Articulating Why You Need to Know It

INSTITUTE *of* **Museum** *and* **Library** SERVICES

This project is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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Purposes for Assessment

Why Now?

Looking Ahead to Hurdles

Why Assess?

Assessment:

- Enables **communication and dialogue** with users, not-yet users, stakeholders, decision-makers, etc.

- Moves libraries in **positive directions**

- **Drives improvements** in services, collections, spaces, etc.

  – Increases productivity

  – Lowers costs

  – Improves library offerings and engagement

- Demonstrates **library value** to user

- Is essential for ongoing **reflective practice** and honoring of **professional values**

- Generates decisions that can increase **library impact** and difference-making

Matthews, Joseph R. *Strategic Planning and Management for Library Managers*. Westport, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited, 2005.

Culture of Assessment

- Enables **two-way communication** with users, not-yet users, stakeholders, etc.
- **Informs decisions** with facts, user input, research, and analysis
- Helps **define problems** accurately
- Enables the **planning and delivering** of services/resources/spaces that maximize anticipated outcomes for users and stakeholders
- Points the way to **improvement**
- Monitors **progress** toward achieving goals/outcomes
- Helps reveal areas that require more study
- Ensures careful **stewardship** of resources
- Honors contributions of library workers
- Demonstrates **care** for users
- Responds to **accountability measures** seeking to ensure quality

Matthews, Joseph R. *Strategic Planning and Management for Library Managers*. Westport, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited, 2005.

Academic Library Communities

Students
- High school
- Prospective
- First-year
- Majors
- International
- Co-curricular groups
- First generation
- Honors
- Graduate
- Special populations

Faculty
- Tenured/ tenure-track faculty
- Non-tenure-track faculty
- Research faculty
- Part-time faculty
- Adjunct faculty
- Instructors/ lecturers
- Teaching assistants

Administration
- Presidents/ chancellors/ provosts
- Deans
- Faculty senate
- Department/unit heads
- Committee chairs

Other
- Local community
- Parents
  – Of first-year students
  – Of first-generation students
- Employers
- Graduate schools
- Accreditors
  – Regional
  – Professional

1. What **users, not-yet users, or stakeholders** do we want to focus on or **prioritize**?

2. What do these users, not-yet users, or stakeholders **care about or need to achieve their goals**, individually and/or as a group?
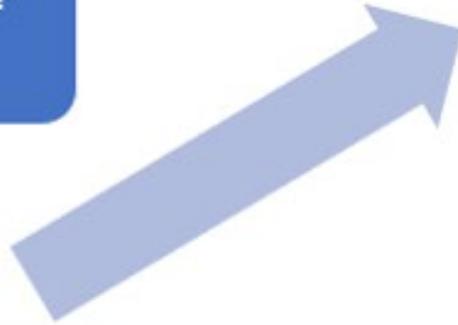
3. What **library services, resources, spaces**, etc. might **impact** the things these individuals/groups care about or need to achieve their goals?

4. What **intersections** between these (2) individual/group wants/needs and (3) library services, resources, spaces, etc. exist?

What intersections **could exist or be more impactful if we did something differently**?

Questions Assessment Helps Answer

- What **problems** exist?
  - Uncertainty, concerns, dissatisfaction, use gaps, hurdles, inequities
- What **strengths** need to grow or be developed?
- What exactly do I want/need to know?
- Does the **answer** already exist?
  - Existing data
  - Literature
  - Professional communications, e.g., conferences, listservs
- If not, how can I make the answer take shape?

Wallace, Danny P. and Connie Van Fleet. "The Culture of Evaluation." *Library Evaluation: A Casebook and Can-Do Guide*. Eds. Danny P. Wallace and Connie Van Fleet. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2001. 1–10.

Questions about the Decision to Assess

- How do we find out what we want to know?
  - What **methods** should we employ?
  - What **resources** do we require?

- Who's involved?
  - Who's **responsible**?
  - Who's **impacted**?

