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J. Stephen Town

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Measures of relationship capital for the value scorecard

Measures of
RC for
the value
scorecard

Stephen Town
University of York, York, UK

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the development of ideas relating to the value of library relationships. The paper is conceptual and provides a framework for the measurement of relationship capital (RC) for academic and research libraries.

Design/methodology/approach – The research approach has been to employ a mixed method research strategy combining desk research on the concepts of the definition of RC and its foundation theories with an exploration of relational capital assessment methods from other industries. A historical review is presented with cases of the traditional main method of delivering effective relationships in libraries (embedded librarians, academic liaison and subject librarians).

Findings – The synthesis suggests a measurement approach to populate the RC dimension of the value scorecard, thereby providing an estimation of the full value of the library's relational capital.

Originality/value – The paper fills a gap in the consideration of the importance of relationships to academic and research libraries, and provides a unique and original framework for assessment and measurement.

Keywords Marketing, Trust, Performance measurement, Academic liaison, Library management, Relationship capital

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction and rationale

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the development of ideas relating to the value of library relationships. The paper is conceptual and provides a framework for the measurement of relationship capital (RC) for academic and research libraries.

This paper is based on a presentation made at the tenth Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services, and forms one of a series of explorations on value measurement commencing with a presentation made at the eighth Northumbria Conference on the foundations of value measurement (Town, 2009), developed further at the third Library Assessment Conference (Town, 2011) and the ninth Northumbria Conference (Town and Kyrillidou, 2012) into the value scorecard for libraries. A further paper on human capital assessment for that framework has also been published (Town, 2014) (Figure 1).

Ranganathan recognised that “the library is a growing organism” (Ranganathan, 1931). Subsequent measurement frameworks developed for libraries have often been focused on the mechanistic and instrumental delivery roles of libraries perhaps at the expense of this particular insight. Organisms develop through their relationship with the environment; human organisations grow through interaction with their social environment; service organisations develop through the relationships they have with their particular web of stakeholders. Relationship measurement might therefore be an expected element of library assessment systems, and because of the fundamental and



Ruth MacMullen, Ian Hall, and Michelle Blake, University of York Rachel Daniels and Selena Killick, Cranfield University UK academic library colleagues engaged in the White Rose consortium and “Relationship Management for the 21st Century Academic Library” activity

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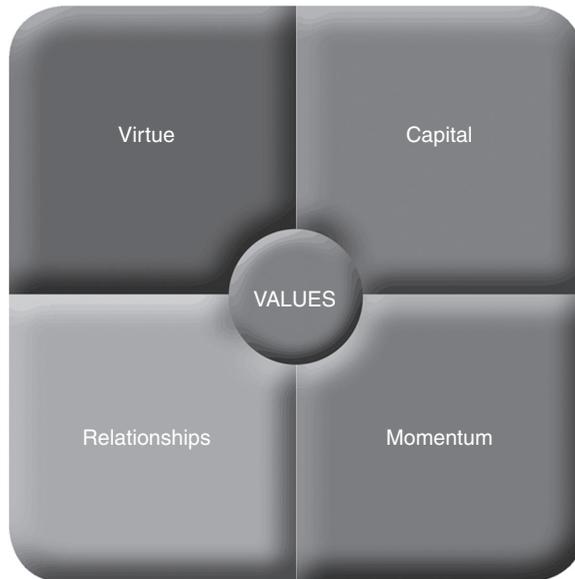


Figure 1.
The value scorecard

intrinsic importance of relationships to academic and research libraries, RC is elevated to a position as one of the four core dimensions of the value scorecard, rather than being viewed as simply a subset of a general dimension of intellectual capital, as might be the case in the industrial context.

Engagement and understanding of stakeholder requirements and context is also essential for service design and delivery, especially in changing times. This is recognised in many modern quality frameworks (see, e.g. “1.2 Engagement and Understanding” in *Customer Service Excellence*, 2014). The role of relationships in innovation and new service creation is critical to success, particularly now as research libraries work with academic colleagues and others to develop new services relating to research publications and data. Success is a product of healthy relationships.

Value measurement of all activity is crucial for advocacy in constrained times, and as we shall see in the historic cases, the failure to measure and communicate the benefit of relational roles may result in unfortunate consequences.

