Life Cycles of Community College Booksellers: Affect of Electronic and Digital Commerce

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Abstract

Organizational life cycling is a tool used by corporate strategists as an evaluative method and intervention for corporate fitness. Health in an organization is determined by the synergy of attributes occurring at the life cycle milestones. Similar to the epigenesis of the individual, pathology occurs when the characteristics inherent in each stage are delayed. The position of a particular organization or firm in its life cycle depends on many factors--some of which are controlled by management, internal and external markets, stakeholders input, industrial forces, and the economic climate.

Organizational life cycling impacts, and is impacted by, our entrepreneurial society. Creative leadership, open to both change and innovation, is key to sustaining vital organizations and their entrepreneurial spirit. Theorists assert that leadership adapts at each life cycle stage to higher levels of management acumen; failure to synergize from entrepreneurial to administrative professionalism as the cycling advances produces weakness in the business that may lead to demise.

Economic pressures arising from demographic changes in the millennium generation and changes in preferences of learning delivery systems has affectively triggered the need for changes at the community college bookstore level. Electronic commerce and digital technology forces the college into innovative practices, of which some choose commercially- leased services as a solution to stand alone businesses.

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, biologists have described the living world in terms of life cycles (Campbell & Reece, 2005; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Lester, Parnell, & Carraher, 2003). Similar to the epigenesis of the individual (Erikson, 1980), theorists have asserted that there is a natural rhythm to development in the corporation (Adizes, 1988). Pathology occurs when the characteristics inherent in each developmental stage are thwarted. In the past several decades, organizational consultants began the assimilation of corporate health to that of the individual, citing life cycles in organizations as being epigenetic and predetermined (Adizes, 1988; Lester, Parnell, Carraher, 2003; Masurel & Montfort, 2006; Liao, 2006). The catalyst for change is similar to that of life crisis in the individual where an otherwise steady state is dismantled by environmental events (Beck & Cowan, 1996). Moving from a successful level of endeavor to a deteriorating, chaotic level, the business is forced to change in sometimes quantum ways. Not unlike the individual, the business resisting change is arrested in development and faces stagnation and possible deterioration. There are occurrences where whole industries are stimulated toward change; as a response, individual business in that industry must decide to adapt to the change or fail. The stimulus from brick-and-mortar bookstores to online booksellers triggered such a change in the commercial book industry, creating an evolved component of that industry in entrepreneurial start-up. The other mature more dated elements of the industry were forced to adapt and change to this trigger. A similar catalyst has occurred in the academic book store industry as the components of electronic commerce popular in commercial sales are now evident in academic book sales. For example, by the end of 1999, college bookstores had begun the transition into electronic commerce businesses, and as a response have simultaneously considered leasing bookstore functions to commercial companies with a greater capacity to expand brick-and-mortar services to include electronic and digital elements (Vargas, 2000). In fact, the Independent College Bookstore Association estimates are that over half of all college bookstores are now managed by lease operators (Deahl, Get ‘Em While; Phua, 2005). These scenarios of events expose community college bookstores in mature markets to the simultaneous triggers of evolving electronic components and the threat and opportunity of leasing operations.

The position of a particular organization or firm in its life cycle depends on many factors, some of which are controlled by management (Liao, 2006), internal and external markets (Adizes, 1988), stakeholders input (Williamson, 2004), industrial forces, and the economic climate (NACS, 2006). Based on the concepts and theories of organizational life cycle management, businesses in varying industries may bear striking similarities. For example, the small nonprofit college bookstore suffers similar environmental threats as do more strategic for-profit businesses with one differential. The profit-bearing business must respond to the stress more rapidly due to lack of economic insulation noted in nonprofit businesses. However, due to the rapid shifting of student enrollments, this level of security is weakening. As college administrators bear the strain of changing demographics and shifting campus enrollments and the proliferation of e-commerce delivery systems there is a demand for entrepreneurial development in these arenas.

Organizational life cycling impacts, and is impacted by, our entrepreneurial society. While it is true that entrepreneurs “dream” their organizations into existence (Adizes, 1988), it is also true that both societal ambition and resilience often bring them to fruition. It must be noted

that in any long-term situation positive momentum is difficult to sustain. Creative leadership, open to both change and innovation, is key to sustaining vital organizations and their entrepreneurial spirit. Adize (1988, p. 56) writes of a purposeful organizational stage in which businesses exhibit the flexibility of entrepreneurialism and the stability of maturity. Businesses noted to display purely mature organizational characteristics are less likely to demonstrate entrepreneurialism as a natural trait and to resist the adaptation and innovation necessary for long term viability (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Flamholtz & Randle, 2000).