- What's this going to **cost**?
  - What about direct, indirect (not solely used to support the assessment), human costs (workload, morale)?

- When is the data "due"? What's the **timeframe**?
  - As needed (difficult to plan, sometimes externally motivated)
  - According to external deadlines (e.g, accreditation, program review)
  - Internally determined (often for problem solving)

- What will I do with the data?
  - **Analysis, reporting, decision-making, action-taking**

- Where do I go from here?
  - What do I do first? Next?

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Assessment = Listening

- To **users**

- To **library workers**, as individuals and as collectors of user perspectives

- To **library services/resources/spaces**, via assessment methods (often multiple, may require training)

- To **gaps**, seeking to identify where service/collections/facilities can be improved or designed to anticipate and respond better to users?

- To the **library organization**

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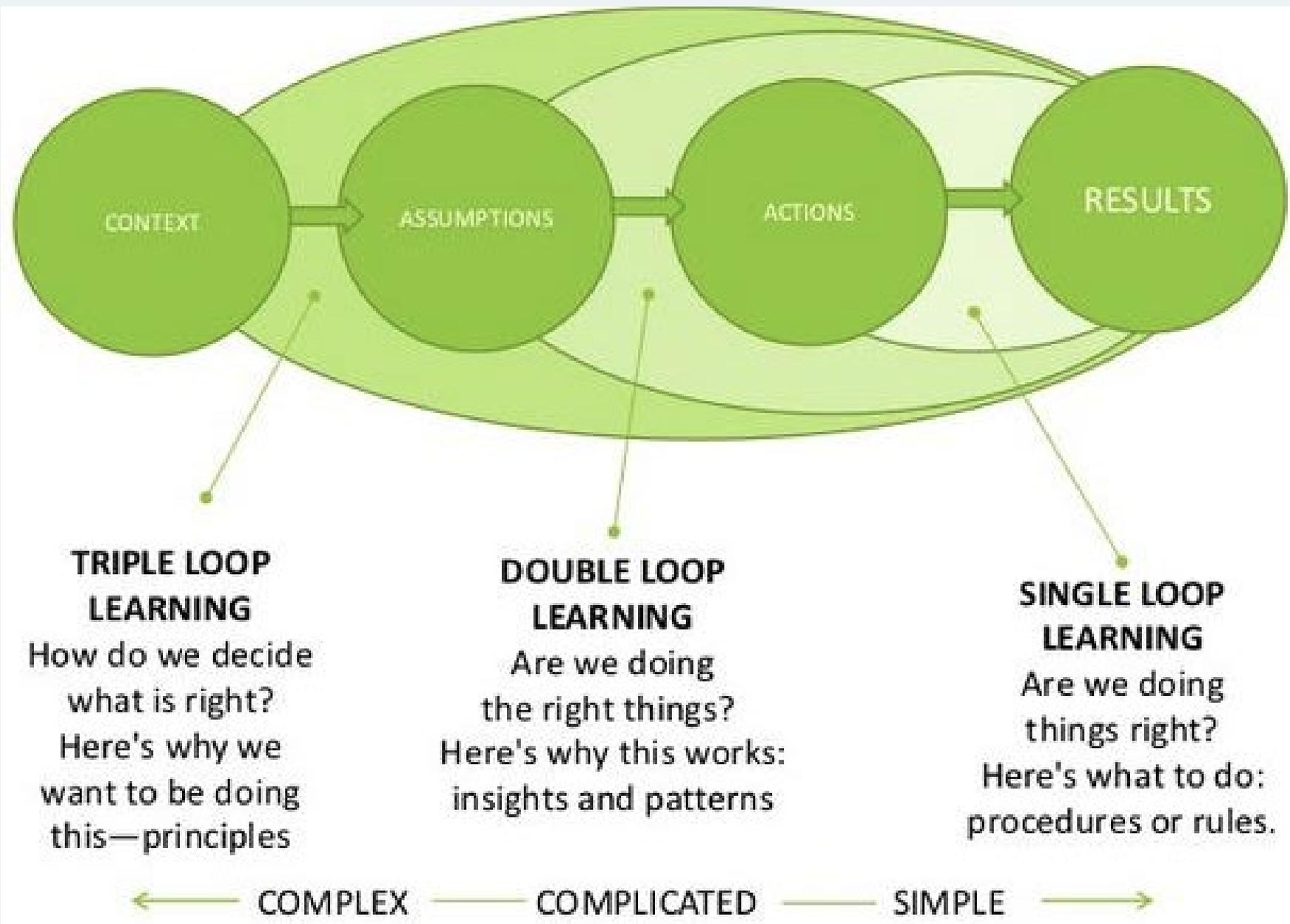
Ways Listening via Assessment can Increase Service Quality