RC value

A simple definition is that RC is “the sum of all the relationships of all the people in the organisation” (Related Vision, 2010). It should be noted that this encourages a mathematical quantification, and implies that a numerical value can be assigned to each relationship. A second important feature of this definition is the implication that internal relationships between staff are included in the assessment. Other definitions, for example, “the value of relationships that an organisation maintains with different agencies of its environment” imply a more collective view of relationships, but do not rule out the internal perspective (Euroforum, 1998). Another more active definition suggests that creating RC is “the intentional building of a system-wide understanding and capacity to act, which becomes the asset or ‘glue’ for creating the context for achieving goals” (Darling and Russ, 2000). Thus relationship value becomes something

more than a passive measure, but a capacity that is the result of command intent, and the measure might be one of both adhesive quality, and also of the flow through these connections towards organisational goals. Later in the discussion it will be apparent that an active approach to management of this area of capital might not only be an important element of creating value, but also avoid the damage of failure to demonstrate and advocate the value of relationship-related staff.

In summary, the attributes of RC might be characterised in the following ways:

- it is individual and personal;
- it applies internally (to the library) as well as externally;
- it is about markets, power and co-operation;
- it results in knowledge sharing and problem solving benefits;
- it supports brand and reputation enhancement through connection;
- relationships can create or destroy value; and
- relationships are dependent on behaviour and character.

The financial perspective on RC is that in accounting terms it is the quantification of the effect of goodwill as an intangible asset which increases market value. The factors that might be used to calculate RC in an organisational context might include:

- position power and personal influence;
- types of relationships;
- strengths of relationships;
- the number of touch points; and
- relationships as a source of innovation.

From this perspective measurement needs to be outside the institution (or in our sense, the library). This therefore implies exclusion of the value of internal relationships. For the practical application of the value scorecard, it is perhaps simpler to consider internal relationships (between library staff) as a feature of the human capital dimension, but one that should not be forgotten in the overall assessment.

Trust and transaction costs

The sectoral focus of this paper is academic and research libraries. The arguments made here are therefore based on the assumption that the library is the organisation under consideration, and that the immediate customer market is largely the rest of the institution (and for academic libraries therefore the university). In many cases this is likely to be an oversimplification of the relationships that a library may have to manage, and ignores the broader relationships and partnerships of the institution in which the library may have a role. This limitation is chosen to establish some principles and approaches which can then be used to assess and measure those relationships arising from that other more complex web.

In considering relationships both within and beyond the institution, the importance of trust comes into play when the assessment of full relational value is required. The rationale for this is as follows (Fukuyama, 1995):

[...] if people who have to work together in an enterprise trust one another because they are all operating to a common set of ethical norms, *doing business costs less* (my italics).

In other words, the economic value of the library will be higher if it is trusted by the rest of the institution (and vice versa), because both will achieve their respective and related goals without the additional costs attached to lack of trust. To quote Fukuyama (1995) again:

[...] by contrast [...] legal apparatus serving as a substitute for trust, entails what economists call 'transaction costs'.

Thus the value of library staff engaged in creating effective relationships based on trust that provide real outcomes are not only creating value, but also reducing transaction costs which would otherwise be necessary. Hence the computation of the value of relational effort should take this into account.

A related point is that these transaction costs are avoided by clarity of ethical norms. One distinctive feature of the value scorecard proposition is that it is based on these shared values. Institutions may fail to capitalise on their shared values by introducing audit or compliance-related management systems and processes based on lack of trust (and in contradiction of the ethics of most academic organisations) which substantially increase internal transaction costs, reducing the overall capital value, and wasting investment which might be put to better use. Libraries themselves may introduce systems and processes which increase transaction costs due to lack of trust between different internal departments.

Transaction cost theory is not new (Coase, 1937) and leads to ideas of the value of social capital, which is a component of relational value that can also be assessed by libraries. If positive social capital is built with users, partners and other stakeholders, then transaction costs can be managed down, providing a tangible benefit to outcomes. This requires a focus on "those costs associated with human interaction" (Fussell *et al.*, 2006). It is hard to find much discussion of these ideas in the library-related literature, which is surprising given the historical recognition that research libraries have given to the importance of relationships with their academic communities. "Trust lubricates co-operation" (Putnam, 1993) and this trust is critical as academic and research libraries move beyond their traditional roles to the management of a broader range of institutional data and services.