The small community college bookstore succeeds or fails under circumstances which are little different from those that affect businesses in other industries. The drive in maturing or declining industries provokes similar reactions. In the particular case of the college community bookseller, the artifact of industry consolidation from small brick-and-mortar businesses includes movement to contracted services through national booksellers and expansion of electronic, digital, and consumer sensitive products. Consideration of alterative forms of book business processes and Internet-driven delivery systems is imminent as the young college student becomes more demanding toward a "connected" environment (Vargas, 2000). Sensitive to millennium generation demographics and values, the small college bookstore books sales are correlative to the college enrollments, as well as the changing buying behaviors of the younger college student favoring national brands (Deahl, Get Em' While), and electronic commerce (Vargas, 2000). Due to failing enrollments, falling book sales, and changing preferences in the millennium generation student, the community college administrator faces two decisions: whether to lease bookstores to national booksellers and if to integrate brick-and-mortar services to include electronic commerce and digital products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Life Cycling: As A Model

The stages of life cycles, according to Lester, Parnell and Carraher (2003) are dependent upon an organization's activities and corporate structure. Threats and opportunities vary as organizations and firms move through their life cycles (Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001, p. 9). An effective life cycle model aids management in a variety of areas, as the model guides an organization through formal procedures and systems upgrades, strategies, priorities, and management changes. Such models can demonstrate the need to abandon past practices, in seeking growth and success through newer transitions. Some theorists (Masurel & Montfort, 2006; as cited in Churchill & Lewis, 1983) have developed life cycle models that describe and fit certain types of firms, and that are appropriate for organizations of various sizes. Other theorists (Lester, Parnell & Carraher, 2003; Quinn & Cameron, 1983) present a generic model for profit and nonprofit businesses entities.

Organizational life cycling theorists create models that aid leaders and managers as they evaluate and develop long term strategies for their businesses. The particular theory or model chosen by a manager is dependent on, but not necessarily determined by, a business's practices or its type. Prevailing theories related to the impact of life cycles in an entrepreneurial society vary dependent on the position(s) of a firm and its particular life stage.

Similarities between organizational life cycle theories are more common than are differences. However, this article is particularly interested in the effects and analysis of, organizational life

cycling, in its relationship to the open or arrested decisions of administrators to move in the flow of new delivery systems, namely contracted services and electronic commerce. The research which concerns life cycling particular to the college bookstore includes theories based on small service firms, universities, and educational institutions. Research relevant to nonprofit organizations was considered as well.

Adizes

Adizes (1988) proposes a ten stage life cycle. Stages ascend from entrepreneurialism or start-up and growth to the professionally managed mature stage and further into decline and death. This model demonstrates that leadership can overcome external pressures customarily lending to demise. Adizes asserts that synergistic leadership is critical to entrepreneurial strategy. A more holistic approach to management and leadership is advocated by Adizes through his ten-stage model with the goal of his organizational life cycle model being the attainment of vitality (p. 56), whereby the firm or organization has control and yet is still flexible.

When an organization enters the stable phase of its life cycle, inflexibility is often a key factor. Another term for this stage of the life cycle model might be "comfortable". Without entrepreneurial leadership and energized internal marketing forces, a firm can prolong its "comfort zone" into bureaucracy and eventually, the death stage (Adizes, 1988). Adizes' model incorporates the effects of leadership, behavior, and goals on organizational life cycling. Important to Adizes' contribution is the entrepreneurial expression of administrators and managers in effectively responding to environmental triggers. For example, one industry illuminated is that of the commercial bookseller in relation to the academic bookseller and the differences in responses in those industries. A response has been the deferring of college bookstore functions to the commercial agent, who has greater capacity for entrepreneurial contribution.

