

Performance Evaluation in Library and Information Systems of Developing Countries: A Study of the Literature

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Based largely on a study of the literature, this article outlines the nature and purposes of performance evaluation in library and information systems in general. It further delineates the information scenario of developing countries and pinpoints the specific issues that performance evaluation could address in the library and information systems of these countries. It then raises the challenges that the library and information systems of developing countries face in conducting performance evaluation to achieve the expected benefits from it. The article identifies the following stumbling blocks: lack of awareness, cost of conducting the evaluation, shortage of staff and lack of methods and tools to em-

ploy for the purpose. Methodological problems are identified as important. It concludes that the library and information systems in these countries have to develop their own methods and tools appropriate to their needs and relevant to their environment. It further discusses key issues in the development of the required framework such as assessing the environment and identifying what is important from the point of view of the system for the evaluation effort to focus on. The means of generating data usable for performance assessment and training as a means of improving the staff shortage and absence of awareness of the role of performance evaluation to address among the other challenges.

Introduction

Evaluation of the performance of library and information systems is one of the major concerns and an integral part of the library and information systems manager's job. It is widely recognised as an important issue, although it has been looked at or defined variously. For example, Cronin (1982b) writes that it is "a process of systematically assessing effectiveness against a predetermined norm, standard..."; or according to Mackenzie (1990), "a systematic measurement of the extent to which a system (for example a library) has achieved its objectives in a certain period of time". It is also described as a systematic process of determining "value" (in terms of benefit gained) and "quality" (as reflected in customers satisfaction) of a system (McKee 1989: 156). But fundamentally evaluation remains comparing

"what is" with "what ought to be" for the purpose of exercising judgement (Van House et al. 1990: 3). The process of evaluation of performance can focus on the whole of a system or the components of a system (such as the individual services of a library and information system) as the assessment needed could be at any level of a given library and information system.

Performance evaluation can also be a one-time-only activity where "data are collected only until an intelligent appraisal of a situation can be made", or "a continuous activity where data processing eventually becomes an established house-keeping routine" (Cronin 1982b) on the basis of which continuous and long-term improvements effected.

Not only do library and information systems' administrators benefit from and require performance evaluation data but also others such as

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“governing bodies, library staff members, patrons, accrediting agencies ...” (Lancaster 1977: vii) and external funding agencies (Cullen 1998), to name few. Cognisant of the benefits and necessities of having evaluative data, performance evaluation has become a mainstream exercise in all service giving institutions like libraries in many countries of the world (McKee 1989: 156; Baba and Broady 1998).

Purposes of evaluation of performance of library and information systems

Performance evaluation of a library and information system or its components can be required for different reasons. For example, the evaluation of the performance of library and information systems and the resulting data could be used to assess how well the system meets its objectives or for justification of continuance of a service (Bawden 1990: 49). It can be used to convince institutions that the library needs the same relative share of institutional budget, even if the budget itself is shrinking (Mackenzie 1990; Rodger 1987). It may allow a librarian to demonstrate how one's library stands in relation to others (Winkworth 1993). It can help the librarian to describe the extent, range and importance of the service being provided and that it is being given efficiently (Abbot 194:4). It may be used to assess how well the library and information system contributes to achieving the goals of parent constituents (Pritchard 1996). It can diagnose particular problem areas of service or monitor progress towards specification or even compare past, current and desired level of performance (Van House et. al. 1990: 8) It can identify areas where improvement is needed (Van House et. al. 1990: 3). Finally, it can identify what we have yet to accomplish and to communicate what we do, how well we do it and what we need to accomplish them (Van House 1995) or to provide evidence that the expectations of a variety of stakeholders are being met (Cullen 1998).

However, there is an overwhelming agreement that library and information systems first and foremost have to justify their existence and the cost to their constituencies (Abbot 1994:4; Roger 1987; Van House 1995). Secondly, they have to be evaluated in order for their managers to find out if there are any deficiencies in the system and to

determine what needs to be improved (Pritchard 1996; Van House et. al. 1990: 3; Van House 1995). Therefore, we can say that performance evaluation is done for both “internal” and “external” purposes as the following paragraphs further illustrate.

Performance evaluation for justification purposes

Parent organisations require proof that the activities of their library and information systems and the organisational expenses incurred are worth the investment in that they contribute towards achieving organisational objectives. In justifying their worth library and information systems are required to prove that they are “performing a useful, relevant and valuable function without which the institution would be the poorer” (Abbot 1990: 4). Thus, library and information systems have to prove that they are useful for the organisation and for the purpose for which they are established. In this aspect specifically, the “only way” for library and information systems to make their contributions and worth known to concerned bodies is by using some measure of library performance (Pritchard 1996).