In simple terms it can be said that social capital and trust are in inverse proportion to transaction costs. It should also be noted that social capital cannot be built on one's own, therefore positive engagement with stakeholders is not a luxury but an economic necessity. In summary, effective relationships add value and save cost where they build trust; so human interaction measures are a key indicator of value, and hence the allocation of one of the four dimensions of the value scorecard to relationship value. This is also encapsulated in the concept of social intelligence suggested by Anglada (quoting Marina, 2004) and bluntly expressed thus:

There are intelligent [libraries] and stupid [libraries] [...] intelligent groups gather information better and adapt better to reality [...] thus we find 'social intelligence' (Anglada, 2007).

The idea of a socially intelligent library requires a measurement framework to assess and demonstrate this value.

Relationship strength and marketing frameworks

By now it will be clear that there is a link between library marketing (in its broadest sense) and the relationship value for which measurement is sought. To achieve practical measurement of the web of relationships in which any library is engaged,

there needs to be both a way of analysing that web, and a way of quantifying the relationship with each partner or stakeholder group.

To take the latter question first, one way of assessing each relationship is to apply a value to its strength. One option is a strength of relationship index, and a version is reported (McHale, 2006) in which a number of relationship dimensions (such as satisfaction, trust, commitment, advocacy, goodwill and repeat business) can be combined to provide a numerical RC “dashboard”. This might provide a potential route for libraries to take in assessing their relationships.

Relationship marketing concepts similarly provide a way for libraries to begin to analyse the range of relationships in which they are engaged. A foundation idea here is the “commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing” (Morgan and Hunt, 2013). This concept encompasses relational marketing, working partnerships, and strategic alliances, and internal marketing. It also suggests a framework which might cover all the different types of relationship that an academic or research library might have, which when each is quantified using a strength index might add up to an overall assessment of relationship value. It is also fitting to note that Morgan and Hunt acknowledge the influence of Parasuraman and co-workers, given the subsequent application of Parasuraman’s work to library service quality assessment, and his keynote at our fifth Northumbria Conference (Parasuraman, 2004).

Relationship marketing ideas have been further developed in the interim, particularly to take account of more modern theories of forms of organisation in the digital environment. In a proposition for “total relationship management” (Gummeson, 2004) a list of 30 relationships is provided covering:

- classic market relationships;
- special market relationships;
- mega relationships; and
- nano relationships.

Many of these are relevant to libraries within parent institutions that have complex relationships with a variety of stakeholder groups; and some others reflect important operational service-level interactions critical to good relationships. Newly developing value elements may also require inclusion, as libraries form relationships through new social media. The value of consumer interaction as intellectual capital developed via these routes needs to be added to the overall assessment (Sussan, 2012).

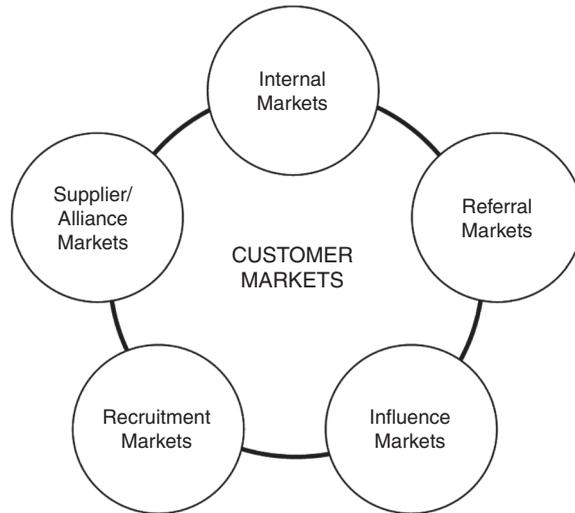
A final framework proposition is a market model that encompasses all the likely relationships an organisation may have within a simple typology. An example (Payne *et al.*, 2004) is shown in Figure 2.

In the final section a development of this model is provided for libraries to use in assessment of their relationship value.

The next section is a historical diversion to strengthen the rationale for libraries to assess their relationship value.

