

Highlights of the Third Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement

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The third Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services,¹ sponsored by the Department of Information and Library Management at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, U.K, was held 26–31 August 1999. The conference was a truly international gathering, with 137 attendees from 27 countries, including 18 participants from North America. The theme of the conference was the "Value and Impact" of performance measurement activities in libraries. Information North will publish the proceedings in early 2000 for the Department of Information and Library Management, University of Northumbria at Newcastle.²

The conference aimed to provide a venue for discussing various library measurements and assessment issues and activities, to exchange experiences, to increase awareness of current research, and to identify issues for further study and work. A total of 43 papers were presented. Some major themes emerged:

- Defining and Measuring Values;
- Electronic Library and Network Measurement Indicators;
- Benchmarking;
- The Scorecard Models and Their Use in Performance Measurements;
- Government Involvement in Library Assessments;
- Quality Service Measurements and Applications;
- Management Information Services; and
- Activity-Based Costing.

Electronic and Network Services Measures

Developing new measures for electronic library services was the focus of a number of presentations. In an invited paper, "**Measuring Electronic Library Services: Possible Statistics and Performance Measures**," John Carlo Bertot investigates new library services—such as Internet-based databases, website development and maintenance, and online reference—which are "different" and difficult to measure. His paper covers assumptions, models, methodologies, and standards for networked and web-based data. Bertot describes the issues framing the lack of measurement of electronic library services due to lack of agreement about:

- what to measure;
- how to measure; and
- interpretation of the data.

Bertot's paper discusses his and Charles McClure's work on measuring electronic library services in U.S. public libraries and state-wide networks run by state libraries.³ Bertot describes measurement variables, their definitions, and assorted measurement techniques used to collect data on those variables. He also emphasizes the need for libraries, associations, and vendors to agree upon measurement indicators, measurement methodologies, data collection techniques, and new reporting standards. This is especially essential with electronic services, since key data are beyond the library's control and in the hands of vendors, remote webhosting companies, and assorted licensors. Bertot concludes that there is much work to be done, especially in developing measurement standards. Without these standards, institutional comparisons will be impossible.

Charles McClure's keynote paper, "**Issues and Strategies for Developing National Statistics and**

Performance Measures for Library Networked Services and Resources," provides an overview of how one might think about strategies and techniques for assessing networked library resources and services. Since there is no agreement on what are good data, McClure hopes that libraries will settle for data that are "good enough" in order to have information to build upon. Although libraries need to gather facts and learn to analyze them, success in advancing our understanding of the quality of networked services may depend on paying close attention to customer stories—i.e., qualitative measures. A number of practical guidelines and measurement strategies are offered for consideration: agree to disagree; focus on a small number of measures; investigate equivalent traditional and electronic measures for clarity; learn from e-commerce websites about useful data to measure and the use of automatic data capture; and utilize electronic helpdesk questions and answers. McClure stresses the need for state and national agencies to speed-up data gathering methods, analysis, and reporting to member libraries. The fact that the electronic environment is changing at a very fast rate is an additional burden for all.

Zoe Clark from CERLIM also presented a paper focusing on electronic library indicators. Clark describes the EQUINOX Project⁴ in "**EQUINOX: The Development of Performance Indicators for the Electronic Library.**" The EQUINOX Library Performance Measurement and Quality Management System is a project funded by the Telematics for Libraries Programme of the European Commission. The Project addresses the need of all libraries to develop and use methods for measuring performance in the new networked environment, alongside traditional performance measurement, and to operate these methods within a framework of quality management. The Project has two primary aims: first, to develop international agreement on electronic library performance indicators emphasizing information access and delivery, costs, and user satisfaction; and, second, to develop and test an integrated quality management and performance measurement software tool.

Service Quality Measures

Philip Calvert's keynote paper, "**A Report on Preliminary Investigations of Attitudes to Integrated Performance Measures among New Zealand University Library Staff,**" describes inquiries that attempt to develop user-defined measures that integrate measures of library effectiveness with indicators of service quality, by studying the attitudes of academic librarians to integrated measures in seven New Zealand academic libraries. The study discusses relevant measures of quality and effectiveness as well as the constituency perception of measures of market penetration, stock availability, shelving turn-around, staff performance, etc. Calvert finds that service quality is what matters to the customer. Libraries should concentrate on quality as expectation and measure the gap between customer expectations and actual performance (gap analysis). Service quality gaps are difficult to detect in internally focused institutions. He also advocates a focus on conformance quality, which means the reduction of errors, defects, and delays. Calvert notes that these are issues on which users make judgements and place value. Libraries need measurements to identify this kind of variance and to connect conformance quality with user-defined measures. Calvert advises that libraries should undertake gap analysis methods and concentrate on reducing the gaps between expectations and performance. He advises concentrating on customer related measures of effectiveness, satisfaction, and service quality that asks questions such as: How well? How accurate? How responsive? How valuable? How courteous? How satisfied? All results should be recorded and reported for accountability both to stakeholders and management for decision making. A number of customer measures are discussed in detail, and Calvert concludes that measures alone may be insufficient to convince all stakeholder groups of the library's value. Libraries need leaders that can convince funding agents of the value of the library's measured outcomes, and these leaders should insist upon better reporting tools and management information.