Library and information systems also need to justify the money that their parent institutions are expending on them is well used just like any of the rest of the organisational units (Baba and Broady 1998; McKee 1989: 9). Particularly as a result of economic constraints leading to fierce competition for institutional budgets, more tangible and appreciable evidence is required on a continuing basis from the library and information systems in order to convince management of the importance of continuing to devote resources to them (Abbot 1994: 4). The old ways of talking that suggest that library and information systems are “good in themselves” no longer work, and the language and the logic of their argument should be meaningful and appreciable in the current environment in which the library and information systems exist. Library and information systems can best prove that “the benefits derived are worth the expenditure” and that no resources have been wasted through data obtained from performance evaluation exercises. This evidence has proved to be one of the main weapons that departments have when it comes to fighting for organisational budgets or to attracting funding bodies at large.

This is the major reason why performance evaluation started to gain in significance in the 1980s in the “increasing hostile financial climate” of the period (Bawden 1990: 73). The “rising costs of libraries”, in particular, have become one of the major concerns causing the management of many organisations to require library and information systems (Van House et al. 1990: 3) to provide evidence to justify their cost using objective data acquired from evaluation of performance.

External funding agencies financing projects, or some aspect of services or resources, of course, normally require progress reports to monitor whether or not the activities as well as the expenditures are according to the agreed upon plan before releasing funds or before letting themselves into any additional financial commitment. They also require a final report, whose major part is the financial detail, on the success or failure of the project. This is the basis for any healthy, continuing relationship between funding agencies and a given library and information system. Every library and information system has to be careful about it to stay in the good graces of a particular funding or other similar agency. It is also required that library and information systems show funding agencies, in acceptable form, that they are competent and trustworthy in managing their finances. Library and information systems can also communicate their “concern for efficiency and effectiveness” to the funding agencies by using performance evaluation data as evidence (Van House et al. 1990: 3). Particularly “in times of tight budget” resulting in stiff competition for donor recipients, evaluation data to justify the worth and importance or value of library and information systems has become critical (Van House et al. 1990: 3).

Thus, it is essential for library and information systems to prove that the activities they are engaged in and the subsequent costs that they incur are worth doing. It is also critical that the investment made on the systems is well managed and utilised in the best interest of the funding bodies as library and information systems almost entirely depend on these internal and external sources of funds. And all such proof to justify the importance and the resources consumed by the library and information systems require compelling data that can be acquired through conducting performance evaluation, as evaluation can provide “ob-

jective data” on library and information systems’ performances (Van House et al. 1990: 3).

Performance evaluation for self-improvement purposes

Apart from justifying their existence and the cost that is expended on them, library and information systems need to take a look at themselves on a continuing basis to find out whether each activity undertaken by them is relevant and being implemented in the best possible way. Library and information systems’ managers, like any responsible managers, need to monitor their progress to determine if they are on the right track in implementing their various undertakings. These include determining the relevance and meaningfulness of each activity, the cost effectiveness of each activity, the system’s efficiency in executing tasks, what is needed to realise the desired goal, and the professionalism of their work.

To determine what is needed and that each activity/service being undertaken is appropriate and worth continuing, an assessment or evaluation can provide reliable and complete information. In the first place, as Van House points out, “improving performance requires information about how good performance is currently, plus feedback on the success of efforts to improve” (Van House et al. 1990: 3). It is also in the same way that we can determine whether things being implemented are being done in the most efficient way. Progress and achievement (or failure, for that matter) need to be learned by evaluating services and products in the context of the expectations and targets set as well as within an acceptable cost. This is also the only means that achievements or failures can be determined and corrections and improvements introduced. Willemse (1995) confirms that a continuous evaluation contributes to improving services by revealing remedial actions that need to be taken based on the result of the ongoing evaluation. In his report of the experience of the University of South Africa, Willemse discusses in detail how performance evaluation has been useful in improving services and instrumental in winning over the support of the parent institution. As a management tool performance evaluation helps library and information systems managers to have better knowledge of the status of their system, allowing them to be

in a better position to make informed decisions and to exercise better control over the destiny of their systems. Without performance evaluation data, managers have to rely on intuition and anecdotal information as the basis for assessing the usefulness and value of their activities (McClure and Lopata 1995) which could lead to failure.

It is also key that the staff to find out how much each activity reflects the professional standards required of them. In the earlier report Willemse (1995) points out that performance evaluation also "forces the staff to focus on their most important areas, where the whole experience revolves around." He also indicates that the exercise of performance evaluation creates an environment that makes staff "regularly consider what their role in the library is and the way they support" the parent institution in meeting its target.

To justify the existence and cost of these systems, and to improve continuously their internal working, performance evaluation is thus a necessity. This applies equally to library and information systems in developing and developed countries.

Major features of library and information systems in developing countries

Many authors indicate that developing countries have common features distinguishing them from developed countries such as poor economic situations with their populations living below standard and low technological development (Adeyami 1991). The issue of development, which they have to tackle with a high sense of urgency, has profound meaning for these countries. As a result, they have their own set of priorities to address with low resource capabilities (financial, human, technological) to realise these priorities. One can see a similarity in the information scenarios of developing countries, likely resulting from similarities in their general situations.

