Realizing Outcomes of Assessment: Decision Making & Action Taking

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Considering Results, Outcomes, and Actions

If a particular library service, resource, space, etc. is effective, then “X” outcome will occur.

“X” outcome did not occur.

Hmm. It seems the library service, resource, space was not effective.

“X” outcome did not occur.

What might be happening that rendered the library service, resource, or space ineffective?

Can we explain the ineffectiveness by uncovering something that is interfering and then address or remove that interference?

Could we add something to the library service, resource, or space to make it effective?

Should we replace the service, resource, or space with something else that would be more effective?

Hurray!
(We can’t be entirely sure the outcome occurred because of the library service, resource, or space, but let’s keep this service, resource, or space going and recheck in the next cycle.
If we need to pin down a strong correlation, we can continue out investigation with a more rigorous assessment in the next cycle.)

If we continue to demonstrate linkages between the library service, resource, or space and desirable outcomes, how can we expand or extend that success? How might we apply what we’ve learning in other contexts?

Let’s try one of these options and reassess to see if the changes enable “X” outcome to occur.
Realizing Outcomes of Assessment: Decision Making & Action Taking

Strategic Thinking
- Prioritizing Equity
- Values to Policy
- Setting Targets
- Resource Allocation
- Supporting Library Workers
- Innovation
- Sunsetting
- When the “End” is Not the End
- Continuing the Assessment Cycle
Revising Strategic Plans or Activities

- To what degree do the assessment results indicate that **stated (or unstated but intended) strategies are attained** through linked library services, resources, spaces, etc?

- Are there **intentions or realities revealed** by the assessment that should be incorporated into the strategic plan or activities?

- Might the strategic plan require **rebalancing or realignment** as a result of new understandings provided by assessment results?
Aligning Strategy with Action

- Mission
- Content, offerings, and activities
- Knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Users, not-yet users, and stakeholders
- Methods and strategies
- Delivery modes and venues
- Policies

- Timeframes
- Structures
- Evaluation/assessment
- Personnel
- Facilities
- Finances
- Reward structures
- Professional development

ACRL Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries
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Integrating Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence

• Was a “one size fits all” approach taken in the assessment? If so, what limitations does that put on the usefulness of the results for decision-making and action taking?

• If a more refined, intersectional, and multi-dimensional process was used, how can those results be used to make library services, resources, and spaces more equitable and inclusive? What generalizations can be made or are not indicated?

• How will the library ensure that decisions and actions are communicated back to the participants and communities that exerted time and labor towards the assessment effort?

• How does the library intend to maintain collaborative action with those communities?
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# Reconsidering Existing or Creating New Documentation

## Policies
- Connected to library or organizational mission, legal statements, professional standards
- Two audiences: library staff and users; often two versions are produced, customized to each audience
- Should be regularly reviewed, made current, assessed for values alignment
- Should be made available and accessible

## Typical Content
- Standards of service
- Levels and limits of service to users
- Priorities of service
- Philosophies, ethics, and goals
- Staff roles
- Operational practices and procedures for various reference services
- Service/resource/space processes, models behaviors, checklists, etc.
Changing Policies, Procedures, or Practices

• What values, needs, or aspirations were surfaced by the assessment process and results?

• Values are enacted through policies, procedures, and practices.
  – What changes to documentation and standard practices are needed (e.g., formal and informal, internal- and external-facing)?
  – What processes can be put in place for adherence to changes?
  – Are exceptions to practices clearly articulated and communicated?
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Setting Targets

- Outcomes describe an intended result.
- Performance indicators describe how we know the outcome (result) was achieved.
- Indicators are concrete and specific descriptions of measures of the outcome.
- Indicators must be able to be seen/observed/measured/judged.
- Indicators define and operationalize an outcome.
  - What does meeting an outcome look like?
  - How will we know an outcome is met?
  - What will we measure/judge to know an outcome is met?
- Within indicators, targets are used to quantify the indicator (or a change in the indicator) and/or set a timeframe within which a target should be met.
Anticipating and Updating Targets

- It can be hard to balance ambition vs easy of attainment in setting realistic but also “stretch” targets.
- Historical data, staff experience, and user input can help you set reasonable targets.
- Generally speaking, if the goal is continuous improvement, setting targets a bit better than your past achievement makes sense, with ongoing check ins and resetting of targets over time.
- Assessments enable you to gauge reasonable starting benchmarks, targets, or aspirations and then continuously update (and provide a rationale for) stretch goals.
Reallocating Resources

• Assessment results can inspire changes in strategic thinking, priorities, or activity; prioritization of equity and inclusion; changes to policies and procedures; new staffing models; innovation or sunsetting; and new targets for service, resource, and space performance all may require changes to resource allocations.

