

Exploring the Dynamics of Public Library Board: From a Perspective of Agency Theory

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ABSTRACT

In most public libraries in the U.S., the board of trustees is a governing body that makes authoritative decisions to set strategies and goals for fulfilling the needs of their community. Despite the importance of the board in public library governance, public library boards have been neglected in academic research. As a nascent endeavor to study this neglected phenomenon, I investigate the dynamics between a public library board and the library director by applying agency theory, which has been often applied to examine the relationship between the board of directors and the executive officer in for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Agency theory explicates a situation in which “one or more actors (principals) must depend on one or more other actors (agents) to perform certain tasks for them.” (Wood, 2010, 184) By using agency theory as a framework to analyze seven observations of public library board meetings, I focus on identifying goal conflicts and information asymmetries, which are the two main assumptions of agency theory, between the public library board and the public library director to find characteristics of the public library board’s dynamics. The result of this study will guide the design of a larger study of public library board dynamics and its relationship with its community, especially with underrepresented populations in its community.

References

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ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

public libraries; community and civic organizations; community engagement.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

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