Lester, Parnell and Carraher

Lester, Parnell and Carraher (2003) proposed a model that uses a "best features" of approach, and is adaptable for all types of firms. In this model, small businesses are generally placed in either the existence stage or the survival stage (Churchill & Lewis, 1983) and defined in such a way as to accommodate all small but older organizations (Lester, et. al., p. 3). The five-stage model is: a. existence entrepreneurial or birth stage, b. survival – seek growth, c. success – maturity and formalization, d. renewal – teamwork and matrix structure, and e. decline – lack of profit and market share.

Masurel and Montfort

Masurel and Montfort (2006) have studied professional service firms. Their research analyzing the life cycles of small and medium-sized service firms (SMEs) offers a model to such firms, smaller organizations and, importantly, to businesses such as community college bookstores. Their model, based on hypotheses dealing with a firms' sales, labor force, and business performance, revealed that, rather than growing only in order to survive, SMEs grow and change throughout an entire five-stage life cycle. Masurel and Montfort (2006) also noted that diversification increases through the maturity stage and decreases after maturity. This is due to the types of sectors, clients, and activities these firms deal with. Important to this paper is

how SMEs develop and how each life stage is characterized by size, diversity, complexity, and management factors (Masurel & Montfort, 2006, p. 3). The community college bookstore is noted to be a small-to-medium size business, non-professional in nature, with gross sales of conservatively less than 1.5 million per year (Addison personal interview October 30, 2006). The profile of the community college bookstore is not professional in nature and maybe slow to accept or advocate change. Steeped in the academic culture, the community college bookstore may be one that responds latently to environmental triggers and is slow to adapt to entrepreneurial innovation.

FIGURE 1

ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE CYCLE

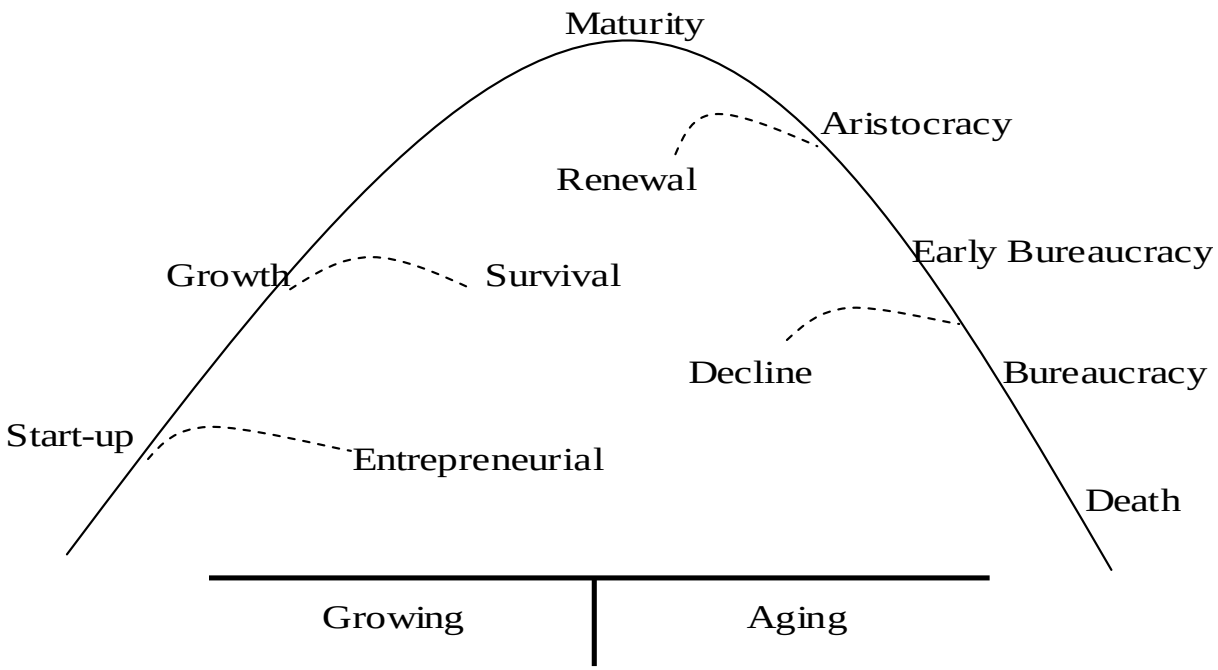

Figure 1. The above figure demonstrates general milestones and stages for organizational life cycles. Adapted from *Corporate Life Cycles* (1988) by Adizes and *Organizational Life Cycle: A Five-stage Empirical Scale* (2003) by Lester, Parnell and Carraher.