• Resources might include time, money, personnel, or other effort contributions.

• Because library resources are generally finite and sometimes diminishing, choices must be made to align resources with priorities, values, and commitments.
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Understanding and Valuing Library Workers

• People are the **most valuable library resource**.

• Assessments of library services, resources, and spaces can reveal the **differences made by library workers**.

• Assessments are intrinsically **risk-taking ventures**; a certain amount of risk is inherent in continuous improvement.

• Assessments can also generate discussions about **reallocations of library worker effort and attention**.

• Library worker job changes driven by assessment should be:
  - resourced
  - rewarded
  - supported via professional development and training
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Seeking Innovation

What outcomes do we want to contribute to that we aren’t currently contributing to enough or at all?

Are there any ways the library does contribute to these outcomes?

What could we do more of (or better) to increase that contribution?

What could we do that we haven’t done before to increase our contribution to these outcomes?

What would we have to do (or stop doing) to develop something new that would contribute to this outcome we care about?

Are we the right ones to make this change? Who else might make sense to collaborate with?
Seeking Innovation

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“X” outcome occurred.

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Systematizing Success

- Successful one-offs or stand alones may merit a programmatic approach.

- Programs are more than a collection of activities.

- Programs have:
  - Intentional, scaffolded approaches
  - Clearly stated outcomes tied to overarching strategic goals, missions, purposes, values, etc.

ACRL Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries
Developing Programs

- Joint needs assessment identifying gaps and needs the services/resources/spaces can help fill, using surveys, focus groups, interviews, existing data, etc.
- Joint articulation of programmatic goals/outcomes
- Mapping to assess coverage and depth of offerings
- Infrastructure including dedicated resources (e.g. spaces, software, supplies, personnel)
- Access to professional development
- Marketing, publicity, and advocacy

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**Sunsetting**
When the “End” is Not the End
Continuing the Assessment Cycle
Planning Sunsets

• Sometimes, repeated assessments demonstrate that a library service, resource, or space is not achieving its intended outcomes. At that point, the offering may be a candidate for sunsetting or “planned abandonment.”

• Planned abandonment of services, resources, and spaces that are not contributing to their intended outcomes is necessary for a healthy organization.

• In situations where an offering scheduled for sunsetting is meeting outcomes for a specific population, a decision could be made to scale down to provision of unique, tailored, or specialized services targeting identified populations.

• Done well, planned abandonment draws on assessment evidence, seeks coordination with and provides agency to those who provide the offering under scrutiny, and can offer a path to increased impact through alternate avenues.

Questions to Consider Before Sunsetting

• How long has the service/resource/space existed?
• Why was it started? Who was the target audience?
• What data exist on its use?
• Why is it not successful now?
• What would the library gain by ending the service?
• What would the library lose by ending the service?
• What would it take to resuscitate the service?
• Are there political or strategic reasons not to end the service? Can they be resolved another way?

RIS, 5th ed., Chapter 10
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*When the “End” is Not the End*

Continuing the Assessment Cycle
“Other” Outcomes

• Usually, the goal of assessment is to make decisions or take action for changes/improvements in practices, policies, or outcomes of library services, resources, spaces, etc. in order to better serve users in achieving their goals (e.g., learning, development, success).

• Sometimes, other results might occur:
  – Development of **new understandings** or ways of thinking about users, practices, policies, the assessment process, etc.
  – **Consideration of action** (but not actual action yet)
  – **Affective outcomes** (for participants, researchers, or library colleagues) such as disposition or emotion toward assessment processes, evidence, or proposed actions or a feeling of empowerment resulting from engagement with assessment
  – **Confirmation of a decision not to act** (at a particular time or at all)
  – Improved understanding of the **process of assessment**

• Any of these results may happen concurrently with assessment, at the close of an assessment cycle, or well after the assessment cycle has been completed.

Multiple Paths to Success

Given the multiple possible “conclusions” to an assessment process, numerous skills might be needed:

• **influencing with or without authority**

• understanding **motivations** of decision-makers and action-takers

• strategies for “**calling for action**” with evidence

• **organizational awareness** (e.g., silo busting, identification of hurdles and techniques for overcoming (or circumventing) them, alignment of resources, attitude toward rewards for risk-taking and innovation)

• **logical and persuasive reasoning**

• **emotional intelligence**

• **patience, persistence**, and a long-term view

• techniques for working through possible outcomes of an assessment prior to the next cycle to prepare stakeholders for various scenarios and determine willingness to act in advance

Influencing without Authority (ACRL Active Guide #2)
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Continuing Iterative, Cyclical Assessments

- Choosing a focus and setting goals
- Revisiting goals
- Gathering and analyzing data
- Sharing results
- Making decisions
Reflecting and Improving to Increase Library Impact

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