Dangerous liaisons

Traditionally academic and research libraries have sought to manage their relationships with the academic community in their institution through academic liaison librarians, sometimes called subject librarians or other variants. These staff members focus on one or a number of particular disciplines comprising the library’s



Source: Payne *et al.* (2004)

Figure 2.
The “six markets”
model

market. What follows are some application cases in libraries on these people, and their markets and relationships. The intent here is to reveal some evidence from past experience which might highlight the important and specific measures which might be relevant to populating the RC dimension of the value scorecard in the academic and research library context.

The first historical example chosen relates to the author’s background in medical libraries, in which the concept of an embedded (subject specialist) librarian was developed and tested, to achieve direct impact on patient care (Lamb, 1976). This link to transcendent value is precisely the aim of the value scorecard. The important aspects of these “clinical librarians” for relationship measurement are the notion of “the clinical librarian as a member of the patient care team” and as “a valuable interface [...] the key to better patient care”. In other words there is a desired quality of “membership” relationship, a sense of value to be measured in the interface style, and that together these help generate an impact value in patient care. All of this supports the conclusion that these elements should form part of a measurement framework in which the aim is impact beyond the library. Lamb also suggests that the clinical librarian “[...] must observe the ways in which health professionals are currently seeking information”, and so having an impact on the skills of the clinical team, and be “a working member – not just an observer – of the team”. One clinical librarian summed this up as “I can measure my acceptance”, so reinforcing the importance of capturing this aspect of RC. This author later developed some of these elements of potential assessment of role value into a vision for the future LIS professional in the UK National Health Service (Town, 2001). This broad picture of the range of relationship-related activity and value of specialist liaison librarians was also used more recently to inform the development of new ideas for the role and structure of these staff across UK White Rose consortium libraries (Town, 2012).

This suggests that there are some enduring and consistent truths about the value of library relationship staff across time and contexts. The first Northumbria Conference

was conceived partly as a reflection on the publication in the same year of “The Effective Academic Library” (Ellard *et al.*, 1995). One of the dimensions in this measurement framework was “Integration”, and within this dimension was the suggestion to seek “evidence of formal and informal communications between the library service, the senior management of the institution, academics and students [...] to assess the degree of effective and dynamic communication to inform service provision” (Indicator P1.4 Liaison). Johnson took up the challenge of deeper consideration of this area in her paper in that first Conference (Johnson, 1995). A key point in Johnson’s argument was that liaison is based primarily on relationships from which beneficial activities may follow. Because liaison is primarily about the former, measurement should start here. Johnson also presciently discussed seven relationship markets, and mused on the question of measuring relationship quality through assessing “warmth”. She also questioned whether trouble-free and smooth relationships with academic staff were always good in terms of achieving progress in library services.

The period around ten years after Johnson’s paper might be labelled the nadir of academic liaison in the UK. The value of liaison librarians had not been measured or advocated effectively enough for some in those intervening years. In 2005 Bangor University (Curtis, 2005a; Tysome, 2005) sought to remove six subject librarians deploying the argument that “the support [...] from the qualified subject librarians *is hard to justify in value-for-money terms* at a time when the process of literature searches is substantially de-skilled by online bibliographical resources” (my italics). No specific data on this value assessment appears to have been published openly. Green is quoted as suggesting this implies the plans were “based on a misunderstanding of what librarians do” and McKee that it “ignores academic liaison”. This did not prevent posts being lost. In the same year SOAS gave redundancy notices to four subject librarians; in this case some posts were saved because of existing relationships with academic staff, researchers and the Japan Foundation (Curtis, 2005b). East (2007) in a literature review on “The future role of the academic liaison librarian” alludes to the Bangor case, but in his list of tasks does not focus on marketing or relationships, opting instead for a dichotomy of either an active or passive role. These cases demonstrate the need for hard value measure justification of liaison and subject roles, and for these to be in place before threats materialise, rather than offered afterwards. The latter case also demonstrates the power, and therefore value, of good relationships.

