

**Практика на основе фактов и управление современными,  
ориентированными на пользователя библиотечными услугами:  
некоторые наблюдения**

**Evidence Based Practice and the Management  
of the Modern User Centered Library Service: Some Observations**

**Практика на основі фактів та управління сучасними, орієнтованими  
на користувача бібліотечними послугами: деякі спостереження**

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Директора библиотек сталкиваются с огромными трудностями при необходимости предоставления пользователям высококачественных услуг за счет оптимального использования ресурсов. Подход, основанный на фактах, способствует пониманию потребностей пользователей и реагированию на них, а также отвечает задачам экономного, эффективного и оперативного управления. Рост цифровых услуг стимулировал предоставление доступа к проверенной информации по эффективности деятельности. Массивы фактических данных, качественных и количественных, могут быть собраны вместе для получения описания библиотечного обслуживания в смысле использования и предоставления информационных ресурсов. Факторы оценки, включающие исходные данные, результаты, выводы и следствия, обсуждаются вместе с получением и использованием данных по пользователям, их требованиями и отношению, и представляют собой действенные методы развития и повышения качества услуг.

Library managers face formidable challenges in meeting user needs with appropriate services of quality through optimal use of resources. The evidence based practice approach contributes to understanding and responding to user needs and responses as well as to managing services economically, efficiently and effectively. The growth of digital services has contributed to the availability of reliable performance information. An array of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, can be assembled to describe how a library service is performing in terms of resource utilization and delivery. Evaluation factors such as inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact are discussed together with the acquisition and use of data on the user community, its requirements and attitudes. These are powerful methods for developing and enhancing services.

Директори бібліотек стикаються із значними проблемами у забезпеченні потреб користувачів у високоякісних послугах за рахунок оптимального використання ресурсів. Підхід, що базується на фактах, сприяє розумінню потреб користувача й реагуванню на них, а також відповідає задачам економічного, ефективного й оперативного управління. Збільшення цифрових послуг стимулювало надання доступу до перевіреної інформації з ефективною діяльністю. Можуть бути зібрані масиви фактичних даних, як якісних так і кількісних, щоб описати, як проводиться бібліотечне обслуговування щодо використання і доставки інформаційних ресурсів. Фактори оцінки, що включають вихідні дані, результати, висновки та наслідки, обговорюються разом із отриманням і використанням даних щодо користувачів, їх вимог та відношення, і являють собою діючі методи розвитку та підвищення якості послуг.

## **Introduction**

The role of the modern manager, any manager, is a challenging one involving many and varied demands on a range of skills and knowledge. Policies need to be interpreted as aims and objectives and then transformed into action and results with the best use of resources and the highest level of quality attainable.

All this takes place in a context in which change, brought about by technological, organisational and social developments, is a constant that causes priorities, solutions and outcomes to alter. In the realm of managing a library and information service, the challenges entail meeting current and anticipated user needs with appropriate services of quality through optimal use of resources. A central aspect of this approach is the way in which users are regarded and treated contributes to the success of the operation. A range of evidence that identifies user demand and activity and describes the working of the organization, as well as what it may aspire to provide, can be used to support the endeavour. This paper is concerned with the growing emphasis on users and the evidence available for managing services successfully in that context.

### **Managing the User Centred Library Service**

Adopting a user-centred perspective of library management places the emphasis on seeing the service through their eyes and what it can, and should, do for them. There is little room for a preoccupation with process and bureaucracy in such an approach. The user-centred approach seeks to identify and understand the community's needs, now and in the future. It also maps user activity as well as attitudes and opinions regarding the services provided. Understanding and reacting to the level of use made of the service, as well as to when, how and why becomes important. So also does knowing about non users [or potential users] as well as lapsed users. Building on this information, the service is developed around what works and what fulfils community expectations and priorities. No longer is it sufficient [even if it ever was] to offer a service on a 'take or leave' basis. In many instances there are competing sources of materials and information provision which cannot be overlooked such as discount bookstores, the internet and information brokers. To summarise, the user is placed firmly at the centre of the service 'universe' rather than the systems, methods, materials and even the people involved in delivering it.