A number of other papers touched on issues of quality service:

Vicki Coleman, Colleen Cook, and Fred Heath comprised the panel on "**SERVQUAL: A Client-Based Approach to Developing Performance Indicators.**" They reported on six years of experience at Texas

A&M Libraries with the SERVQUAL instrument. SERVQUAL measures the gap between minimum expectations of clients on a range of library services and the perceived delivery of those services. The panel describes the Texas A&M results in detail and the use of the Six Sigma analysis tool in conjunction with the SERVQUAL instrument in analyzing the data. This is an alternative approach to monitoring service and benchmarking.

Marjorie Murfin and Michael Havener presented their paper on **"Perceived Value, Importance and Impact of Information: How Are They Related? How Do They Influence the Reference Transaction?"** This paper analyzes the nature of "patron importance" ratings and their impact on reference transactions. The findings are based upon over 10,000 transactions in public libraries and the same number of transactions in academic libraries, as measured by the WOREP tool between 1983 and 1998. The Wisconsin-Ohio Reference Evaluation Program is well established and its utility has been proven. Michael Havener of the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Library and Information Studies directs the program, which is set up on a cost recovery basis. Findings indicate that when patrons assign "importance" to their reference needs, these rankings are influenced by factors of alternate availability and external consequences, i.e., a value measure is situation dependent. Patrons, who could identify the impact of not getting their information, assigned a much higher value to it. Findings also show a correlation between how patrons communicate to the librarian the "importance" of their needs, and the librarian's perception of that "importance." Findings assigned values of cost effectiveness related to perceived "importance" of questions, groups of identifiable customers, and library staff status. Professional librarians' time at the reference desk is more cost effective, since the failure rate is lower, even if they spend additional time on each transaction. The cost of failed reference transactions should be an important factor in measuring reference effectiveness.

Shelley Phipps presented her and Carrie Russell's paper **"Performance Measurement as a Methodology for Assessing Team and Individual Performance."** The paper describes the context of developing a methodology for assessing team and individual performance as part of the University of Arizona Library's multi-year organizational restructuring from a hierarchical, internally focused organization to a team-based, customer focused, learning organization. The paper describes the development of a new Performance Effectiveness Management System (PEMS), which has three objectives:

- build an evaluation system based on the principles of a team environment;
- measure team effectiveness from a customer point of view; and
- assess individual performance in a way that would support motivation, self-responsibility, and continuous learning.

The system uses Rowena Cullen's Values/Focus/Purpose matrix presented at the second Northumbria Conference⁵ and it advances the values of an externally focused, learning library. Phipps and Russell also describe the first-year implementation challenges and the resulting progress, which indicates positive advances both for individuals and teams at the University of Arizona Library.

Ian Winkworth reported on a University of Northumbria project carried out by him, Michael Heine, and Kathryn Ray, titled **"Measuring User's Service Seeking Behaviour."** The objectives of the research project were to clarify in a conceptual way the sequential patterns of library use, to explore how well service design matches use patterns, and to design a survey and analysis methodology. The results are very encouraging. A successful data collection method was developed, new analytical tools are in place, and the pilot results suggest that this new approach may help libraries learn about patterns of user behavior. The analysis package needs more work to make it more user friendly.

Launch of New Journal

During the conference, a new journal, *Performance Measurement and Metrics: The International Journal for Library and Information Services*, was launched by Aslib. The first issue is available on the Web at <http://www.aslib.com/pmm/volume/number/index.html>.

A more detailed report on the conference is available at <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/207/lakosfull.html>. The full report contains a summary of key papers presented on each of the major themes addressed at the conference.

The next Northumbria Conference is scheduled to take place in August 2001 in Boston.

Endnotes

1. See the third Northumbria International Conference website at <http://thenortheast.com/pm3web/index.htm>.
 2. Proceedings of the earlier Northumbria Conferences are available at <http://thenortheast.com/pm3web/pm3procs.html> or through the [ARL Publications Program](#)
 3. Charles McClure and John Carlo Bertot, "Developing National Public Library Statistics and Performance Measures for the Networked Environment," 8 Nov. 1999, <http://www.albany.edu/~imlsstat/>.
 4. See the EQUINOX website at <http://equinox.dcu.ie/index.html>.
 5. Rowena Cullen, "Does Performance Measurement Improve Organizational Effectiveness? A Post-Modern Analysis," in *Proceedings of the Second Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Information North, 1998), 3–20.
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