Library and information systems of developing countries are, in general, backward and constrained.

"The basic informational resources of libraries and databanks and the likes that are available to the poorest countries are hopelessly inadequate, frequently taking the exclusive form of published sources arriving sporadically by sea mail to understaffed libraries" (Adeyami 1991).

This is one of the reasons why library and information systems in developing countries have failed so far "to provide even what has been considered the obvious benefit obtainable from libraries" (Neill 1991).

In connection with this situation, Neill (1991) comments that "governments became disenchanted with libraries' lack of tangible achievements and librarians failed to plead an effective cause or provide supporting evidence as to their worth." Consequently, the image and status of library and information systems in developing countries are very tarnished. In these countries "a low esteem of librarians" and a "lowly stature of the librarian's profession" is very common. They are in general marginalised and tend to be ignored by governments and their dominating features are "under-resourced, understaffed and underdeveloped". Thus, library and information systems in developing countries commonly are deprived of the means of meeting the demands of their constituency requiring hard work and an appropriate approach if this is to change. And so the future of library and information systems in these countries seems rather bleak.

And it is in this context that diagnostics and justification research acquire the highest significance as management tools in library and information systems of developing countries. Particularly as gaining favourable attention from funding bodies largely depends on one's ability to demonstrate the impact of its services (Baba and Broady 1998), which is achieved through continuous evaluation of one's performance for the purposes discussed above.

The potential roles of performance evaluation in library and information systems of developing countries

From the discussion above it becomes clear that library and information systems require the exercise of performance evaluation and the resulting data can justify their existence and the need for betterment of their activities. A closer look into the prevailing situation under which library and information systems of developing countries exist also confirms the crucial role that performance evaluation and the resulting data could have in addressing their major problems.

Justification of worth and resources consumed

One of the major obstacles that library and information systems face in developing countries is that their role and importance is highly undermined and so they are not taken seriously. For example, Rosenberg's report indicated that the libraries and information systems in Africa did not have access to expenditure figures (quoted in Town 1998). Consequently the library and information systems in these countries are in desperate need of data to prove that they have useful contributions to make in the fulfilment of the objectives of their parent organisations, or to prove that without them the organisation can be at a disadvantage. Library and information systems in developing countries have more at stake because they are units that are "grudgingly tolerated" by government bodies and that appear at the "bottom of any national list of priorities" (Neill 1991).

The library and information systems manager's struggle to win sufficient funding or to receive a due share of the organisation's budget is even more difficult when compared to managers of most of the other departments within the same organisation. This is because library and information systems rarely are accorded the proper status on a par with other departments (Neill 1991). When the financial constraints on the parent organisations increase, a common phenomenon in developing countries, library and information systems are among the first departments to be targeted for budget reduction. And it is not even uncommon for library and information systems to have no separate budget of their own or to have no channel to fight for the manager and for the budget like managers of other departments.

If they can not come up with strong evidence to support their claim to change the opinion of the already decided management, the possibility of getting financial support will continue to get worse. Therefore, engaging in an evaluation process is a life and death option if library and information systems in developing countries are to live up to their purposes. It is the only way to generate objective data about their performance to demonstrate their worth against the traditional belief of their worthlessness held by parent management and the nation at large. The prevailing attitude of management towards library and in-

formation systems in developing countries, which implies worthlessness, can be changed only by showing their worth using performance evaluation data, the only effective way to prove their value (Pritchard 1996).

Thus, the diminished status of library and information systems in developing countries contributes both to the difficulty and the necessity of demonstrating their worth. And to extricate themselves from the low position and tarnished image, the library and information systems in developing countries need evaluative data justify that they are worth maintaining.

Improving competitiveness for securing financial support

As finance underpins everything, it is a key issue to library and information systems in developing countries for a number of reasons. The scarcity of finances in these countries makes the competition for organisational budgets among departments fiercer than in developed countries. This makes performance evaluation data more important to library and information systems in developing countries. Furthermore, as Rodger (1987) stressed, evaluation is needed more in economically constrained situations "because there is less money with which to attempt to do the same, or more than before", the permanent situation of library and information systems in developing countries. It is also true that performance evaluation is most needed during times of economic constraint as such situations result in "pressure for cost justification of all activities" (Baba and Broady 1998; Bawden 1990: 73).

The fight waged by librarians in developing countries for more finances is also severe since their goal is not only to maintain the status quo but also to acquire more each year in order to overcome the already existing state of being under-funded. They have to present strong cases to justify increments in investment because what they currently receive is already much below what they require. To justify not only their existence but also increased funding in this constrained environment, library and information systems have to provide sound and stronger reasons to the parent institution to keep supporting them. This is difficult especially because in the past these requests needed no proof.

