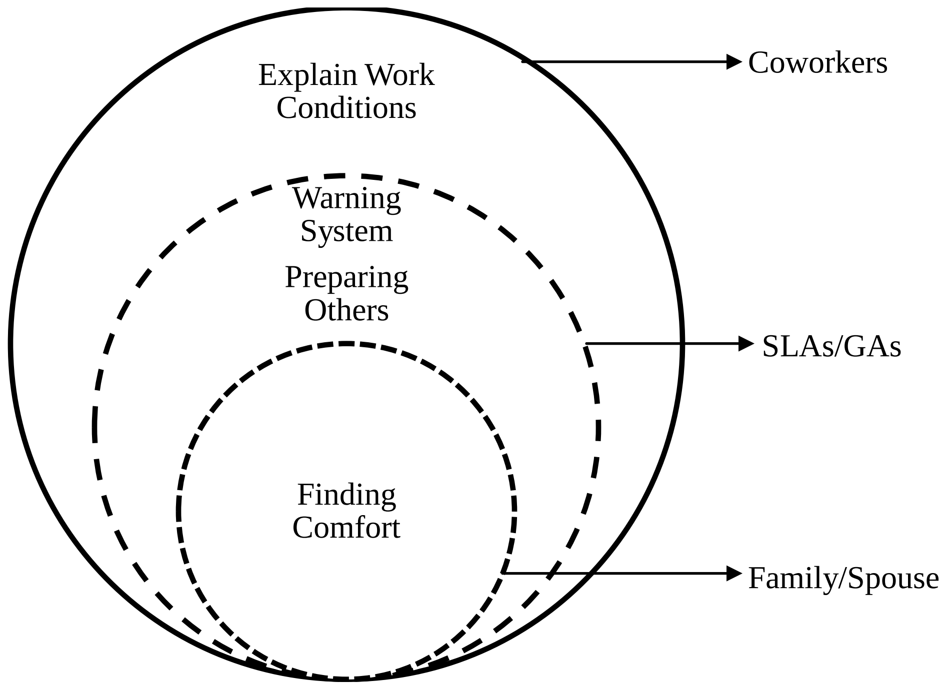

Figure 5. Main Addressees by Organizational Storytelling Role

Kinds of Knowledge Transferred in Stories

The data suggest that the type of knowledge transferred in story exchanges, particularly those that take place in an organization, is cultural in nature. This means that the main type of knowledge transferred was tacit and it centered on social interactions, historical incidents in the organizations, and unstructured work incidents, rather than specific processes or systematic job components. Most stories reflect the storyteller's ideals, values, and emotions, and deal with actions and interactions of a social nature. These characteristics are emblematic of tacit knowledge, and contrast with knowledge that is captured in writing, drawings, and formulas, the characteristics of explicit knowledge (Nonaka & von Krogh; 2009).

Storytelling appears to be the main way in which librarians working at the reference desk are introduced to their job in order to make sense of it, as well as their organization in general. The stories shared by the participants show a vast array of personal points of view, and social interactions. The stories run the gamut of topics, from day-to-day issues reference librarians working at the reference desk encounter, to conflicts within the organization, to past events that are still remembered by organizational members. These subject areas have previously been discussed by other researchers, especially by Musacchio Adorisio (2009) and Boje (1995), who described organizational stories that reflected environments in which organizational members were dealing with conflict and personal negotiation, and were a way to make sense of their organizations. The stories shared by participants in this research had five main themes through which the kind of organizational knowledge that was transferred can be understood. The five main themes identified in this study were: unusual patrons, former supervisors, poor administrators, former employees, and past crises.

Unusual Patrons

The most prevalent story theme among librarians working at the reference desk was their experienced dealing with unusual patrons. The majority of these stories referred to people from outside the organization: the dreaded “public patron” making use of an academic library. This epithet refers to either former members of the organization, such as retired professors or alumni, as well as people from the community who are not affiliated with the university but who are entitled to receive services at the library because it is part of a public, state-funded institution. The unusual patron stories dealt mostly with this latter kind of patron, although not exclusively. As Librarian Number 7 indicated “…we don’t have very many problems with students, we get a few here and there…” Librarian Number 13 explained that the stories shared among her and her colleagues dealing with student patrons relate to “…typically a sort of a student who is doing some very last minute work and needs basically the impossible … there’s an expectation of everything exists.”

Even though there were some stories shared that dealt with students, the bulk of the unusual patron stories related to public patrons being disruptive or misusing resources and services that other, more mission-centric patrons, such as those currently affiliated with the university, needed. In some cases, these situations prompted a change in policy, but in others it made the librarians aware of their institution’s shortcomings, particularly those related to proper communication and flow of information among branches of a library system. For example, Librarian Number 3 explained how the “public patron” abuse of the library’s open computer policy prompted the organization to change the policy, and how this in turn has generated a new set of challenges for the librarians:

> …it used to be all the computers were available to anybody that walked in out the street and now we've made it so that you can only, you have to sign in with your student log in and password, and so there's only a few computers and so that recently people have been trying to come in and dominating those computers and uh sitting all day long and doing things that are not scholarly work [laughs] …
>
> (Librarian Number 3).

