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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)