The poor situation of these library and information systems and their need for greater financing each year is exacerbated by the increasing cost of library resources which affects the library and information systems in developing countries more). This has made it important for the managers to devise the means of winning the required resources while parent organisations must be convinced to accommodate this increasing cost. Performance data from evaluation can then be one way of showing why the money should be made available as well as how it has been expended effectively on a continuing basis.

Technological developments also contribute to the increasing financial requirements of library and information systems of developing countries. The need to get enough money is critical. Some information technologies (ITs) currently in use by library and information systems in the developed world are becoming absolutely necessary to keep the gap in meeting the needs of the users of developing countries from widening further. Evaluation exercises and the resulting data are also of paramount importance in relation to attracting needed financial support from external funding agencies, as library and information systems in developing countries are more dependent and more often beneficiaries of donor support.

Thus, in these days of constrained financial input, it is accepted that library and information systems can not be continually financed on the assumption that they are "good things" in their own right (Winkworth 1993), but instead they have to prove their "goodness" by demonstrating their relevance and usefulness. Performance evaluation data is needed if they are to be successful in competing for organisational budgets. The outcome of their requests depends on management's appreciation of these justifications (Abbot 1994: 4). Again this is important as the ability to demonstrate their importance by in large determines the priority they are accorded in receiving needed resources from their parent organisations (Baba and Broady 1998).

Improving internal efficiency and services provided to users

As a measure of improving the working of the system and the meaningfulness of their activities, about which library and information systems in

developing countries are criticised, library and information systems in developing countries must look into one's system. The exercise of performance evaluation is needed to find out the relevance of each activity and the efficiency of the ways that each activity (service) is handled. The internal workings of library and information systems will also be improved when remedial measures can be taken as needed based on the results of the assessment desperately needed by library and information systems of developing countries. It will provide the data needed to make sound and informed decisions and to take effective measures to survive even under their constrained situations. As the Sussex experience proves: "Although our acquisition levels have had to fall, the books we are now not able to buy are those which would not have been used anyway, so no-one has missed them" (Rodger, 1987). And improved service, tuned to needs, definitely proves worth doing, as it will have a direct relationship to the outcome of the organisational effort and to the perceptions that others will have about the library and information systems.

Thus, "to identify areas where improvement is needed" and to live up to the requirements and expectations put on them, library and information systems in developing countries need to perform self-audits with more zeal and commitment. What really has weakened librarianship and information work in Africa, for example, is one key issue that needs to be addressed and resolved for the future of the profession. Library and information systems in developing countries have been unable to prove what good they can do and to meet the expectations of their patrons. Neill (1991) summarises it well as "for the majority of Africans, libraries appeared to have very little to offer." Furthermore, mainly because library and information systems in developing countries have not succeeded in living up to these expectations, the role of information in the development process is sidelined by the majority of decision makers. This has a profound impact on the future and the status with which library and information systems in developing countries are held. Library and information systems in developing countries are for the most part under-performing and this requires an immediate solution.

As a part of improving their internal workings, library and information systems in these coun-

tries can use performance evaluation data to improve their efficiency, particularly in the area of financial management. As Rodger (1987) stresses, in times of constraint "it is important to everyone concerned that nothing is wasted". For example, if the library and information systems keep on using their meagre financial inputs in areas whose appropriateness has not been evaluated, the chance of failure or of not being useful will be very high. This will keep tarnishing their already grim image. Thus, working on specific high priority areas is the first order of business because they do not have enough money to do all that they wish. Since they have little money to use, they have to decide carefully where that little money should go by finding out which services or efforts are bound for satisfactory outcomes or which efforts deserve the money available. They have to be more cautious with their finances to make sure that nothing is wasted and that the maximum is made out of them. Therefore, before committing their poor resources, library and information systems in developing countries have to find out if the services they provide are exactly what they should offer and if they are being offered in the best way possible.

Proving value through improved ways of doing things is then one major aim towards which library and information systems in developing countries need to work. This requires continual monitoring through performance evaluation as improved services using such evaluation help in gaining the support of parent organisations (Willemse 1995). The importance of the performance evaluation exercise in developing countries is thus very high. And library and information systems in developing countries have greater need for supporting evidence to prove their worth and to improve their performance now more than anytime previously.