In other typical instances, the librarians were involved in a situation with a patron, only to find out later that the person had been banned from another branch of the library system, but the organization did not have a policy or the necessary media to alert its other branches of the situation. This provoked a sense of outrage and heavy criticism of the organization among the participants, as exemplified by Librarian Number 11 in his interaction with a disruptive patron, "…on a security level there's a real disconnect between the buildings, because we didn't even know that that guy was banned over at [main library]…"

Sometimes these public patrons generate problems when they procure services that require a lot of time and resources for what the librarians perceive as their mere curiosity, or to satisfy a personal need for information that is unrelated to conducting research or scholarly work. Many of the librarians interviewed for this research find this kind of patron to be one of the hardest to deal with in their day-to-day job. Many expressed feelings of discomfort and dread having to spend part of their work shift finding information that appears to have no particular purpose. This is clearly stated by Librarian Number 7:

> …usually this person just has weird questions, they're not always stuff that we like to work on because not always they're not questions you necessarily want to talk about. Like one time she [public patron] asked me about the most common

> chemical that's used in cooking pots because her pots were getting black too fast, and I mean that is, it's research so I know to try to point her in the right direction but it's not really academic research by any means and that's not really what we're trained and taught to do.
>
> (Librarian Number 7).

In other situations these unusual patrons cause dangerous situations in the library. For example, an alleged arson incident at one of the organizations participating in this study was started by a 'public patron.' The fire caused significant damage to part of the collection and the building; which had to be closed for a period of time in order to fix the damage caused by the incident. "Interviewer: And was the arsonist, suspected arsonist uhm a student? Participant: No. He was not. Yeah, general, member of the public." (Librarian Number 14).

A curious detail regarding the presence of unusual patrons and the stories that circulate among librarians regarding the situations they have to deal with is that, in some cases, these patrons receive particular names that make them recognizable to other organizational members. Case in point, Librarian Number 16 talks about "Cup Man" and "The Greeter" while Librarian Number 11 talks about "Cookie Monster" and "Dr. Strange" and his "man-servant:"

> "…we don't know their names but we have "Cup Man" who would always come in with the little Styrofoam, the white Styrofoam coffee cup…"
>
> "But he'd be here at the door and saying it to patrons as they walked in, "How are you?" or getting out, "Have a nice day." So we called him "The Greeter" because we thought he'd be perfect at Wal-Mart [laughs]."
>
> (Librarian Number 16)
>
> "If you get a nickname in the library is a bad thing, right? You're a problem, but

> they call him “Cookie Monster”…”
>
> “…the other one was a guy we use to call “Dr. Strange” and he would come in, there were actually two of them there was “Dr. Strange” and his “man-servant”
>
> (Librarian Number 11).

These stories were shared among organizational members as both warning systems and in order to prepare others for the profession. They are shared mainly because the organizational members see that there is important, valuable knowledge contained in these that cannot or is not being transmitted by the organization through more formal communication channels. This knowledge can be interpreted as cultural in nature, but its usefulness to others is directly related to the work being done, whether they are meant to inform others of potential dangers and problematic situations or just to give advice on when to let a situation pass with minimum involvement.

Former Supervisor

Another common theme in the stories shared among the participants of this study was the former supervisor. These stories related mainly to former direct supervisors and their content either praised a good past supervisor, or described a poor one. Librarian Number 1 related the story of a very good supervisor she had at one point in her career with the organization. This person had to leave and was replaced by a series of people who were, according to the participant, not as good nor as committed to the job as the former supervisor was:

> … at that time my current supervisor was a very good boss, I have to say he is one of the few people I’ve worked with that I ever felt had a…was one very interested in what he did, passionate about what he did as a job with public service was interested in his immediate supervisees and their success and uhm was somebody

who you could count on to work towards resolving issues. He saw the importance of what you did, which is, as you can gather, I do not feel is the case right now [laughs]

These stories reflect the extent to which the changes in leadership impacted the life of these employees. The general idea gathered from these stories is that once the supervisor is gone, he/she is replaced by somebody who does not live up to the precedent set by the previous supervisor. This creates tensions between the employees and new supervisors; but it is also a way to remember that there have been "good bosses" and that the employees have had the opportunity to work with them and they are remembered fondly. In a way, the story becomes a way to perpetuate the former supervisor's memory and reminisce about the "good ol' days."

The opposite of this is the story of a former supervisor who was not good, but is still remembered in the organization. This type of story is mainly shared by librarians who are still outraged at the former supervisor's actions, or at least a little amused. They remember and pass on stories of their experiences to their coworkers. These people's actions are questionable and are still used as an example of how things could be worse than they currently are, as expressed by Librarian Number 15:

> …former head of the [library department] apparently like there was this librarian and he [had a disability] or something and like she canned him and the rumor was it was because of his disability, and she's not here so I can say that."

These stories carry a deeper meaning of "wait and see" as expressed by Librarian Number 12, who had to endure a bad supervisor for several years. This situation ended when the university constructed a new building and Librarian Number 12 was relocated, and her supervisor stayed behind. Librarian Number 12 explains that now she finds that:

> …after being here for 17 years I've learned well enough that if I'm not happy with something just wait, it will change, you know. I mean with what happened, I was very unhappy with my supervisor, they built a building."

These types of stories act as a coping mechanism and appear to help organizational members deal with less than ideal current situations because, in a way, they communicate that things used to be worse when the former supervisor was around, so employees should appreciate the way things currently are.

Poor Administrators

Another common theme that emerged from the stories shared by the participants in this study was that of poor administrators. The word 'poor' here is used to denote less than stellar behavior, attitudes, and decisions by administrators which prompted librarians to question these administrators' managerial abilities or even the legitimacy of their position. These stories are different from those of former supervisors because they mostly deal with people who are currently in the position (although not exclusively), and it also relates to the actions of people who are a few levels away from them in the organizational chart, but are not their direct supervisors. These administrators are mostly the heads of the library system or the heads of an entire unit, such as the reference department. The stories shared by the participants are not always full of criticism of the administrator's abilities or intelligence, but they carry negative judgments of their decisions; especially those relating to how administrators deal with situations that the librarians working at the reference desk deem important.

