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Managing the modern library: can e-measures help?

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Overview

- The modern academic library
  - organisational & operational context
- The role of performance assessment in library management
- Effective assessment-based management
  - progress to date
  - influencing factors
  - ways forward
The modern academic library: organisational context

- Use of ICT in
  - research
  - teaching & learning
  - administration

- Integration of systems to support this activity

- Blurring of traditional roles & responsibilities

- Emphasis on quality & assessment
The modern academic library: operational context

- Complex & dynamic operating environment:
  - demographics
  - user needs, priorities & expectations
  - range & complexity of products & services
  - digital library developments

- Tight budgets & inflationary prices

- Accountability to stakeholders
Role of performance assessment

In practical terms, a cycle of activity:

- determine what the desired state should be
- measure the current state
- determine the best way to close the gap between current & desired state
- implement the changes
- re-measure to verify that the gap has closed

(Stein, 2003)
Role of performance assessment

In strategic terms:
- to assess the achievement of strategy
- to influence its development

Important to distinguish between organisational & operational strategy

Essential that library’s contribution to strategic aims of parent institution is well understood

(Ford, 2002)
Role of performance assessment

In library management terms:

- a means of delivering client-centred services of consistently high quality in a cost effective manner
- an agent of change in a service environment of continuous, rapid & radical change
- a means of demonstrating the value of library services & their contribution to institutional goals

(Barton, 2004)
Assessment-based management: the positives

- Robust measures, methods & models now available
- Some excellent examples of good practice:
  - Five Universities Benchmarking Group (UK)
  - University of Washington (US)
  - University of Cape Town (SA)
- Published case studies
- Support & training
Assessment-based management: the negatives

- Good examples of effective use of performance assessment within library management remain scarce

- Assessment of electronic or hybrid library services is:
  - sporadic
  - limited & naïve
  - thin & inconsistent
Influencing factors

- Organisational structure & culture, at both library & institutional level
- Staff skills, especially analysis of data & presentation of results
- Pace of change & resulting immediacy of decision-making
- Dissemination, communication & support
The way forward?

- Culture change
  - awareness & training among library & institutional managers
- The skills gap
  - tools, training & support
- Channels of communication & dissemination
  - exchange of experience
  - research into practice
- Responsiveness to change
Cause for optimism

While libraries may not have the results they hope for, or have demonstrated the integration of data collection, analysis, interpretation & use in management, there is far greater awareness of the issues involved, & the need to develop not only the skills to understand & use data effectively, but also the organisational structures that will facilitate application.

(Hiller, 2003)