Elsewhere perceptive libraries had been focusing on relationships with their customers and users, as evidenced by a range of papers on the capture of customer relationship data within Customer relationship management (CRM) systems. Case studies have been published from the UK and Malta (Broady-Preston *et al.*, 2006), China (Wang, 2007), Singapore (Sharma *et al.*, 2009) and the British Library (Chapman, 2009). Anglada (2007) described a typology of alliances and social intelligence, and recently Killick and Daniels (2013) described the creation and use of a liaison tool for recording and analysing customer communications.

We are now in a context, in the UK at least, in which the role of liaison librarians is, if not transformed, then at least under conceptual and practical redevelopment. A group of academic and research libraries have been working together to consider new approaches and structures for staff in these roles. This encompasses both a stronger sense of the activities associated with the role, reflected in the use of words such as “brokering”, “engagement” and “selling” services from a “service catalogue”. The relationship angle is also strengthened to creating a two-way voice between

academic departments and the library, providing deeper insight both ways, and creating a more equal partnership distinctively different from the traditional “subject handmaid”. There are also new functional activities that are breaking the traditional subject specialist model; for example, the creation of research focused support teams to manage new research data and open access publishing roles, alongside the necessary retention of the discipline focused staff.

The conclusion from these cases is that of a continuing need for relationship management and the building of relational capital by libraries, irrespective of the label on those who carry it out. There is also a need to collect data about these relationships effectively, probably through some type of CRM system. Because the value of these staff might not always be apparent, there is a need for effective data collection and measurement of their contribution, and ultimately to link these activities to the broader impact of the library.

A framework for RC value measurement for libraries

In introducing this final section a tribute is due to our late colleague and member of the Northumbria Conference Editorial Board for many years, Niels Ole Pors. In a paper given at the seventh Conference (Pors, 2007), Pors presciently predicted that attention would turn towards these areas of a library’s activities. The paper “Social capital, trust and organizational effectiveness” lays out the importance of these ideas to our profession. In summary, Pors suggests that:

- Trust is probably a relevant concept in relation to information behaviour, thus relating the idea to our core function.
- Trust is probably related to fulfillment of information needs, so its strength may be related back to satisfaction with that core dimension of quality.
- Trust is probably related to an institution’s degree of effectiveness, efficiency, perception of competencies and positive personal interaction, so the overall performance, culture and climate of a library and its institution are factors which will influence RC.
- Trust and social capital are concepts that will be more fashionable in the coming years.

Because universities are knowledge organisations, and academic libraries can be the core organisational element for knowledge management in this age, there is an importance in library relationships beyond the instrumental delivery of service. The opportunity for a recognised strategic partnership between the university and its library (Huotari and Iivonen, 2005) is suggested, in which the value of the library’s role in productive knowledge processes is apparent. This would link the intellectual capital of the library to the university’s intellectual capital in a more coherent way.

Guidance on the base components for qualitative and quantitative assessment of library relational capital as intangible assets has been suggested (Kostagiolis and Asonitis, 2009) as:

- users training;
- collaboration between academics and subject specialists;
- participation in information networks;
- trust and co-operation within staffs;

- lists of users;
- agreements with authorities;
- reputation; and
- brand name.

This was later elaborated into two categories of indicative relational resource categories (Kostagiolis, 2012) suggested as directly and indirectly related to the library. Kostagiolis also recognised the concept of “goodwill” in providing a diagram of the different perspectives of this potential asset:

- (1) organisational setting goodwill;
- (2) professional practice goodwill:
 - library staff goodwill; and
 - library presence goodwill;
- (3) “Celebrity” goodwill.

Building on these ideas, and drawing on Payne’s model (Payne *et al.*, 2004) the following synthesis of a framework for choice of target relational assessment categories is presented as a Seven Markets Model (Figure 3) for academic and research libraries.

This model can be used to identify the complete web of relationships in which a research library might be engaged and which require maintenance. This is an essential first step to the full assessment of all RC.