The main story focusing on administrators is the challenges that follow each administrative change and the changes made to the general organizational structure of the library, the services provided, and the general coordination of the library functions. On many occasions these changes have organization-wide repercussions and become particularly problematic when there is a rapid succession of administrators, a situation that can cause employees to experience serious morale issues. This is the case explained by Librarian Number 8 when she told about how she and her coworkers share stories of a particularly challenging period in the organization:

> …I mean morale was just horrible…there were a lot of changes in administration like there were two people that had been moved into administrative positions and they had been there for several years and like overnight it seemed like all of the sudden they weren't administration anymore and they were getting, I guess demoted…

Based on Librarian Number 8's experiences, the shifts in the organization caused a lot of tension and an increase in employee turnover, which coincided with the retirement of some other librarians. All of these events caused a situation in which the library's reference department was understaffed, and many librarians who worked the reference desk had to cover more responsibilities. This caused an decrease in morale, mainly because of the uncertainty about the future of the department, as well as the feelings of being overwhelmed with so many different responsibilities being left unfulfilled.

Some stories also related to questionable decisions made by administrators, which were not fully understood by the study participants. This lack of understanding seems to cause these decisions to be discussed among coworkers and shared in the form of stories. However, not all of the administrator stories were negative; in some cases, the administrators themselves are well liked by the participants; but their decisions and managerial style were still questioned. For example, Librarian Number 10 explains how she felt her library is being held back by the administrator's decisions and practices, when she expresses that:

> He's a thing's librarian and that's not what reference is anymore, reference is about service and people and that's just, if you ever [met] our [last name] he is near painfully shy and I mean he's very, very nice but …what he's good at is collecting things and building buildings and so reference is an afterthought to him…

In other instances the stories shared among the participants and their coworkers criticized administrators' erratic decisions and administrative changes that were done, according to the participant's point of view, just to simplify the administrator's job, instead of improving the organization. Librarian Number 17 mentioned that in his organization, at one point, the stories shared among organizational members revolved around a new administrator who made a series of big personnel changes shortly after arriving in the organization:

> …you have somebody coming in, she wants to do things a different way or whatever, she wants different people who are more or less accountable to her, who owe their jobs, their positions to her, not people who had their own ideas about how to do things…

According to Librarian Number17, this attitude caused a wave of personnel and structural changes in the organization in rapid succession that affected the employees by creating an unstable work environment. The situation made the library personnel highly suspicious of the administrator's actions , since they did not know when things might change unexpectedly: "Well in confidence I can tell you we call that side of the building 'The Hurt Locker'…Yeah. Because one day you get blown up in the hurt locker and you're not there anymore." (Librarian Number 17). This is a reference to a movie dealing with the lives of the military personnel charged with diffusing bombs during the war in Iraq.

One of the most common themes of the stories shared among librarians working at the reference desk was the lack of communication or the severe communication deficiencies in their organizations. These breaks in the communication, particularly from the top down, have caused great confusion. The majority of the stories shared among librarians centered around the theme of how to deal with these situations. In one particular instance, the administrators seem to have made a decision regarding a small branch library but the future of this branch has not been officially or even definitively communicated to the organization's members; the problem is that there were already rumors going around the organization, in the absence of official communications from the administrators, and generating more uncertainty, as expressed by Librarian Number 19:

> Well there was, an e-mail was sent to all staff which apparently went out before the head of the [branch library] had a chance to talk to her staff. So the staff heard it through this e-mail before they had a chance to talk to her.

In another case, the administrators did not notify employees of an important change in the hours of operation of the library, despite the fact that the employees needed to find a way to cover the hours as Librarian Number 4 tells of her experience when she worked in a different library department:

> …[the head of the library] decided uhm to go ahead and reinstate 24 hour service, as head of the [library department] I was told and I was told not to tell the staff, for whatever reason. This person wanted to disseminate that information. And uhm she did but did not [tell] the [library department].

The accounts provided by the participants of the stories they shared or heard among coworkers reflect a break in communications between the administrators and employees at all levels in the organization, including librarians. This break in communication caused rumors to spread throughout each of the organizations, which traveled through both face-to-face as well as electronic communication. Rumors are "unverified and instrumentally relevant information statements in circulation that arise in context of ambiguity" (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b). Rumors arise when people feel a need for security and understanding regarding a situation, and function in a way that helps people make collective sense of a situation; this process starts at an individual level but quickly moves to a collective level when the individual's personal frameworks of understanding fail and informal hypotheses are proposed, discussed and evaluated collectively (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b). Rumors are passed as fact even when they lack sufficient veracity of the evidence, and because of this, can be the source of many misunderstandings, particularly in organizational settings (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007a).

This phenomenon is especially relevant when considering the role of administrators, since communication is at the core of what administrators do, and underlies all of their responsibilities to the organization (Martin, 1996; Stueart & Moran, 2002). One of the most common results of poor communication in organizations is conflict, which can take place between individuals and groups within the organization (Stueart & Moran, 2002). The result of conflict among organizational members results in a great deal of stress and causes a lack of focus on employees' work. This kind of conflict can also affect employees' morale and motivation and hamper cooperation (Stueart & Moran, 2002). These effects are completely at odds with the main requirements for achieving proper knowledge management and accomplishing the ideal status of the "learning organization," which is dependent on an organization's employees' ability to share knowledge (Choo, 1998; Dalkir, 2005; Hislop, 2010; McMorrow, 2001).

In the case of these organizational stories, it is easy to see that many of the stories circulating regarding the organization's administrators are indeed rumors. However, in an environment in which communication is deficient because of a lack of official, verifiable information on events taking place, rumors are likely to abound and create more rifts, not only between the organization's employees and the administrators, but also among different groups of employees.