### **Managing Optimally**

The manager has always to work within finite budgets and time frames to create a the best service that can be achieved. Inevitably, resources are not unlimited and not all service ambitions can be fulfilled so there is need to prioritise objectives and resource deployment to achieve optimal results. In addition, the climate of accountability prevailing in all organizations emphasizes the need to demonstrate value for money to those who make funds available, whether they be governments and communities in the public sector, or corporations in the private sector. Moreover, it has to be recognised that library and information services do not operate in isolation, but compete for resources with other agencies within an organisation. Securing an adequate funding allocation relies upon soundly based business planning and convincing advocacy. Operating in this type of climate requires a considerable amount of supporting evidence of various kinds as well as a framework for demonstrating value for money. An example of such a framework is the 'three E's concept' which may be summarised as:

- Economy in acquisition of resources
- Efficiency in the use of resources
- Effectiveness in the achievement of objectives

The first two may be assessed, to a large extent, through an analysis of costs against results and there remains a great deal that can be achieved with relatively simple metrics. The third is dependent upon there being a clear view of objectives and a coherent approach to describing and defining effectiveness.

### **Managing with Evidence**

The importance of assembling and exploiting a range of evidence to support a successful management strategy has been discussed earlier. In the context of evidence based practice it is convenient to view evidence as being of two principal types:-

- Performance Evidence  
and
- Research Evidence

## Performance Evidence

Performance evidence may be described as that which pertains to the primarily operational aspects of an individual service or group of services. It encompasses the quantitative and qualitative aspects of what goes on in, and around, a service from beginning to end. The growth of digital systems and information products has contributed to the availability of reliable performance information because so much data can now be harvested from the transactional records residing within them. It may be argued, on the other hand, that digitisation has brought added complexity to the service configurations and options now available.

A basic taxonomy of performance evidence will comprise: inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact. In addition, there is an array of community related evidence that is central to a meaningful and successful user oriented service.

Inputs describe the resources that are applied to providing the service and will contain financial and much other inventory data. Inputs include: how much money is spent on the service as a whole, and on different parts of it; the numbers and grades of staff employed; the number of service points and their opening hours; the accommodation, including seating, that is provided; the equipment, including workstations, available and the collections, including electronic sources, that are accessible. Collections may also be described in more qualitative terms. An example is the Conspectus approach used by many research libraries to describe the range and depth of their scholarly collections. An IFLA Guidelines document outlines the methodology. [1]

Outputs describe what users derive directly from the service. Quantitative measures of output include: visits made to a service; items consulted within a library; items loaned; requested and reserved items fulfilled; documents or photocopies supplied; enquiries received and answered; search sessions performed and attendance at training events. Qualitative indicators of output may relate, for example, to the relevance of documents supplied, or to the reliability and accuracy of information provided. In many cases they are more difficult to establish. Some quantitative output indicators can be correlated and refined to reveal information on the quality of the service. For example, it is possible to calculate the number of enquiries answered within a specified target time, or the percentage of reservations fulfilled within a specified waiting time.

Outcomes describe what the user gets out of the service in a much broader context. They relate to the advantages that the user derives from using the service in terms of contributing to recreation, learning, working or living. Identifying individual outcomes entails considerable effort in surveying users, although sampling may provide sufficient evidence to establish a reliable indicator. Systematically assembled anecdotal evidence and case studies can build up a reasonably representative picture of outcomes.

On a more general level, service penetration, that is, the percentage of the population that are active members of a service, offers a broad indication of outcomes. The number of repeat visits, or repeat enquiries can also yield information regarding outcomes and assist in establishing the level of satisfaction with a service, but such data have to be interpreted carefully. Another outcome measure is the needs/fill rate which measures how often the user gets what he, or she wanted. More detailed study can reveal whether a user found the information supplied useful, thus adding to the qualitative assessment of outcome.