Problems for conducting evaluation of performance of library and information systems in developing countries

Unfortunately, performance evaluation, while critically needed and potentially beneficial particularly to library and information systems of developing countries, is the least practised management tool in these countries (Town 1998). Although no formal survey for this study has

been conducted, performance evaluation was almost non-existent in the seven universities participating in a CD-ROM pilot project sponsored by American Association for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS) from 1994–1996. Only one participant confirmed that they had any evaluation activity in the past. Taking into account, furthermore, the case of Ethiopia, no performance evaluation has been made in any library and information system for any of the two main purposes of performance evaluation, i.e., diagnostic and justification. Although there is the possibility that such activity was not reported, the general absence of reports on performance evaluation from developing countries in international library and information science indexes, such as *Library Literature*, confirms this as well. Of course this excludes evaluative work conducted by sponsoring agencies on information projects implemented in developing countries. But these, too, are very few. In a different context, Saracevic (1980) also confirms that "very few actual evaluative studies have been conducted" in developing countries and this holds true largely up to this time.

Why is such a timely and much needed management practice ignored by library and information systems in developing countries? There are a number of possible reasons for the absence of performance evaluations in these countries. Some of the reasons are problems that are known to exist even in library and information systems of developed countries. But in developing countries, these problems are more severe, to the extent of becoming major stumbling blocks for performance evaluation to take place. Some of the reasons, on the other hand, are peculiar to library and information systems of developing countries. Specifically the first three problems discussed below are common but are severely felt in developing countries. The fourth is peculiar and more important to library and information systems in developing countries and is discussed in a detailed manner.

1. Low level of awareness of relevance and importance of performance evaluation

The first problem is a low level of awareness as to the relevance of evaluation by library and information systems managers and/or management of the parent organisations. This includes not be-

ing convinced of its value or of its worth as a priority in many library and information systems in developing countries. This problem is more prevalent in library and information systems of developing countries because the issue of evaluation itself is little known. This problem has a far-reaching impact in that no resources have been allocated for this purpose nor is it one of the areas that library and information systems in these countries normally consider their territory. Performance evaluation is more of an academic exercise in these countries; if used at all, it is confined to research related to academic requirements. This is very true as most modern management techniques are by in large unknown in library and information systems of developing countries. The environment can be said to lack, for the most part, managers and professionals of library and information systems who appreciate its value and the necessity for it on a continuous basis leaving alone those who are willing to initiate and use it to convince the management. As a result there is no receptive ground even when motivated individual staff members want to engage in such exercise. Because of the low level of awareness about the relevance of performance evaluation by library and information systems managers or management of the parent organisations, performance evaluation is almost non-existent. As a one-time-only exercise, in rare cases, it is done haphazardly, rendering the resulting data almost useless for the purpose (Town 1998).

2. Lack of finances

The second reason for not exercising performance evaluation is the cost of such exercises even if their importance is recognised. Although the problem of finance is common to all countries (Cronin 1982b; Goodall 1988), it is more severe in developing countries. This makes performance evaluation among the least likely technique to occur in these countries. Particularly because it is research, money that needs to be allocated for it is beyond the reach of the majority of library and information systems. Because of the financial realities of developing countries, only basic activities are considered at any one time, diminishing the chance of conducting performance evaluation, among others. The problem of finance has been one of the long-standing problems which li-

brary and information systems in developing countries may not hope to overcome in the near future.

3. Shortage of required staff

The third problem is shortage of staff, both in quantity and quality, to undertake performance evaluation in library and information systems in these countries. It is known that library and information systems' managers with appropriate conviction may shy away from conducting performance evaluation because of the resulting "unacceptable increase in the existing work load" on the library and information systems all over the world (Cronin 1982b). But in developing countries since the shortage of staff is acute and more pronounced, the resulting workload on already over-extended staff makes it the least welcome commitment. The meagre professional staff is highly in demand to cover all aspects of library and information work, including even non-professional jobs (Lawal 1991). Thus, lack of staff who can be spared or whose time can be spent on performance evaluation puts pressure on considering the exercise as a routine and necessary activity.

Equally problematic is the scarcity of qualified/trained personnel to plan and execute performance evaluation activities in library and information systems of developing countries. Managers found in most library and information systems in these countries are good indicators of lack of qualified personnel. Qualified/trained library and information workers as heads of library and information systems are found in limited number. It is just a new development in developing countries. This is the general workforce situation in the information sector of developing countries as indicated by Adeyami (1991): "Information activities in most third world countries suffer from absence of relevant expertise in the areas of generation, processing, storage and retrieval." The problem of staff adequate in number and qualification is also an issue that library and information systems have a long way to overcome.

4. Lack of evaluation tools / methodologies

Apart from these three major problems, also encountered by library and information systems all over the world at varying degrees, there is a ma-

major problem prohibiting performance evaluation that is peculiar to library and information systems in developing countries. The problem is unique because it results mainly from the characteristic features of library and information systems in these countries. The problem is also more important because even when the problems of awareness, finances and staff are overcome, this problem persists making it difficult to conduct performance evaluation by library and information systems of these countries. The problem remains strong for all sorts of library and information systems' managers, including those strongly motivated and convinced as to the importance of performance evaluation as a management tool. The problem is lack of appropriate evaluation tools (methodology), as the library and information systems in developing countries have difficulty in using existing evaluation tools and methods developed by the profession.