Former Employees

Another important theme present in the stories shared by the participants of this study was about people who used to work in the organization. These stories revolved around former librarians who had particular traits that made them memorable. Most of the stories are funny and amusing and play an important role in providing the librarians with a sense of the organizational culture. Some deal with librarians behaving in odd ways, such as the story shared by Librarian Number 2, about the:

> … [a] librarian in [library department] and she was notorious for coming over and raiding the stacks and taking books that she thought were more appropriate for [her library department], to her area and they would eventually get processed and changed and in the meantime nobody would say anything to her…

This category of stories also included tales of quirky events, such as somebody spiking the punch at a party, or having a librarian smoking in her office, as shared by Librarian Number 8:

> …I think it was some reference party and somebody spiked the punch and you know [laughs] And I mean there are stories about uhm like apparently at some point they had a reference librarian who would just chain smoke cigarettes in her office, you know and people couldn't smoke in their offices and she was always

there chain smoking cigarettes [laughs]…

These kinds of stories are mainly targeted at amusing the addressee, but also provide newer members of the organization with the context regarding their work place as constructed through the stories of past members of the organization. Some stories become illustrations of standards for behavior, or sources of inspiration for current organizational members to strive toward a standard set by those who came before them. This was the case of Librarian Number 19 and the stories she has heard of her predecessor:

> …that she was just, it was hard to live up to her reputation, she just, she was just great, all around great. Well read, well rounded… she was just one of those people who knew a little bit about everything and she had a phenomenal memory, which is another you know "I can look this up. Wait a minute. I forgot. I think I can look this up." I rely on Google and I mean memory aids but she had it all up here [points to her head]

The organizational stories shared by most participants can be understood as valuable and serving an essential role in the organization, mainly helping librarians working at the reference desk to understand their jobs and organizations better. Although most of the narratives shared by the participants can be classified as organizational stories, there are also some anecdotes shared mainly because they are 'tellable' (Marra & Holmes, 2004). Some librarians are aware of this, as expressed by Librarian Number 2 when asked why she shares the story of a former elderly coworker with a drinking problem: "For one thing I think most of my stories that I pass on are humorous, at least from my perspective. I mean I think it is hysterical to think of this 70-year-old woman being somewhat tipsy…"

Some of these anecdotes also appear to go beyond the purpose of entertaining an audience and can play an important role in the organization, just as the other categories of organizational stories previously discussed can. "Former employee" stories can also be the main topic in the conversation or become an important point of discussion and provide other members of the organization with a sense of belonging.

Past Crises

Some of the institutions visited in this research had experienced particularly threatening situations in the past. The severity of these situations can be judged by the fact that the employees were sharing stories regarding these incidents, and in some cases referred to them as past "crises" faced by their institutions. At one institution, the majority of the interviews centered on an arson incident that had taken place over eight years ago. The stories of the incident itself and its aftermath were shared by all the participants from this institution, even those who did not work there at the time the event took place, as illustrated by Librarian Number 15: "…the fire that happened here a few years ago, before I ever got here, somebody set a fire in the main library and he was an outside user…"

At another institution the organizational stories revolved around a shooting incident that had taken place in the library many years ago. In this particular instance, the participants described the incident as a very unfortunate one in which the shooter was a disgruntled employee who came back to the library after being fired and shot several people, including the head of the library. In this case, because so many years had passed, none of the participants of the study had worked in the library when this took place; however, they had all heard the story and mentioned sharing it with newer organizational members. Some of the participants narrated the incidents of that day with such a vivid level of detail that it prompted the researcher to ask if they were part of the organization when the event took place; as this exchange with Librarian Number 19 shows: “Interviewer: Where you here when that [the shooting] happened? Participant: No, I wasn’t. It happened before I started here actually so uhm so I only heard you know from people who witnessed it.”

This phenomenon can be seen as a manifestation of what Charlotte Linde (2000) refers to as the ‘nonparticipant narrative,’ which is the type of narrative “told by someone not present at the events narrated” (Linde, 2000; p. 609). According to Linde (2000), the nonparticipant narrative is a process in which organizational members tell stories of their group in order to induct new organizational members into the collective memory of the organization. The nonparticipant narrative is also an indicator that a particular organizational story has become part of the organization’s memory (Linde opts for the term ‘institutional memory’), which is marked by the moment when “a story is told by someone who was not a participant in the event” (Linde, 1997; 284). Linde’s work focuses on optimistic and inspiring stories that in time became nonparticipant narratives, whereas in this case the main nonparticipant narratives found related to very negative stories.

The stories surrounding this particular incident also seem to serve a purpose akin to that explained by Yiannis Gabriel (2000) in what he refers to as the “tragic story.” Gabriel explains that tragic stories in organizations center around a certain trauma experienced by its members, and that this trauma is described by Frye’s “low mimetic tragedy” in which a villain, without any redeeming qualities, brings a great misfortune upon a victim, similar to ourselves. These stories are also viewed as the kind of identity-building stories in which a group defines itself based on the injustices done to them, and not on their achievements and triumphs (Schwartz in Gabriel, 2000).

Both the shooting and the arson incident stories align with this description of the tragic story in that, in both instances the participants stressed the rank and/or origin of the perpetrators. It was insisted by the librarians interviewed that the perpetrator of the arson incident was an "outside user" and a "homeless person," that is, somebody not affiliated with the university or the library system. In the shooting incident, the perpetrator was described as a former member of the library staff and not as a professional librarian. In both cases, the identity of the perpetrator is emphatically described as different from that of the participants, i.e., a non-librarian. This can be seen as directly responding to Schwartz's observations of identity-building among group members.