Liao

Liao (2006) expanded on the effects of life cycle theories by researching, and then stating, that an organization's life cycle position affects the relationship between corporate control and innovation. The focus of his research, and subsequent theory, was on product diversification and strategic management of business in different life cycles. Liao's (2006) research on corporate control, and its effects on subsidiaries, differs from the other research presented in this paper. Chosen for its attention to an organization's evolution and success as driven by product innovation, this model supports management in firms such as the college

bookstore (p. 2). The community college bookstore behaves in a manner similar to a subsidiary in that the mission of the store supports but is different from that of the college. Hence, the bookstore, as it considers innovation, and contemplates its future role at the institution, should be effectively managed at its own level, and not evaluated by the same criteria by which academic functions are judged. Therefore, the culture of the bookstore could deviate from that of the college, allowing for the leasing of the business to a national seller and interfacing with technology in areas not common on the small college campus.

Duffy

Duffy (2001) considers a model that is more appropriate for mature firms and organizations, and its central focus is customer-based. The strategic-based life cycle model is most effective when an organization is desirous of a new business model, highlighting the best technologies and implementations (p. 2). The customer-based focus of this model is useful when a business considers new practices, or when ventures are considered. Duffy's model is an important reference as a positioning tool for non-financial indicators of corporate value for an organization such as the college bookstore. The bookstore should have as its focus the creation of value for customers in order to build loyalty and interdependence between the business and its customers. In fact, students exposed to commercial booksellers correlate those positive feelings toward a college when the national firm leases the bookstore functions (Deahl, Get'Em While). Trends in the market place of college booksellers indicate a movement toward electronic sales (NACS, 2006). In this regard, the creation of satisfaction and value for the student-rich target market necessitates movement away from the very fabric of the brick-and-mortar bookstore. Inclusion of a rebirth into the electronic format seems eminent necessitating a transcendence of the traditional college brick-and-mortar bookstore (Cummings & Worley, 2005).

Simon

Simon (2001) asserts that nonprofit firms and organizations evolve in life cycling patterns similar to those of for-profit firms. Directing influence to the nonprofit community college sector, Simon reiterates that nonprofit firms are affected by the same influences that affect for-profit firms including variables such as age, size, rate of industry growth, social environment, and leadership (p. 8). Simon's research into the life stages of nonprofit organizations is critical to any analysis of a firm, such as the community college bookstore.

Entrepreneurialism

Entrepreneurialism can be defined as the end result of creating, processing, and developing value through innovation. An entrepreneurial society benefits from contributions made by entrepreneurial communities. These communities are differentiated by the impetus of a mass of entrepreneurs engaged in profit-seeking activities as individuals and as networks of people and industries (Lichtenstein, Lyon & Kutzhanova, 2004). These communities, in turn, aid in creating and fostering entrepreneurial societies, making full use of human capital and generating economic growth. Contrary to the market-driven concept is the characteristic of academic entrepreneurship which may focus on value development rather than market growth (Laukkanen, 2003, p. 2). Motives for profit may cause friction due to differences of values, rules, cultures, and resources. At issue is Laukkanen's (p. 4) premise of market-driven entrepreneurial ideas for financial gain.

Clark (2004) has studied sustainable change and the creation of entrepreneurial universities. Clark's (2004) research postulates that change at the university level is best determined from the "bottom up" and the "inside-out" (p. 2) and he states, further, that if analysis is managed from the top-down, the internal organic flow of the institution will be missed (p. 2). Clark (2004) has altered his first interpretation of change to that of sustained change, which is dependent on "steady states" inclusive of "bureaucracy of change" (p. 5). To him, the right kind of organizational structure is necessary to allow a university to change itself and adapt to a changing society (Clark, 2004, p. 174). Universities, and similar institutions, succeed with change-oriented management. Clark advocates beginning with small improvements, which ultimately lead to major change (p. 6). He further states that change specified at particular sites gives credence to induced generalizations (p. 6). Clark acknowledges that academic observers on both the outside and inside think entrepreneurialism should not be applied to institutions of higher education (p. 7). Stating that "change is ever present", Clark reiterates that "entrepreneurial" is a term used to reference attitudes and procedures that lead to the modern self-reliant, self-guiding university. Entrepreneurialism allows universities to control their own destinies (p. 7).