Although the profession acknowledges that it lacks widely accepted and applicable tools and methods for performance evaluation (Pritchard 1996; Winkworth 1993), there is a continuing effort and marked achievement in developing and employing tools, methods and frameworks for evaluation of performance of library and information systems in the developed world. The reviews made by Goodall (1988) and Pritchard (1996), for example, present these different models and approaches for evaluation of the performance of library and information systems. These evaluation models and approaches are being used with a degree of success in developed countries, primarily as they result from work done in these countries and hence fit the needs of these countries' environments.

In the effort to use these performance evaluation models and approaches, the library and information systems of developing countries, however, run into complications, rendering the models/approaches inapplicable by in large. The methodologies can only be of use if they are appropriate and practical in the environment where the evaluation is to take place. Unfortunately the prerequisites for the use of most existing bases for evaluation are grossly absent in developing countries, making existing methodologies practically of little help to developing countries. To appreciate this situation, this section elaborates on the issues.

In the discussions of existing evaluation models in the literature of library and information science, some of the tools or methods appear more frequently as appropriate means of approach. For example in the review of performance measurement by Goodall, three approaches emerge as the dominant bases for evaluation during the period under review: the use of stated objectives, standards and user opinion (Goodall 1988). In the literature these bases for evaluation are brought out as prominent more frequently. They are the most highly included elements of the models and the approaches for evaluating the performance of library and information systems. This paper uses these commonly mentioned and highly rated means of evaluating performance in library and information systems to demonstrate the difficulty that library and information systems in developing countries encounter in attempting to use them. The following paragraphs assess the inapplicability of these popular ways to the situation in developing countries.

Use of Stated Objectives

To use "stated objectives" to assess the performance of library and information systems, the system needs clearly stated objectives. The overwhelming majority of library and information systems in developing countries have no clearly stated objectives or else the occasionally available objectives lack the quality needed to determine an evaluation of the performance of the library and information systems. Stated objectives outlining which activities should have efforts and resources directed to them are lacking, or not clearly enough brought out to guide the efforts and resources expenditures in library and information systems of developing countries. When there is no such element in place, library and information systems can not be assessed to see how much they have succeeded in their effort.

In cases where objectives are available, they are either too broad or vague to point out specific targets to be measured. These are rather mission statements, according to Mackenzie (1990) whose definition statements "do not lend themselves for measurement". And these seemingly objective statements are also objectives that have generally outlived their purposes, e.g. objectives for services that no longer exist or objectives that were

set years ago no longer reflect the current needs and situation. These outdated objectives are not of use as they do not cover the whole set of activities that the library and information systems try to do. Good and relevant objectives ought to, for measuring performance, be assessed on the basis of meeting objectives (Mackenzie 1990). Under such circumstances, using this technique of performance evaluation "which essentially aims at assessing how well the system meets its objectives" will be a futile effort, misleading and a waste of resources. As stressed in many writings, in order to use objectives for evaluating how a library performs, it is necessary that achievable objectives are set. These objectives have to consider the resource capability and other realities of each library and information system. They must be "much more tightly defined" (Bawden 1990: 51) and expressed clearly and in a measurable form (Lancaster 1988: 3; McKee, 1989: 44). Where there are no well-expressed objectives or where they can not be measured, performance evaluation techniques that require clearly stated objectives as a basis can not be used.

Lack of clearly stated objectives also implies that it is difficult to determine the relevance of services and resources since normally objectives serve as basis for defining the services to be provided (Abbot 1994: 13). Each service or resources has to be selected on the basis of its usefulness and relevance in achieving the objectives.

In fact the problem is far-reaching in that clearly stated objectives may not be available even for most parent organisations in these countries, making whatever effort made by the library and information systems to set their own objectives impractical or even a source of conflict. Without having clearly stated or dynamic objectives for the parent organisation, the library and information systems in fact can not have appropriate objectives, since their appropriateness is determined by their direct relation and contribution to the organisation's objectives. It is not that easy for library and information systems to set acceptable objectives, too, in an organisation that does not have its own or to encourage the effort to have objectives.

In addition, these library and information systems may find it difficult to set and demand the parent organisation's commitment to and respect

for the objectives, as the value given to library and information systems is very low in general in developing countries. Library and information systems in general are not encouraged by parent organisations to choose what to do, such as setting their own objectives as a target for a given period of time. This could contribute to the library and information systems tending to ignore such activities. Positive organisational climate is critical for setting and implementing objectives (Cronin 1982a). Thus, in a place where objectives are absent, they can not initiate an exercise that requires objective statements in a useable form as the basis to arrive at evaluative judgement of performance.