Understanding the Role of Organizational Storytelling

A discussion of the role of organizational storytelling among librarians working at the reference desk would have to include the understanding these organizational members have regarding the subject. The data point to the participants' negative perceptions regarding the stories they shared. Many participants referred to the organizational stories they have heard as gossip, mainly because they dealt with other people in their organization. When asked what the word "gossip" meant, most pointed out the personal nature of it, or the fact that gossip is usually targeted at an individual. However, the stories mentioned as gossip lacked an important characteristic to be classified as such: idleness. The stories had a more profound meaning than just "idle talk' about an individual who is not present, or that was shared for purposes of entertainment (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b). This gives the narrative a purpose, something to be learned from that can be used at a later occasion, so it can be classified as storytelling, and because it deals with organizational members, it can be argued that these are organizational stories. However, the negative perception of gossip in society can hinder the circulation of the knowledge shared in these stories. Organizational members may not share them out of a sense of guilt or shame centered on their belief that gossiping about work colleagues is wrong, or possibly because of a trepidation about sharing the story with somebody who is outside of the close social group. These concerns can hinder the transfer of knowledge between some coworkers (Jaeger et al., 1994; Ben-Ze'ev, 1994).

Most of the participants who were asked provided definitions of what they understood to be gossip, describing it as any topic of conversation that dealt with an individual's personal matters. As Librarian Number 1 offered:

> Well, I think anytime you talk about somebody's situation and it's kind of from a [unintelligible] point of view you are not really, you are certainly and in this case certainly not taking pleasure in this individual's misfortune but you know you are just kind of "did you hear?"

There is also a general sense that gossip and rumor are the same thing. According to DiFonzo and Bordia (2007b) this is a general perception, even among scholars. However, both phenomena have very particular contexts and contents, but serve different purposes in social interactions. As defined earlier, rumors are likely to spread in environments in which there is a lack of information and a lot of uncertainty about what is happening in the organization. In contrast, gossip has an entertainment value and deals with an individual's private affairs (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b). Therefore, when considering the narratives taking place in an organization, we can learn a lot about it by the rumors that are passed on; which makes these more valuable than pieces of gossip. Unfortunately, many participants do not distinguish between the two concepts, as noted by Librarian Number 6, when she spoke about how she found out that a certain university unit was being relocated to the library building:

> …so this kind of story, gossip, like someone had told me like oh they saw all of

> [technical services area] kind of gathered together and I think our [head of the library] was there it was kind of like “Huh I wonder what is going on”…and then the next day heard uhm from somebody, like he just told me I mean I wasn’t asking and it was like “Oh no you know maybe the [extension type university unit] center is going to move over here…”

This incident can be catalogued as a rumor, because it deals with an entire unit that was being relocated to the library building. It was a situation that was not widely or openly discussed by the administrators with other library employees, yet was certainly going to affect them. In this case, there was no personal judgment passed regarding any one individual; instead, this episode was the exchange of a tidbit of information regarding a situation that had the potential to change the working conditions in the library.

Libraries and Crisis

As for the narrative relating to organizational crises, librarians working at the reference desk had very similar perceptions on the matter. When asked to define what a “crisis” means to them, many pointed at the suddenness and the imperative to take the appropriate action that comes with a crisis situation. Some of the definitions provided included:

> A crisis means uhm either an emergency, event where there isn’t enough time to reflect on it and deal with it.
>
> (Librarian Number 12)

> …a crisis is like an acute situation, something that needs to be taken care of immediately uhm a crisis is like a turning point when you have to decide one way

or the other and you have to decide quickly because something bad is going to happen…

(Librarian Number 20)

Another factor mentioned when discussing the meaning of a crisis for the participants was the disruptiveness that crises bring to their lives: "…something that was so out of the ordinary and maybe not just sad but incredibly disruptive…" (Librarian Number 5) "…I would say the inability to carry out day to day activities." (Librarian Number 8).

Perhaps this last factor is what shaped most of the librarians' view of past crises in their organizations; this can be reflected in the episodes that the participants related to past organizational crises they faced. In one case, the participants identified disruptive events that prevented certain services from being provided to the patrons as crises. The events most often mentioned dealt with the inability to provide answers quickly enough, being prevented from teaching a library instruction class, the printers' being out of order, and the possibility that the computer network might fail:

"There's a crisis that's sort of an immediate crisis like 'Oh my God there's a class here and [her name] has not shown up yet.'…"

(Librarian Number 10)

"…there are what I consider a daily crisis is when printing goes down, the network goes down…"

(Librarian Number 16)

…when I had to, you know, somebody needed something quickly and it was hard to, hard to get and I had other things to do and I guess a crisis is when it usually has to do with time, not enough time to get to something that somebody wants or

> somebody, somebody needs something very specific…
>
> (Librarian Number 3)

> …crisis either like drastic traumatic event in the library or just so many different things that I think patrons have come to rely on, say not working at the same time, if all the computers shut down and stopped working all at the same time and everyone lost their work and anyone knew coming in couldn't use one I think that would probably equal crisis, I guess.
>
> (Librarian Number 5)

These 'daily crises' represented a significant portion of the librarians' stories about crisis, either past crises in the organization or potential ones.

This seems to indicate that for these library professionals the meaning of a crisis is related to any situation that does not allow them to provide the level and quality of service to their patrons that they desire, even if to others the prospect of classifying a printer network meltdown as a crisis may seem ludicrous. These kinds of events seem to align with Coombs' definition of a crisis, since they are indeed perceptions of unpredictable events that can affect the expectations of stakeholders (i.e. library patrons). However, these events lack the severity needed in order to classify such occurrences as true crises (Coombs, 2010).