Discovering user satisfaction with particular aspects of the service can also indicate outcomes. An example of a highly systematic approach to establishing user satisfaction and perceptions of quality is LibQual, a survey based method developed by the Association of Research libraries in the USA, in which users are asked to rate several aspects of the service that they receive against their expectations. [2]

Impacts describe the higher order influences that the service has on the totality of the community or organisation. Impact may be interpreted as: what difference, in the long run, has the service made? Put more directly, the question can be redefined in the following ways: in a commercial organisation, how does it contribute to profitability and growth; in an educational environment, how does it support learning and research; in a community public service, how does it add to social and cultural life as well as to economic prosperity? Assessing impact poses many challenges of methodology and interpretation since the causal relationship between the service and the served may be difficult to isolate. In the United Kingdom official impact measures for the public library sector specified by central government have been centred upon a broad set of shared social priorities that include:

- Raising standards across schools
- Improving the quality of life for children, young people, families at risk and older people

- Promoting healthier communities
- Creating safer and stronger communities
- Promoting the economic vitality of localities.[3]

These factors serve to drive the agenda for achieving community impact by libraries as well as other agencies and, as such, offer a series of discrete criteria for assessment. They are, however, reliant on the prevailing social and cultural priorities of a particular administration and, thus, may be vulnerable to change should the emphasis alter.

Increasingly, the library and information service is having to prove its worth to the community in terms of tangible impact in order to justify its existence and to reassure those who provide funding. More sophisticated methods are being applied such as contingent valuation analysis and economic impact studies. These offer insights into the value of a service to the wider community. They have, however, to be carefully designed and undertaken if they are to provide reliable evidence.

### **Research Evidence**

Research evidence may be viewed as the aggregate of more specialised investigations that provide results and conclusions to inform service design and decisions as well as in some cases policy. The research may be local to the institution or, more frequently, based on externally reported studies conducted elsewhere. The approach derives from the highly formalised evidence-based methodology developed in medicine and health care that is becoming an established success. In contrast with health care however, the research knowledge base in library and information management remains, at present, limited in terms of scope and reliability.

Andrew Booth, a leading exponent of evidence based management, has created the following helpful definition:

What is Evidence Based Management? Evidence-based information practice is an approach that: ...promotes the collection, interpretation and integration of valid, important and applicable user-reported, librarian observed, and research-derived evidence. The best available evidence, moderated by user needs and preferences, is applied to improve the quality of professional judgements. [4]

These two types of evidence, performance evidence and research evidence may be regarded in many cases as complementary. Research evidence may, for example, be used to underpin the impact measures noted above. Moreover, they may not always be as distinct as they have been portrayed here for the purpose of the discussion. For example, a specialised local study that is repeated regularly may become embedded in the general operational assessment of a service.

### **The Service Domain**

The user centred approach requires an understanding of the whole community if services are to be appropriately targeted and tailored to meet expressed and latent needs. Much can be discovered about users' habits, behaviour and attitudes, particularly at a general level, from the performance evidence gathered locally, as well as appropriate research evidence available. However, for a complete picture of the service domain, the entire community's composition and profile need to be established. Such information describes the size and characteristics of the population to be served. It therefore encompasses actual and potential users. As well as a geographic breakdown, detail on special groups of users and their information needs can be assembled. For example, data on the number of visually impaired people in a community will enable a library and information service to plan appropriately in terms of reading aids, environment and accessibility.

In many cases service domain data is easily quantifiable and much of it may be accessible from existing records including local censuses and corporate statistics. On the other hand, in some areas of the globe where population data is less accessible building a picture of the service domain may prove more challenging. It must also be appreciated that considerations of individual privacy may influence the extent to which a detailed community profile can be created.

### **Conclusion**

Although the world of the library and information services manager is full of challenges it also offers stimulation and opportunity as new methods, systems and information products emerge and new ideas and

ways of working present themselves. The focus on users, combined with an emphasis on demonstrating value for money, requires a management approach that relies on timely, reliable and appropriate evidence for its success. This paper has offered some observations on using these powerful methods to support delivering, developing and enhancing services.

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