Clark's initial research on entrepreneurial universities alerts management to the realization that "bottom up" and "inside out" change is best to maintain organizational organic flow (Clark, 2004, p. 2). Change, according to Clark (2004), is beneficial if the correct organizational structure is in place, so that a university can adapt to a changing society (p. 174). The college bookstore's management is alert to industry trends and is continually adopting small changes to integrate better business practices. However, larger more profound changes are limited by the politics of the college and would require separation from the college culture. Clark's concepts lend validity to the idea of contracting out the administration of the bookstore since this function is seen as a support subsidiary function of the college and is not the core business of academia. A business specializing in the administrating of college booksellers could add customer satisfaction and value without distracting from the core business. Due to their commercial presence, national book sellers are also better equipped to respond to changing customer preferences.

Issues Related to the Future of College Bookstores

The college bookstore industry has historically remained in a state of flux. The use of best practices in economically operational and viable businesses, along with sound environmental practices, critically impacts a college store and its personnel (NACS, Nov/Dec2005). Of more importance to leaders in this industry is the threat of takeovers by leasing organizations, changes in content delivery, as well as the continuing quest for profitability. Future challenges to college bookstores involve issues of supply and demand (NACS, 2006, p. 2). As more "on-demand" educational materials become attainable via the Internet, industry leaders and managers have to seek innovative ways to maintain sustainability and viability. Stakeholders, from publishers to students, desire educational quality and value, while college bookstores struggle to maintain their role as intermediary between students and the institution (NACS, 2006, p. 14). In the recent past, a survey of administrators revealed that over 20% of those administrators had planned to evaluate the ownership of their college's bookstore (NACS, 2000, p. 1). The threat of being leased to a large corporate system or entity, or that of

the sale of a college's bookstore to a similar entity, is constantly in the back of the mind of any informed college bookstore manager today. The future of the college bookstore industry, as with that of all industries, does involve change. Recent feedback to a survey conducted by the National Association of College Stores (NACS, 2006) revealed that students and college administrators were those groups most willing to change (p. 16). Bookstore management and leaders were rated as those only third likely to embrace change (NACS, 2006, p. 16). In order for the college bookstore to retain a viable place in the "educational chain", it must evolve and adapt. The academic institution is also challenged to consider the demands of a more connected customer, and with the change in interests, assess the opportunities available through larger, more integrated corporations such as Barnes & Noble Booksellers and Follett Higher Education Group, which run more than 2,000 campus bookstores combined (Deahl, Get'Em While).

At present, and in line with current college bookstore issues, the most significant stakeholders are students. As noted in the literature review, students are certainly those stakeholders most open to accepting change. On the contrary, college bookstore personnel are among those least likely do so. Current industry trends and changes affecting college bookstores include online purchasing of textbooks and the financial relief/benefits (to students) through electronic and digital sales (NACS, 2006). Further, the need to print hardcover textbooks has been significantly reduced due to e-book/digital content offerings by publishers. The emergence of digital content offerings affects college stakeholders in several ways. Students desire ease of use and financial incentives; the administration, including trustees, as well as parents, and faculty want quality educational materials to remain available to students through the college's bookstore. Further, publishers want to enhance sales, as well as retain the ability to offer quality products by the latest methods, while bookstore managers want to remain the intermediary between the institution and the student (NACS, 2006).

College Bookstore Leasing

Community college administrators consider the possibility of contracting bookstore services as this is now a popular option. Success with other college services such as food service, the contracting of college bookstores in particular to commercial concerns has expanded the deliverables in this industry. Opportunities for the college are customer sensitive products, decreased costs, improved revenues, new and remodeled stores, and access to digital formats and electronic commerce (Deahl, Get 'Em While). Contracting allows for a mutually beneficial partnership for the management of the college bookstore. The partnership provides for a high level of service to the on campus community as it eliminates financial risk and generates income for the college (G.M. Sullivan, personal communication, August 9, 2007). Further, the typical partnership includes additional benefits of inventory investment, market segmentation, branding, and benchmarking. Due to the commercialization of the large booksellers, consumer research has also shown that the millennium generation intertwines impressions about the university with feelings toward the brand. Students that have positive impressions toward the bookstore brand report positive feelings toward the university. Presently, 50% of all college bookstores are leased to one of the commercial booksellers (Deahl, Get 'Em While).