Another theme that emerged from the data about crises was that administrators' actions were sometimes perceived as being either at the root of a crisis in the organization, or creating the potential for future crises in the organization. A clear example of linking management actions with an organizational crisis was provided by Librarian Number 20, who described how an administrator's decision to close a branch library generated a crisis in the organization:

> …it's such a big deal because it affects everybody in the system, it affects some

people more than others but it will not only affect that branch and the people who work in that branch but it will also affect people in [main library] because they'll have to all be integrated into the library and also would affect the storage you know facility, we will have to move things there and it will affect the people that will have to process all that all the books going into different places. I mean it will affect everybody and also it's a threat to people's identities you know the, especially the librarians who work in that branch.

(Librarian Number 20)

Others pointed at an administrators' inaction as creating the potential for future crises. For example, Librarian Number 10 explained what she believed to be a "slow burn long term crisis" brought on by her administrator's lack of interest in setting up a succession plan, or Librarian Number 4's concern with the understaffing in the library:

I think there's also sort of the slow burn long term crisis and like it…the succession one is definitely one that is anticipated and could be prevented and yet we are not doing anything about it and so it will become a crisis and I don't know if this is your next question or not but I would say that I don't like our crisis response around here because what we do a lot of times is uhm we wait until something becomes a crisis in order to make a decision…

(Librarian Number 10)

…I think that not enough attention in some libraries and think including this one is not paid to the basics, making sure we have adequate staff and I think that kind of thing could become a crisis, is not yet, but if we don't have enough staff to make sure the building is taken care of what happens if there's an emergency?

What if we only have one student worker on the circulation desk?

(Librarian Number 4)

In this case the participants are really considering the risks, or the circumstances that pose a danger to what they value (McComas, 2010). These kinds of staffing issues have been previously discussed in the information science literature as a problem that has the potential to become a crisis that has not been properly addressed by most libraries (Curran, 2003).

Two of the institutions visited for this research had faced crises in the past: one with the arson incident, and one with the shooting in the library. It is curious to find that the stories regarding both of these incidents were still shared by employees. In at least one case (the shooting incident), the actual crisis had taken place so many years ago that nobody in the department was present when it took place. However, these employees had been told the stories and mentioned them as part of the interview as something that is still widely discussed among employees.

The stories, as previously noted, seem to have helped employees recognize and understand current situations and behaviors of people in the organization. However, they seem to struggle to find an example of any lessons learned from the incident. Some, like Librarian Number 15, indicated changes brought about by these incidents such as tighter security measures: “Well I think they tightened security up [after the arson incident].” But generally the participants struggled to come up with any particular benefit that came about from the situation or any application that helped to create positive changes in their institution. The data seem to indicate that the lessons learned from past crises are hard to distinguish and are not as clear as might be expected by outsiders. As Librarian Number 10 puts it, the only lesson learned she sees from the arson incident at her organization is: “Don’t let crazy homeless people bring matches into your building? [laughs]"

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study imply that among librarians working at the reference desk in academic libraries, organizational storytelling occurs in an informal and spontaneous manner. This informality and spontaneity derives from the fact that the stories are shared among coworkers in this unit and do not seem to extend much beyond the groups that work closest together. Nor does their storytelling take place in formal meetings, or on ceremonial or formal occasions, and they are not told exclusively by an administrator or person with authority in the organization. The stories that the participants in this research shared were not centered on subjects pertinent to the core values and strategic goals of the organization, which is contrary to the descriptions and characterizations of other types of stories and narratives found in the literature (Linde, 2009; Tyler 2007). The stories that the participants of this study shared focused on the nature of their day-to-day work, the actions and decisions by members of the organization, and also dangerous or negative events that the organizations have faced in the past.

In general, the stories shared by these reference librarians are important for transmitting tacit knowledge, as they most frequently dealt with subjects such as how to handle problematic patrons, or cope with difficult questions and situations. The stories are also a way for employees to find sympathy from their coworkers, when having to deal with frustrating situations, or after less than stellar performances. They are also a way to remember that in the past, they or their predecessors had to endure difficult job conditions, but that most of the situations associated with these difficulties were solved in time.

While the majority of organizational stories help to inform, they can also be misunderstood by some members to mean gossip. This perception causes the storyteller and/or the addressee to shroud the stories in a coat of secrecy as something that should not be told to others except, maybe, to a very small group of confidants. However, the findings show that these stories labeled as “gossip” that were shared are mostly organizational stories and, to a lesser degree, rumors. The organizational stories from the present members of the organization, as well as those of past members of the organization, are a very valuable tool for employees who are trying to understand the culture of their workplace, as well as the work environment and the nature of their profession. The rumors, on the other hand, are mainly ways of coping with a lack of effective communication from administrators with the rest of the organizational members, or attempts to manage uncertainty. Anecdotes were also present among the narratives shared by participants; these were told among members of the group in order to entertain one another.

The stories of past scary incidents (or crises) in the library seem to be the type of story that persists in being shared over the longest period of time, and is passed on to newer members of the organization, thus becoming part of the organizational memory. The stories of past triumphs or accomplishments were not as vivid in the minds of the participants as those that dealt with dangerous situations. These threatening stories are passed on and remembered even when the actual lessons learned from these crises are either not clear or completely lost to the employees. But despite this, the general theme takes particular care in pointing out the dissociation of the perpetrators, and their representation as members of groups other than the group to which the research participants belong.

The results of this study also align with the principles of the Social Construction of Reality, as explained by Berger & Luckmann (1967). First, the academic library as an organization is a typification of actions assigned to different actors, that presents institutionalization of roles and the creation of rules by which the actors must abide (Tsoukas &

Vladimirou, 2001). This is exemplified by the organizational structures that academic libraries present, which was discussed in Chapter 2, and which include the internal and external structural characteristics present in academic libraries.