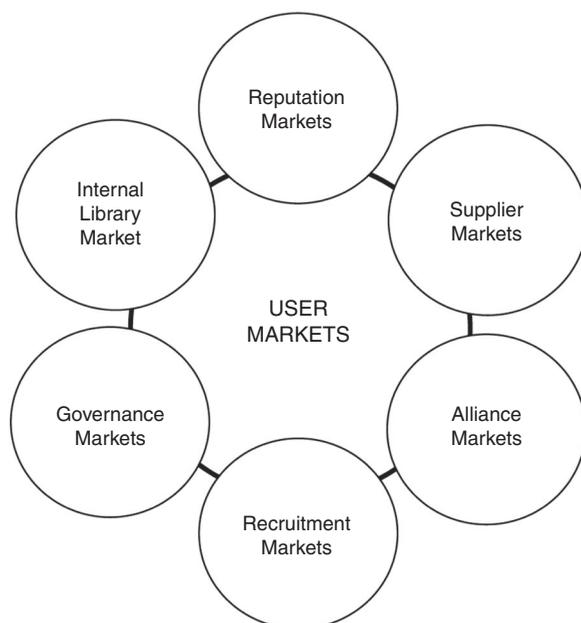


Figure 3.
Seven markets model

A proposed scorecard framework for relationship measurement

In conclusion and synthesis a full conceptual framework for populating the RC dimension of the value scorecard is presented. Drawing on and partly inspired by the Darling and Russ five “Cs” (Darling and Russ, 2000) and following the pattern of “Cs” used for the Human Capital dimension previously presented (Town, 2014), the chosen elements are:

- consciousness and congruence;
- communities and communication; and
- causality and comeback.

The first pair suggests assessment of library awareness and fit. Consciousness is gauged by a general audit of the relational space using the Seven Markets model. This provides one set of the required analytics. The second audit is one of congruence, and requires an assessment of the degree of fit between relationship activity and the parent institution. In this way any particular gaps can be identified.

The second pair requires data about the strength of each relationship listed from the previous audit. In other words every identified relationship must be assessed for strength. Base data for this is likely to come from an effectively designed CRM system. The other data set will come from measures of the processes of communication that are used to develop the relationships within each sphere. This could be as far down as the level of individuals and their contacts, as well as library or service-level marketing communications and programmes, including new social media interactions. Breadth, depth, quality and strength of relational and marketing activities are thereby assessed through this process.

This is insufficient to prove the full value and worth of RC. Success in this area can only be shown by a positive impact of the investment in the human and other capital expended on relational roles and activities. What is sought here is some attempt to show correlation and causality between RC and the “library virtue” dimensions of the value scorecard. These might include specific outcomes and impact of positive relationships on academic process, innovation, finance, quality and staff development. The final element of the assessment is evidence of return on the relationships developed and formed by the library. This might include specific ensuing returns to the library, demonstrating the repeat benefits of relationships. Hence the final pairing of causality and comeback is required to complete a full assessment of the library’s RC value, and populate the RC dimension of the value scorecard.

An academic or research library working through the elements of this framework will gain a quantification of their RC, and be able to demonstrate and advocate this component of their value and worth.

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About the author

Stephen Town is a Director of Information at the University of York, UK. Educated at the Cambridge and Loughborough Universities, Stephen began his career in medical libraries before working for the Cranfield University at the Defence Academy of the UK. Stephen was appointed to the position of the University Librarian at York in 2007, and became the Director of Information in 2009, with responsibility for Libraries, Archives and IT, and for driving forward the University's information strategy. In 2014 the Information Directorate attained the UK national Customer Service Excellence Standard, and celebrated the 600th anniversary of the refounding of York Minster Library which the University operates on behalf of the Dean & Chapter of York. Stephen has an active record in teaching and research, particularly in the field of library management, strategy and performance measurement. He has taught on postgraduate courses in the Universities of Bristol, Cranfield, Sheffield, York, and Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona). A member of the editorial boards of library academic journals and conferences, Stephen also convenes the Northumbria International Conference on Library Performance Measurement. He is a former Chair of the SCONUL Advisory Group on Performance Improvement, and a member of the ARL LibQUAL+ Steering Committee. He has been co-recipient of two Outstanding Paper Awards from Emerald for papers on library quality and value. Stephen has provided consultancy and advice at home and abroad, including for the British Council in Egypt, the Swedish Development Agency in Zimbabwe, and INASP in Uganda. In 2012 Stephen developed, directed and delivered the Executive Management Academy for aspiring library leaders in research universities in South Africa on behalf of the Research Libraries Consortium. Stephen Town can be contacted at: stephen.town@york.ac.uk