Electronic Commerce and Digital Delivery Systems

According to the National Association of College Stores, the majority of students (84%) buy books through their college bookstore but a growing percentage purchase their textbooks

online (NACS, 2004). Of further concern to all bookstore managers is the looming arrival of digital, e-books, and e-readers. Research in 2007, found that 76% of students polled preferred printed textbooks and 18% preferred e-books (Berger, 2007). However, the first delivery of e-books was found to be flawed in delivery and pricing, placing stress on the booksellers to improve on this medium (2007, NACS). New digital products and services like VitalSource and iChapters are continuing to attempt to penetrate through improved methods such as the first color e-book to be published in 2008 (Berger, 2007). Digital content categories are expanded and include: card access to digital products, print-on-demand, digital-to-disc, proprietary reader, licensing, and direct-to-student products. One innovation that improves on this process is self-authored professor-generated course content offered as digital products. In the future, commercial booksellers expect that students will pull digital delivery from their professors rather than being pushed by publishers (NACS, 2007). The bookstore will be expected to manage the delivery of the e-version and hard copy edition of this material (NACS, 2007). At the crux of strategic planning, administrators and bookstore managers will face the threats and solutions that the "connected age" demands with the responses occurring through commercial leasing and movement into electronic media.

CONCLUSION

Staging of the life cycle of the organization and more importantly of that of the industry suggests that the college bookstore at a community college is enmeshed in a mature and potentially declining market. The restraints of the college are mirrored onto the bookstore in this market. Maturity of a market demands the movement into cost-consciousness and the opportunity of industry oligopoly, which promotes an economy-of-scale and efficiency sometimes lacking in a free-standing community college bookstore (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Contracting of the administration of the bookstore to an outside provider also allows for a broader reach on innovation toward the electronic market and the potential of creating value for the prime customer, the student. Consideration of consolidation of the market of college booksellers through transfer of ownership or administration at the institutional level is prevalent. In fact, approximately half of all college and university bookstores are now leased by one of the major commercial sellers (Deahl, Get 'Em While). Statistically, the numbers substantiate consideration of leasing or contracting the bookstore to a larger entity which may provide needed resources and economies.

An infusion of dollars provided by the contracted service could afford the bookstore and, by extension, the college, freedom from the constraints that are often associated with mature and stable organizations. Contracting the administration of the bookstore would then be "the option" for the community college, according to Simon (2001), rather than the inevitable "decline" or "death" as described by Adizes (1988). Prosperity, as assessed by the administration of the college, could then be determined on the basis that the bookstore would be considered a necessary part of a viable campus. Further, the management of the bookstore would be offered more freedom to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors which, in turn, could create an inviting collegiate atmosphere.

Entrepreneurialism, as it is impacted by organizational life cycling, and as it relates to a college bookstore, is essential to the survival and prosperity of this particular niche of the college-related service industry. The degree to which the administration and/or leadership is amenable to

this concept will vary from institution to institution. Market-driven ideas that lead to financial gain while politically controlled are not necessarily bad for an academic institution (Laukkanen, 2003, p. 4). In many instances, market-driven ideas do lead to financial gain either as a promotion of revenue or the restraint of costs both lending to the profitability of the business. Through entrepreneurially-driven decisions the college reduces costs, adds revenue, provides customer sensitive branding, and promotes technology easily and affordably. Administration's concurrent concerns of loss of control are counter balanced by gains in customer satisfaction.

On the other hand, the administration might choose not to contract the bookstore's services. A major concern deals with the many layers of corporate structure that must be dealt with when changes are to be made (boston.com, 2006). In this case, cost savings sought through partnerships with other organizations, and funds solicited through grants or donations, might help the bookstore remain an indispensable part of the institution. Further, entrepreneurialism can be strengthened by increased support, both emotional and financial, on the part of the college's administration. In many cases, the most successful outcome for entities situated in mature and declining markets can be affected by increased resources, either human or capital. In this scenario, the market-driven ideas referenced by Laukkanen (2003), which lead to financial gain, would be best utilized

Regardless of the contracting issues, community college bookstores will be forced to face the inevitable decision of adding to electronic resources and appealing to the preferences of a more connected generation of learners. The stress to produce innovation may be one in a number of signs of the consolidating market.

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