Second, the stories shared by the academic librarians working at the reference desk contain the knowledge that has been deemed relevant according to these institutionalized roles, which is mainly relevant knowledge regarding the social interactions among organizational members, and also among organizational members and patrons. The stories shared by the participants in this study belong to what Berger and Luckmann (1967) referred to as a second level of legitimation, which means that they are mainly explanations of the institutional order and that they give cognitive validity to the objectivated meanings, or those that have been passed on by other organizational members. Therefore the importance of the organizational stories found in this study lies in the realization that they are the tools by which the librarians that work at the reference desk construct their reality and make sense of it.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study indicate that librarians working at the reference desk are passing on tacit knowledge to their immediate coworkers and non-professional supervisees in their organizations through the stories that they share in their day-to-day interactions at work. This tacit knowledge includes: making sense of their current work conditions based on what has happened in the past, commiserating about their frustrations with day to day work incidents, finding better ways to do their jobs, and being more effective when providing services to their patrons. These organizational stories are part of a complex interconnected web of narratives which also includes narratives that serve more primordial human needs, such as that for entertainment (which can be provided by anecdotes), and a sense of belonging to a group, (which is mainly accomplished by gossip) or even reducing uncertainty about certain organizational issues when official information is not available, (which is facilitated by rumors) (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b).

This chapter considers the findings of this study and its possible contributions to the field of library and information science. The first area of consideration is the implications that the results of this study have for the research conducted on the subject of organizational storytelling and the administration of libraries, and more specifically in academic libraries. Then the researcher will consider the implications of the findings of this study for practitioners in the field of library and information science. The limitations of the study are also presented, as well as suggested areas for future studies that may build on these findings. .

Implications for Research

This study has multiple implications for future research regarding the administration of libraries, as well as the progression of studies in knowledge management and organizational storytelling. The findings of this study are a small contribution to the literature in the field of library and information science; there is a need for more research on all aspects of knowledge management within this field, but very particularly for the area of the administration of libraries. The literature in this area is scarce, especially the kind that relies on empirical research grounded in a sound research methodology.

There is also a need to apply more methods of research to the phenomenon of organizational storytelling. So far, the bulk of the literature has relied on participant observations and ethnographic methods. This study shows that it is possible to research this phenomenon employing more direct methods of research that can explore the way the participants see the world, such as the long interview method. This has been used in the past but it is still not the main research method used for exploring the meaning and significance of organizational storytelling.

This research also highlights the need for a more thorough exploration of the phenomenon of organizational storytelling; including more focus on different groups of organizational members, different types of organizations, and different kinds of industries. Specifically for the library and information science literature, there is a need to explore and integrate the role of student assistants, both graduate and undergraduate, in the operation of libraries and information centers. This group of employees is mentioned a great deal by the participants in this study, and their role seems to be essential when providing services to patrons. However, there is very limited research in the field of library and information science that centers on them.

Implications for Practice

This study also has multiple implications for practitioners in libraries and information science, especially for those working in academic libraries. As exemplified by the results of this study, organizational storytelling plays an important role in organizations, and it should be nurtured and encouraged in order to help improve communication and promote an environment where knowledge is shared and where different groups of employees cooperate for the improvement of the organization as a whole.

The results of this study also show that there is a lot more that can be done to enhance communication between administrators and library personnel. In general, communication in the library, as in most organizations, needs to be more open and straightforward. This will help control the proliferation of rumor in organizations. Rumor is not detrimental in itself but, under the right circumstances, it can generate disruptions in the flow of knowledge and hinder cooperation among organizational members. These disruptions and lack of cooperation can have a major impact on the organization's attainment of its goals, which makes it an avoidable nuisance to the organization.

There is also much more to be understood about the status of crisis and crisis management in academic libraries. An insight that has emerged from this study is that the communication of lessons learned after a crisis is not necessarily being effectively addressed by libraries, as evidenced by the participants' statements. This seems to indicate that the crises of the past have not contributed sufficient valuable insight, at least in terms of anything tangible, to help the library learn and prepare for future crises. There are some areas in which the participants pointed out their serious concerns regarding the future, and the potential for certain circumstances to become crises, namely the lack of succession plans in the library and the understaffing of the reference area. The literature on information science has already highlighted some of these concerns (Curran, 2003) and pointed them out as something to consider, yet some academic libraries may not be giving it sufficient planning and forethought, choosing instead to ignore it.

Limitations

As with any research endeavor, this study has some limitations. The primary one is that it focused on only a small group of academic libraries located in public universities in the southeastern United States. These institutions had different policies and different employee classifications for academic librarians. At three institutions these employees were classified as faculty positions and participants were subject to the tenure process faced by faculty members in any other department (Martin, 1996). However, one institution out of the four did not classify librarians as faculty members. This did not seem to affect the general topic of organizational storytelling, but in the future this might be a consideration when choosing participants.

In addition, this study only dealt with librarians who are working in the reference desk. This is a group comprised of individuals with very specific job descriptions that varied from one person to the other and from one institution to the other. It seems that the contemporary librarian working at the reference desk of an academic institution has a very broad range of duties covered in the same position. These additional duties were not the focus of this research, which tried to center on the job as one that includes heavy involvement with public service. Variations in participants' duties and activities could possibly have impacted their perceptions of the interview topics, or the substance of the stories that they may have shared or heard.

Another consideration is that the method employed in this research was the long interview , which meant that the participants had to remember stories and episodes of storytelling among themselves and their coworkers. Though participants were able to recall particular examples of organizational stories, many were baffled by the questions and reverted to talking about the general subject matter of the stories they share. Though it is important to point out the potential shortcoming of relying heavily on the participant's memory of routine activities, this seemed to be minimized, as evidenced by the number of specific stories shared by these participants.

