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## Review of Working Together: Collaborative Information Practices for Organizational Learning

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## Review of Working Together: Collaborative Information Practices for Organizational Learning

### Keywords

Book reviews, collaboration, organizations, sustainability

## Review of *Working Together: Collaborative Information Practices for Organizational Learning*

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Adaptability is a key indicator of an organization's capacity to respond successfully to change. Library organizations are facing enormous pressures to adapt to societal changes in order to remain relevant. Mary Somerville's book, *Working Together: Collaborative Information Practices for Organizational Learning* provides a useful framework for reconstructing library organizations addressing sustainable change through collaborative processes.

In the learning organization, the "process through which an organization (re)constructs knowledge" (Huysman and de Wit in Somerville, p. 57), sustainability is critical to the concept of organizational transformation. Collaborations between individuals can produce remarkable outcomes, but sustaining the collaboration beyond a specific purpose requires a will to transform relationships. In turn, an organization that restructures and defines new roles for individuals in fulfilling its mission may achieve remarkable results, but many do so only temporarily. To achieve sustainability, Somerville presents 'system thinking' as a means to create a big-picture perspective in which insights are integrated into a holistic understanding of the organization.

Using case studies from her tenure as Assistant Dean of Information and Instruction Services at California Polytechnic State University (CalPoly), Somerville described three projects that show-cased collaboration as a change-agent in the libraries. The three-year CalPoly "action research study" described collaboration between departments for changes in reference desk staffing; a three-way collaboration between librarians, faculty, and students that resulted in an expansion to the information literacy programs; and an institution-wide collaborative process for creating a learning commons.

Somerville also included in-depth literature reviews with more than one hundred and fifty references interspersed throughout the book. These key references, along with her first-hand experience in libraries, provide the foundational principles that guide Somerville's work. Somerville's book is a quick read at a mere eighty-nine pages, but with surprising depth. The book's subtitle promises "collaborative information practices." However, rather than concrete practices, Somerville presents models and processes. The closest construct to a distinct set of identifiable actions is found in the diagram entitled, "Process Model for Library Organization Leadership." The book falls short of providing the blueprint for action that might be expected. At times the theoretical discussions seem amorphous and without direct reference to the case studies. Ideally, the perspectives of other participants involved in the projects would have added a more tangible dimension to the book.

In summary, libraries that embrace the principles and methods of the learning organization as Somerville purposes in her book can provide a process that fosters sustainable transformation.