Use of standards

Evaluating library and information systems' performance by comparing their achievements/output against standards or agreed upon norms or "theoretically maximum targets" is also equally hampered as a performance evaluation method to be used in developing countries. Standards developed for each country and for type of library in each country is by in large lacking, as only few developing countries have tried to have these in place. Having standards for each country is necessary because what has been set as a standard for one country can not be used as a standard for another country, simply because setting standards is affected by the local circumstances of each country (Boekhorst 1995; Van House 1995). The same is true at the level of the institution as Lancaster clearly indicates that "to be valuable they [standards] must be directly related to the resources and objectives of the institution (Lancaster 1977: 297). Standards, either set by consensus or by taking average achievements in comparable systems, need to be unique to each country (or to similar library and information systems in a given country), as standards have to be based on what is possible in each specific environment (Kasar 1982). As a result, if developing countries use standards initiated by developed countries to evaluate their performance, then the result is known even before conducting the assessment. No developing country meets the standards set by and for developed countries that take into consideration the relatively fortunate local situations of these developed countries.

Unfortunately developing one's own standard is one of the areas in which very little progress has been made by developing countries. The future of this is difficult to foresee. This could be, among other things, the result of the peculiar situation of developing countries. For example, arriving at consensus requires a gathering of professionals at a national level, usually a difficult task in these countries. This is a not much exercised event because it takes professional commitment, finances, and the appreciation of its importance, etc. to come together in the first place. Professionals are also not likely to set these standards since there are a limited number of professionals who can be spared and committed for such responsibilities because of the clear shortage of qualified staff. These kinds of standardisation activities are not the major headaches of poorly funded and undermined library and information systems as it can be seen now.

Furthermore, even if the library and information systems succeed in developing their own standards, acceptance of the standards by the respective parent organisations is very unlikely because of the low esteem in which library and information systems in these countries are held. Also the incapability of the library and information systems to meet the required input and levels performance because they are under-resourced, etc. undermines their ability to meet standards. It will also be difficult to enforce standards as required instruments like national information policies are lacking in these countries. Parent organisations' support or the existence of the right organisational culture is critical since no program succeeds unless there is a commitment from the top management (St. Clair 1984).

Use of user opinion

The use of "users' opinions" (mainly through their expressed satisfaction level on the premise that satisfied users mean good system performance) as a measure of the performance of library and information systems in developing countries, encounters a variety of problems. Although users are important indicators of whether a given library and information system is doing well, they are liable to a number of factors that can affect the reliability of their judgements. Line (1990) points out that users' perceptions of the quality

of library services are affected by circumstances, opportunities and expectations. McKee (1989: 168) also stresses that satisfaction levels indeed are determined by preconceptions and expectations which confirm the role of the factors affecting expressed satisfaction (view, opinion, etc.) of users about a given library and information system. Specifically in developing countries these factors are generally affecting the user's view in a particular way rendering this method of performance evaluation as shaky as the earlier ones.

First their exposure to quality library and information systems or services is very limited so that their expectations are low. If a user deprived of all basic resources sees materials of, say, average quality in terms of currency and coverage in a given library and information system, for example, he may claim that the particular system is satisfactory because this is the best thing that has happened to him. This misleading opinion is what should be expected as the majority of library and information systems in developing countries continue serving without subscriptions to current journals, using books 25–30 years old and are usually limited to the traditional library services (Adeyami 1991). Consequently, the needs and experiences of users of developing countries in using information resources can be said to differ from those of users in developed countries. This results from such factors as the lack of opportunities to be exposed to a variety of exhaustive, current information sources such as current publications, scientific meeting proceedings, etc. as well as a lack of well developed library and information systems (Keenan 1993). Because opportunities have been nil or they had a bad experience with libraries (Neill 1991), the population of developing countries do not expect much from their library and information systems. Thus, the slightest effort on the part of the library and information systems may take the user population by surprise. These conditions definitely affect the general user behaviour and expectations, including their perception of what a good library and information system is. And this is true simply because user satisfaction is the difference between a user's expectation about anticipated services and the actual performance of service output as perceived by the users (Thomas 1998).

In addition, a situation unique to users in developing countries is the low level of information

literacy among the population, which indicates the general difficulties that the users face in understanding their own information needs, the ways of satisfying them, the ways of expressing needs, etc. This can then render them more or less inappropriate judges as to whether the library is meeting their needs, whether it is doing well, etc. In general it would be difficult to communicate very well regarding information provision issues or even to find users appreciative of and interested in being asked about their satisfaction in developing countries. The exception to this is a very small fraction of the community who can not be used to represent the whole population. Thus, the reliability of evaluation based on users in developing countries is surrounded with doubtful situations. Besides surveying users, the major tool used for this purpose, on a regular basis is a very costly venture, in terms of finances and qualified staff time, for library and information systems of developing countries to consider in their current situation.