Future Research

This study was intended to be an initial exploration of the role organizational storytelling plays in the administration of academic libraries in the Unites States. The study's findings can be translated into valuable information for both practitioners and administrators in different library settings, however, not exclusively to academic libraries. The researcher hopes that her work is just the beginning and that it brings about a starting point for additional research that can help improve the knowledge-management practices of the contemporary academic library.

Future studies that can build upon this initial exploration include an expansion of the subject to different types of academic institutions, not just large, public academic institutions in the United States. Other possible studies can focus on academic libraries operating in private institutions and also small colleges. There is also the possibility to expand the study and consider the different scenarios of international academic libraries, since culture plays such an important role in the process of sharing stories, and the way stories are told (Bennett, 1998).

There is also room for extending this work into future studies with different groups of library employees. As mentioned before, groups such as library para-professionals, and student library assistants at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, are of particular interest, given the scarcity of information available on these groups' roles and contributions. Possible studies should also explore the role of organizational storytelling among groups of library employees that are less likely to engage in public service, such as technical services personnel. Other groups to research would be library administrators, including library directors and department heads.

Research in the area of storytelling in general would greatly benefit from an expansion on the research methods used in the exploration of organizational storytelling. The discipline of library and information science should consider future studies that utilize focus groups and qualitative case studies of different library settings as a research method. An ethnographic participant observation would also be useful, since so far, the literature relating to academic libraries lacks an in-depth ethnographic study dealing with organizational storytelling.

In future research endeavors it would also be useful to focus on the study of the dynamics of smaller work groups, such as those working in branch libraries, and compare them to bigger groups such as an academic institution's entire library system. This would allow researchers to study the flow of knowledge in smaller groups and contrast it with possible differences arising from the complexity of large groups.

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Appendices

Appendix A: E-mail to the Deans

Hello [Dean's Last Name],

I am a doctorate student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Currently, I am working on my doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Edwin Cortez. As part of the research for my dissertation, I need to interview academic librarians who work at the reference desk.

I have chosen your institution, [University's Name], to be included in my work. I would: 1.) like your permission to contact these reference librarians and invite them to participate in my research; and 2). appreciate your identifying those librarians with MLS, or equivalent degree, working full time at your institution who work as reference librarians and staff the reference desk as part of their job functions to participate in this study.

Please let me know by August 12 whether or not your institution can participate in my research; and more importantly, that I have your permission to contact those librarians you have identified for my research.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance with my research,

Mónica Colón-Aguirre

Appendix B: E-mail to Participants

Hello [Librarian's Last Name],

I am a doctorate student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. At this moment I am working my doctoral dissertation on the topic of organizational storytelling among librarians working at the reference desk in academic libraries in the southeastern United States. [Contact's Name and Last Name] suggested that you would be an appropriate candidate to participate in my research.

I sincerely hope that you will agree to assist me in this research project. If possible I would like to meet with you to discuss your work environment as it relates to the objectives of the study (see enclosed abstract). The interview should last approximately 30 and 45 minutes.

If you are willing to participate on my research, I will be at the [University's Name] on the week of [Dates]. Please let me know if you agree on the interview and the time and date that would work for you.

Thanks for your cooperation,

Mónica Colón-Aguirre

Appendix C: Interview Guide

I. Introduction, explanation of the goals and definitions

II. Grand tour questions:

A. Tell me about yourself.

B. Tell me about your job.

C. Which work task occupies most of your work time?

III. Specific incident questions:

A. Throughout the years you have been working here, can you recall any work incident here in the library that was widely discussed among yourself and your colleagues?

1. Did you share this story?
2. With whom did you share this story?
3. What information did they get from the story?

B. Can you think of an incident that sums up the stresses and strains of your job?

1. Did anyone read the situation differently?
2. Have you shared the story with coworkers?

C. Has anyone told you a story about a particular work incident that happened in the library?

1. What did you learn from the story?
2. Did you share this story?
3. With whom did you share the story?
4. What do you think others learned from the story?
5. How does the story make you feel?

D. What does a crisis means to you?

1. Has your library faced a crisis?

2. How did it come out of the crisis?

3. What lessons were learned from that crisis?

IV. General stories in the organization:

A. Does the library celebrate any special days or have any special functions?

1. How did it begin?

B. Are there any special stories about past members of the organization?

1. What does the story mean to you?

2. What did you learn from this story?

3. Have you shared this story with coworkers?

Appendix D: Story Prop

The Cat's on the Roof (James & Minnis, 2004)

After years of encouraging her aging parents, Sally finally persuaded them to take a vacation. It wasn't that they didn't want to travel; it was just that they didn't trust anyone to take care of their beloved white cat, Puff. With Sally's full assurances that she and her husband, John, would watch over puff as if he were their own, the parents left for the trip. As luck would have it, the first day they were gone, Puff climbed up onto the roof, fell onto the concrete patio, and died.

That night, Mother and Dad called to check on Puff. John simply told them, "Puff is on the roof but we're working on it." The next call came early the next morning. John said "We've got a bit of a problem. Puff has had a fall." When the third call came, his response was, "It's not looking good." Finally on the next call, he came through with the bad news: "We're sorry, we did everything we could, but Puff didn't make it."

Vita

Mónica Colón-Aguirre is a native of Puerto Rico; she is a doctoral candidate from the School of Information Science, at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She is an ALA Spectrum Doctoral Fellow. Her previous academic work includes a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus and a Master's in Business Administration from the Inter American University of Puerto Rico as well as a Master's degree in Information Sciences from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Before moving to Tennessee she worked as an Assistant Librarian at the Inter American University for over three years. She has also worked at the Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine Library and Hodges Library at the University of Tennessee. Her research interests include: knowledge management, organizational narratives in the academic library context, human resource management, information literacy, and professional development in information organizations.