

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 12, 2023.

Organic Growth: for Libraries too?

Yes, for Libraries too. Organic growth, as commonly meant, is corporate growth based on internal capacities and developments, but not growth from external acquisitions and mergers. The latter go to inorganic growth. This is the language of corporate life; it is not the language of Libraries, but it could be. Libraries too are corporations.

I have been fortunate professionally to have lived in a corporate world of organic growth, and, actually, even in retirement, still do sometimes. I witnessed the latter stages of the development of electro-coating for making automotive body parts corrosion resistant. That is a major factor in why rocker panels no longer rust through from road salt. Does anyone even remember those rust holes now? I witnessed from its beginning the invention and development of self-darkening eyewear (photochromically dyed) for what is now Transitions® Lenses, in such common use today. These two big ideas, come to fruition commercially, began organically (as did solar-reflective “green” windows, to which I got to contribute personally).

So, how does this relate to Libraries? They, too, for survival’s sake alone, must exhibit growth from within the corporation. Have they? Yes, they have, especially in the recent past, and it is not difficult to cite examples from within the Westmoreland Library Network (WLN). The Polaris Integrated Library System (ILS) that is shared by all WLN public Libraries in Westmoreland County is a big one. It makes possible the 24/7 browsing of a common catalogue, from which item holds can be made at any time of day and from any place. Its implementation was a big idea that meets the definition of organic growth. Another is creating on-line programming to be shared across communities in a time of COVID-19, emphasizing in another way that programming is as much a part of Library service as is the traditional borrowing of books.

There are two other examples that come to mind. When Storytime STEM-packs™ was nucleated in 2014, it was in part meant, in its broadest sense, to begin a culture of standards-based preK-4 STEM programming, much like that of standards-based, in-school practice. The problem to be addressed by that is what is commonly known in education as summer-slide. Summertime is a time of closed schools, but very active Library programming. The idea was to make the Library experience something of a true and sustaining bridge to school semester learning, to make for a quality year-round experience, minimizing summer-slide. Because Library staff does not always get this kind of standards-based preparative training as students themselves, it is still a work in progress. The Storytime STEM-packs project is as much about training staff to standards-based presentation as it is anything else. This needs to be better understood in the context of organic growth.

Another example derives from the newly built, green Delmont Public Library. That facility, with its special resources (outdoor garden space, solar collectors, geothermal heating, automobile plug-in station, monarch butterfly house) stands as a symbol and a foundation for the associated green programming that was envisioned at the outset of construction itself. This is truly planning for organic growth, though I am sure that no

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 12, 2023.

one thought to use that term then (or now). My view is that, for a better understanding of the good that Libraries have done and can do, we might benefit from contextualizing with the language of and urgencies associated with “organic growth.” Words always matter.

Charles B. Greenberg
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation