
The Stakeholder Approach to the construction of Performance Measures: some implications

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Abstract

A large questionnaire survey in 1995-96 covered ten stakeholder groups in fifteen UK higher education libraries to examine their views on 91 library performance measures. Those considered most important are discussed and the entire set is listed.

Library management issues seemed much less important to users and to academics than to library staff. A hierarchical 'looking upwards' to groups above was noted.

Results supported the findings of earlier Stakeholder research overseas. It is suggested these results require conventional performance measures to be reviewed and extended. In particular The Effective Academic Library requires a broader perspective. These findings in the library world have subsequently been overtaken by a broad political 'Stakeholderism'.

The Occasion

'The Stakeholder Approach to the Construction of Performance Measures' was a BLRIC funded research project which began in July 1995 and concluded in November 1996. A report was made to the British Library Research and Development Department (British Library Research and Innovation Report 31). Copies are available from, John C Crawford, Glasgow Caledonian University Library, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow, G4 0BA. It is hoped that a research level article will appear later.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the research project was to design a set of user chosen performance measures, using the stakeholder method, which can be used in British academic libraries to improve customer service

The **detailed objectives** were:

1. To identify the following:
 - a set of user (stakeholder) chosen performance measures, using the questionnaire method
 - a small number of generally applicable "parsimonious" measures
 - an appropriate number of meaningful stakeholder groups
 - performance measures appropriate to particular stakeholder groups
2. To design semi-standardised questionnaires for:
 - general use
 - specific categories of users
3. To allow academic library managers to concentrate their attention on an independently validated set of measures.

A questionnaire consisting of 91 performance measures, each of which had to be graded on a scale of 1 to 7, was distributed to 15 participating British university libraries.

The Survey

The list of stakeholders, decided upon in conjunction with the 15 participating libraries was:

1. Part-time undergraduate
2. Full-time undergraduate
3. Part-time postgraduate (taught)
4. Full-time postgraduate (taught)
5. Postgraduate (research)
6. Research staff
7. Academic staff (teaching)

8. Library staff (other than senior staff)
9. Senior library staff
10. Members of university senior management team

Sample Design and Sample Sizes It was decided to identify samples from small populations using a census, and for large populations using Krejcie and Morgan's table⁽¹⁾ which gives suggested sample sizes for different population sizes. These samples were then doubled to allow for non-returns. Any further increase in sample size was impractical from the point of view of the participating institutions, since they were limited in the number of questionnaires they could handle. Most completed questionnaires were returned by the end of February 1996 and all were in by the end of April. They were distributed by internal mail or through lecturers and returned through a combination of internal mail and collection boxes. Several universities used the Royal Mail to contact students and they were supplied with pre-paid envelopes to encourage returns. In the end 33,797 questionnaires were distributed of which 6724 (20%) were returned. Of these, 4193 (62%) of the returns were fully completed and could be used to calculate the overall rankings.

Analysis and Conclusions

A particular value of the project was the inclusion of a large number of respondents, thus allowing identification of the characteristics of stakeholders and of the influence these have on different groups' requirements for library services. Each group was large enough to allow some consensus on different concerns to be reached, so that the user-oriented approach to performance measurement was supported. When considering individual stakeholder groups, it became clear that for many users there is still a "them and us" attitude in place, with library staff and university management on one side and users on the other. There is a tendency for each group to look upwards towards the next one, so that, for example, management issues become more important to researchers and to senior library staff.

Ranked outputs of performance issues were produced, both by all stakeholder groups in all

institutions (Figure 1) and by individual stakeholder groups. Comparisons were made between service provider stakeholder groups and user stakeholder groups and also between pre and post 1992 universities. Of the 91 issues included in the questionnaire, 18 were rated as "very important" by at least 40% of the combined stakeholders and could be regarded as the key performance issues:

- 2 Helpfulness, courtesy of staff
- 4 Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed
- 5 Expertise of enquiry desk staff
- 18 Provision made for disabled users
- 24 Amount of regular maintenance of equipment
- 26 Adequacy of seat numbers
- 31 Match of open hours to user needs
- 42 Provision of multiple copies of items in high use
- 43 Speed and accuracy of re-shelving of materials
- 44 Availability of sought material on the shelf
- 56 Proportion of materials listed on computer catalogue
- 57 Availability of library catalogues throughout the library
- 58 Access to library catalogues / CD-ROMs / Internal databases via networks throughout the campus
- 65 Overall user satisfaction
- 70 Competence of library management
- 78 Total amount of library budget
- 79 Total amount of library budget as proportion of university expenditure
- 80 Flexibility of library budget to respond to new subject areas

Figure 1: Rankings: Combined Responses

Indicator	Rank	%frequency of 'very important'	Indicator	Rank	%frequency of 'very important'
q42. Multiple copies provided	1	60.79%	q46. Flexibility of loan periods	51	29.81%
q65. User satisfaction	2	60.15%	q12. Suitability of library building	52	29.12%
q02. Staff helpfulness	3	58.55%	q32. Institution goals match user needs	53	28.74%
q18. Provisions for disable users	4	55.95%	q66. Time taken for journal binding	54	28.33%
q56. Proportion of materials catalogued	5	54.38%	q61. CD-Rom serials indexes available	55	27.74%
q04. Enquiry staff available	6	52.25%	q39. All material available for browsing	56	27.55%
q70. Competence of library management	7	51.87%	q87. Expenditure per FTE student	57	26.47%
q78. Total library budget	8	51.63%	q45. Borrowing entitlement	58	26.26%
q44. Availability of materials on shelf	9	51.56%	q76. Communication with user groups	59	24.99%
q31. Opening hours	10	50.78%	q08. Level of staff training	60	24.23%
q23. Cost of photocopying	11	48.39%	q09. Workload levels	61	24.04%
q24. Regular equipment maintenance	12	47.58%	q55. New stock notification	62	23.99%
q15. Quietness	13	46.51%	q01. Staff per FTE student	63	23.47%
q58. Catalogue networked within campus	14	46.48%	q47. Proportion of stock in short-loan	64	23.13%
q43. Re-shelving	15	46.46%	q60. Printed serials indexes available	65	22.44%
q22. Photocopier numbers	16	46.12%	q52. User recommendation mechanisms	66	22.39%
q91. Extent to which services are free	17	45.72%	q88. Expenditure per FTE researcher	67	22.25%
q80. Budget flexibility	18	44.34%	q64. Sanctions policy	68	21.04%
q57. Catalogue availability	19	44.05%	q75. Openness of management procedures	69	20.70%
q79. Budget as % of university budget	20	43.95%	q17. Provision of carrels	70	20.46%
q69. Stock security	21	43.86%	q16. Provision of group study rooms	71	20.15%
q05. Enquiry staff expertise	22	43.45%	q53. Feedback to users	72	19.84%
q26. Adequate seating	23	41.19%	q40. Usage of reference collection	73	19.51%
q34. Range of material types	24	39.33%	q68. State of repair of stock	74	19.29%
q67. Currency of materials	25	39.18%	q06. Counter staff expertise	75	19.15%
q11. Amount of user education	26	38.85%	q77. User involvement in decision-making	76	18.65%
q25. Seats : FTE student	27	38.66%	q29. % potential users using the library	77	18.48%
q36. Publicity for services available	28	38.42%	q27. Library proximity to teaching areas	78	18.20%
q81. Materials as % of library budget	29	38.33%	q84. % material budget spent on research	79	17.17%
q62. % enquiries answered	30	38.25%	q83. Books : serial budget	80	16.60%
q51. Proportion of wanted items obtained	31	37.99%	q73. Use of planning procedures	81.1	16.17%
q35. Range of services	32	37.94%	q85. Staff budget as % of library budget	81.2	16.17%
q38. Collection adequacy	33	36.63%	q21. Provision of audio-visual equipment	82	14.81%
q49. Speed of ILL	34	36.47%	q07. Proportion of qualified staff	83	13.31%
q59. Ease of use of OPACs	35	36.42%	q86. Cost per item	84	12.47%
q13. Collection arrangement	36	36.20%	q72. Stock development policies	85	11.78%
q20. Remote database access	37	35.85%	q30. Vacation : term time usage ratio	86	10.80%
q63. Queues	38	34.94%	q28. Refreshments proximity to library	87	10.59%
q14. Signing	39	34.15%	q10. Staff involvement in organisation	88	10.28%
q33. Total items held by library	40	33.99%	q41. % collection borrowed	89	10.02%
q82. Budget allocation amongst subjects	41	33.94%	q71. Management policies	90	6.58%
q54. Acquisition speed	42	33.79%			
q48. Short-loan reservations available	43	33.32%			
q90. Cost efficiency of library	44	33.20%			
q89. Cost effectiveness of library	45	32.22%			
q37. Reciprocal access to libraries	46	32.03%			
q74. Library goals achieved	47	31.96%			
q03. Subject specialists available	48	31.84%			
q50. Recall speed of reserved items	49	31.46%			
q19. Computers provided for general use	50	30.93%			

The above preferences show that there is more interest in direct user services and the ability of library management to deliver them than in involvement and feedback issues. If the university is interested in involving users in decision making, rather than just making them aware of what has been decided, it would need to look at mechanisms which would encourage them to be involved in future planning. This point may be allied to the apparently low interest in internal library management and also to the low value placed on the mission statement approach. Both *Number and quality of written management policies* and *Use of planning procedures (long and short term)* received low ratings. Users are more motivated by the provision of hard information about services than by the possibility of involvement in strategic planning, a fact which has particular implications for the planning of user education and the identification of relevant publicity material relating to library services.

It was not possible to identify an objectively validated method of recognising the most important and least important issues. The figures of 40% of respondents' highly placed preferences and 25% for low preferences which were used as cut-off points were reached by studying the tables of rankings and making a subjective judgement.

Planning of library accommodation could be influenced by the low rating given to *Provision of group study rooms*, *Provision of carrels* and *Proximity of refreshment service during library open hours* as well, of course, by university-wide decisions about the provision of computers for general use. These issues are usually the outcome of the teaching methods favoured by the university, and regular evaluation of this requirement would need to be undertaken.

Because of its generally low ranking, there may be a case for reducing audio-visual provision. This would have implications for purchase and maintenance of equipment and for appropriate staffing.

Since all student groups rate the availability of multiple copies very highly, there could be implications for the supply of electronic textbooks. On the other hand, some user groups, particularly undergraduates and postgraduates on taught courses, do not appear to be interested in

IT applications, and the idea of the Virtual Library may not be attractive to them. This attitude may require to be addressed if full advantage is to be taken of developments in this field. However, it is evident that attitudes to IT issues vary from one university to another and from one stakeholder group to another and each institution would be advised to study this issue in more depth.

The provision of multiple copies, together with IT issues and cost issues constitute possible areas of conflict, not only between providers and users, but also amongst identifiable groups. Consideration would also have to be given to the rating for *Extent to which services are free*, which was highly rated by users but lower by service providers, and to the fairly low rating for *Equitable and effective sanctions policy*. The possibility of charging for some services, such as photocopying, Microform copying and inter-library loans would have to be considered in the light of users' concern for the availability of free services.

There is a need to invest more time and effort in user education and information services for part-time undergraduates, whose access to the library is limited by time constraints and, often, poor information-seeking skills.

Some contradictions relating to staffing arose in the analysis of the questionnaires. There was a high ranking for *Availability of enquiry desk staff when needed* but a low rating for *Counter staff expertise*, *Levels of staff training* and *Proportion of qualified staff*, and a relatively low ranking for *Subject specialists available to provide assistance to users*. It is questionable whether participants understood the difference between enquiry staff and subject specialists, and they were not necessarily knowledgeable about the skills required by counter staff, the depth of knowledge acquired by subject specialists or the need for staff training. It would seem necessary to give more information to users about the skills, expertise and training of library staff, so that they could make more appropriate judgements about the level of assistance they require.

The comparison with current performance measurement documents demonstrates that in some instances, notably the recommendations of the Follett Report⁽²⁾, the stakeholder approach to

rating attached to *Extent to which services are free*. These issues can only be resolved by further, qualitative based, evaluation.

Different user stakeholder groups have widely differing needs and there is scope for conflict between groups, especially on issues of access to basic textbooks. The research casts doubt on the viability of on demand publishing exercises for, although all student groups rate the availability of multiple textbooks very highly, they are not very interested in IT applications and furthermore are extremely concerned about the costs attaching to the reproduction of core reading materials. This may explain why attempts to replace short loan collections with electronic, on demand access have had limited success.

Stakeholderism The project aimed to identify empirically viable stakeholder groups and successfully accomplished this. Recently 'stakeholderism' has emerged as a popular ideology and has even been espoused by the prime minister who believes that competitive success in business comes from a stakeholder approach and that companies which treat their workers as partners are the ones which succeed.⁽⁸⁾ Several large companies have taken up the idea and, as yet, it exists mainly as a macroeconomic idea. Will Hutton, the editor of *The Observer* in *The state to come*, an overt attempt to influence the new Labour government⁽⁹⁾, links 'stakeholderism' with the following

- the promotion of an investment culture
- the promotion of intermediate institutions between government and the electorate
- a bottom up rather than top down approach to government and administration
- the promotion of equality
- the sharing of responsibility

To what extent this philosophy is applicable to the public sector in general and librarianship in particular requires further debate but there are germs of the idea in *The Effective Academic Library (EAL)* 'P1 Integration', 'P2 User satisfaction' and especially 'P2.35' which states

"Library managers should ensure that user constituencies are regularly invited to appraise the effectiveness of the library operations and services"

The key question is: What mechanisms in university libraries are likely to facilitate stakeholderism? Qualitative mechanisms can be resource intensive and likely to lose credibility if they do not produce timeous, useful results. However stakeholder mechanisms are likely to be more successful and valued if they are seen to promote the integration of the library into the university community as proposed by *The Effective Academic Library (EAL)*. Another potential stumbling block is the possible hostility between senior library managers who do not seem to identify with user stakeholder groups on some key issues. However Davies and Kirkpatrick have argued that, as a result of the imposition of performance indicators, academic librarians have lost much of their workplace autonomy⁽¹⁰⁾. While their case is open to argument it raises the question of whether new means of accountability can offer a useful way forward.

Changing the evaluation climate Throughout the 90s academic libraries have lived in a climate of evaluation centering round such methods as teaching quality assessment, research assessment exercises and departmental reviews. The evaluation culture which permeates higher education, although praiseworthy in principle, is in practice, labour intensive, time consuming, cumbersome and is prone not to produce decision making information timeously. A more flexible ad hoc strategy which identifies problems quickly and facilitates action seems a possible alternative. The Stakeholder project, by identifying key performance issues has pointed the way to a strategy in which data could be collected directly from stakeholders using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative evaluation could be based on pre-existing quantitative data and research could be undertaken to identify the most fruitful qualitative methodologies, an approach which would extend *The Effective Academic Library (EAL)* document.

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