Through improvement, specifically of:

- **Tangibles**—appearance of physical facilities, equipment, staff, materials

- **Reliability**—ability to perform promised service dependably, accurately, respectfully

- **Responsiveness**—willingness to help users promptly

- **Courtesy**—politeness, respect, humility, friendliness

- **Empathy**—caring and individualized attention

- **Competence**—required skills and knowledge to perform service well, believably, honestly

- **Security**—freedom from danger, risk, doubt, bias

- **Access**—approachability, ease of contact, free from barriers

- **Communication**—keeping users informed in accessible, understandable ways

- **Understanding the user**—making the effort to know and respect users, application of cultural competence

Listening to the Library Organization

- Do we have a **clear vision** of the future that motivates our library colleagues?

- Are our **actions consistent with our words**?

- Do we know **what users care most about**?

- Do we know how well the library satisfies those things?

- Do we measure and analyze our performance?

- Do we **learn from our mistakes**?

- Do we communicate the **value of library engagement** to our users and potential users?

- Do we seek to **intentionally grow the value of user engagement** with libraries?

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Why do you need to know?

- **Improving** services, resources, facilities, etc.

- **Advocating** for additional resources

- **Communicating** with users and/or stakeholders

- **Changing direction**

- Sunsetting

- Celebrating **successes**

- Making **decisions**
  - Planning
  - Staff leadership
  - Financial
  - All decisions should be evaluated during the next cycle

- Taking **action**

- Improving or increasing **outcomes and impacts**

Why do you need to know **now**?

Who will knowing help?

What unintended negative consequences might occur?

Who might knowing inadvertently harm?

Is knowing truly urgent? Why?

- What opportunities might be missed if there is a delay?

- What might be missed if there is a rush?

Assessment timeframes:

- As needed (difficult to plan for, often externally motivated)

- According to external agencies timelines (e.g. accreditation)

- Internally set (often intended to produce solutions for problems)

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Reasons Used to Avoid Assessment

- Belief that library impacts can't be measured

- **Lack of leadership**

- **Lack of expertise** in assessment

- **Fear** of comparison to other libraries

- Fear of negative results

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What Can Go Wrong

- Data not collected

- Data that is collected isn't useful

- Too much data is collected, preventing timely analysis

- Data is collected and analyzed, but no actions are taken

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Key Ideas Driving Assessment

- Assessment results from **design, not accident**.

- There is a **process** to adhere to. Sloppy or careless assessment results in bad data.

- **Assessment doesn't have to be "big" to be useful**.

- Small projects can be just as useful, and are often easier to complete.

- **There is no one right way to assess**.

- Many problems can be avoided with a **good fit of method to needs** and purposes of assessment.

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Key Ideas Driving Assessment

- Assessment should help libraries predict, reflect, and react to **societal changes**.

- Library assessment is impacted by the larger institution and cultures of which the library is a part.

- Effective assessment requires **administrative support**. Administration impacts the ability to react to assessment results.

- Unless assessment can impact the library, it is a waste of time.

- **Unless assessment can impact users, it is a waste of time.**

- Assessment is a **professional imperative**. We can't do good work for and with users without checking to be sure that it is in fact, and still, good work and, crucially, seeking informed change if it is no longer good and valuable.

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