5. Other shortcomings

In addition to the above problems, the option is also minimal for searching alternative means of generating or acquiring data useful for performance evaluation as in most developed countries. The leading institutional players in developing models, criteria, and standards for evaluation of library and information systems in developed countries, such as Association of Research Libraries (Pritchard 1996), are non-existent or too weak to produce high quality work in most developing countries. The tradition of using data collected routinely by government and other official bodies used as source data in some advanced countries (Pritchard 1996) for evaluation of library and information systems is also generally lacking in developing countries.

This leaves developing countries wanting for a method of their own. In other words, library and information systems in developing countries have to confront the issue of a methodology for performance evaluation from a different perspective in order to have it in a readily useable form and appropriate for the purpose. Library and information systems of developing countries have more to do in having appropriate and effective tools for conducting performance evaluation mainly as a result of their peculiar situation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the importance of performance evaluation for library and information systems in developing countries, it is almost absent. This is primarily so because the information scenario of developing countries makes performance evaluation one of the very difficult tasks to undertake. It is impossible to fully implement the existing evaluation tools that the profession can provide. The methodological issues achieve prominence, as these are important problems particularly in these countries. Although the profession has some tools to offer they don't provide the kind of flexibility and appropriateness for developing countries' needs.

All the same, one thing remains true, that library and information systems in developing countries have to be able to conduct performance evaluations using tools and methods that are appropriate to their context. At the same time, although again there is the factor of not reporting in the literature, there is no evidence supporting that developing countries have developed their own methods and tools. The report of Rosenberg also confirms the absence of such guidelines in Africa, either at a national or continental level (Town 1998).

Specifically then, library and information systems in these countries need to have a framework for performance evaluation that categorically addresses their needs. To achieve this, the following considerations need to be addressed. To measure and to have "direct impact on what tools are used, where one gathers data and how it is interpreted" (Pritchard 1996), library and information systems in developing countries need to analyse their peculiar situations and unique environment in order to develop tools, methods, and frameworks that are relevant to their own specific needs and environment. They need to have a clear picture of their information environment, i.e., what needs to be accomplished, what it takes, what is available and possible, etc. This is a good starting point as context is critical in determining what we do, how we do it and how we communicate it to the concerned bodies (Van House 1995). As many writers also agree, for proper evaluation of the performance of library and information systems, the measure to be used always must take into consideration "the limits

set by the level of resources available to each system or should be adapted to suit local circumstances" (Winkworth, 1993). This implies again that library and information systems in developing countries have to determine first the capability of and the constraints in their environment. This allows them to set realistic targets.

They also need to determine what is important for the environment as the criteria to be used must be reflect "what is defined as important" in a given setting. Developing countries' priorities and needs, which constitute what is important, will have a bearing on the selection and development of the measures and indicators. Thus, in order to serve the purpose very well in developing countries, which have their own priorities and unique environment, there is a need to determine what is really important in their own context. This includes understanding and promoting the peculiar features of library and information systems in developing countries because performance evaluation has to consider "the special features and conditions of the organizational environment in which the study is carried out" (Cronin 1982b). This may also involve looking into the philosophical grounds and broad missions of library and information systems in these countries. The exercise of performance evaluation then will allow them to bring out what they believe is important in their activities and how they handle them, both for themselves and for others to see.

Care must be taken to reflect the special features and conditions of the information environment in the targets. The performance evaluation frameworks have to be stated clearly to show the specific needs and to be appropriate to the environment; for example, "in x circumstances, a library should be able to offer Y activities. Given P resource, a library should satisfy Q proportion of requests for population R," to use the words of McElroy (1989).

Among the important issues that the performance evaluation exercise should focus on is assessing the appropriateness of the different activities to find out whether there is a need for each activity in the first place (Schmidt 1990). This is a very common problem in library and information systems of these countries. Appropriateness here also includes the extent to which the activities' objectives and priorities match the

needs of the users, as well as the government or organisation priorities (Maguire and Willard 1990). Particularly the support of the parent institution and/or government is worth emphasising as it is critical for "no program, ... is going to succeed unless we have commitment from the top management for what we are doing (St. Clair 1984).

Undertaking performance evaluation to improve services has to be emphasised, too, because attractive and useful service in the end is bound to attract more users, which will prove the worth that these library and information systems have to all concerned (Orr 1973). The positive impact on users particularly contributes towards increased support of the funding bodies (Baba and Broady 1998; Willemse 1995). Also alternative sources and the use of data from them, such as national survey data, have to be taken into account by the framework to be developed.

To address the issue of lack of awareness, sensitisation and training should be initiated to bring the importance of performance evaluation and what it requires to the attention of the concerned bodies. Formal training should also have to focus on developing adequate expertise in the area. Information literacy should also receive adequate attention, as this also will have a role to play in the future of library and information systems in developing countries, as well as for the development of the whole of the society.

Although there has not been any way out of the financial problems so far, library and information systems in developing countries should continue their fight to address this problem as it has profound impact on almost everything that the library and information systems have to do.

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