The value of libraries: the relationship between change, evaluation and role

Stephen Town

Introduction

What is the relevance and importance of evaluation to the role of libraries and their place in society? This chapter describes how approaches to library evaluation have responded to pressures arising from wider changes in the environment and society, and suggests that the related concepts of values and value will be the key to future approaches. Because behaviour follows measures, changing evaluation frameworks continually shape what libraries are and what they do. The first part of the chapter defines evaluation and argues for its importance in how libraries have defined themselves. The second part identifies some key past trends in evaluation, culminating in the current position of a variety of cross-pressures on libraries to prove their worth. The key question of the value of libraries is posed, with a brief review of some recent responses. Finally, the chapter seeks to offer a route to library value based on broader values, and how this might be characterised within the construct of the transcendent library.

What is evaluation and why is it important?

An assumption implicit throughout this book is that major changes are taking place in society and that these generate changes of requirement in

what libraries are and what they do. There appears to be no doubt that libraries have changed substantially in the four decades since 1970, and that evaluation within libraries has tried to keep pace with these changes. Whether the concept of libraries which forms the framework for evaluation has developed apace in the world beyond libraries is more open to question. Libraries are a social construct (see, e.g., Cullen, 2006), but one of our problems is now a lack of clarity and certainty about this shared construct, exemplified in recent trends to rebrand libraries under other names such as 'discovery', 'explore' or 'learning' centres. What is clear is that these shifts in concept will lead to demands for different forms of evaluation and proof of contribution.

What is library evaluation? Some commentators (see, e.g., Brophy, 2006) make no distinction between the terms 'assessment' (as used widely in North America), 'performance measurement' (as used in libraries in the UK and Ireland and broadly understood throughout the world, and also the accepted term in the management discipline) and 'evaluation' (as used in some key works in the past, see, e.g., Lancaster, 1993). A perceived difference between evaluation and measurement was, however, sufficient for some library science publishers in the past to have had titles on each in their lists. The author's position would be that the differences might and sometimes do imply a different understanding of the activity described: assessment seems to the author to actively imply measurement for a purpose; measurement focuses on the activity itself but in relationship to a sense of due form, while evaluation might indicate an activity which offers an answer to a question arising beyond the library's boundaries. However, these terms are, more often than not, used interchangeably, and this chapter will do so.

The focus of this chapter is not the practice of evaluation, except where measurement tools and methods add to an understanding of the overall picture, but what might be termed a meta-level view of what performance measure developments indicate about libraries and their role. Performance measurement is inseparable from performance; performance is inseparable from a consideration of due form; and the assumptions behind the measures, as to what the due form is, help to provide a definition of role. Brophy (2008) records that library performance measurement has evolved rapidly over the last 30 years; but also suggests we are now at a watershed in this field, due to the fact that libraries are changing. Library performance measurement has certainly become a recognised sub-discipline in its own right: a healthy field of research and practice with its own journal; two large-scale international conferences; an extensive international community of practice with a

readiness to question, respond to change and often to be well ahead of parent organisations in appreciation of this element of management. It is difficult to do justice to the extraordinary richness of library evaluation, and the author has no choice but to be personally selective in his sources for this chapter. In particular, examples have been drawn largely from the perspective of my own experience of specialist, academic and research libraries, but the conclusions are believed to be applicable to all library sectors and contexts.

It is often stated that measurement is about control, but this is perhaps too narrow a focus. The author's assumption is that there are probably three levels at which evaluation and measurement are used and have influence: firstly, for internal library operational management; secondly, for advocacy, strategy and understanding of the library and its services within its governance or organisational frame; and thirdly, for a broader justification for the role of the library or libraries within communities or societies. It could be suggested that, whilst as a profession we have generated good data and methods for the first, we have not been fully persuasive in the second; and are in danger of failure in the third, at least in some contexts. There would appear to be a greater need now than in the past to positively influence and shape the social imaginary (that is, the view of what our society values, or the institutions that it accepts as fundamental) in a way that strongly incorporates a role for libraries. In particular, the transcendent, collective and connective role of libraries does not play well in an increasingly individualistic, disconnected and fragmented society (as described, e.g., in Putnam, 2000 or Taylor, 2007) or as represented in extreme new technology rhetoric (see, e.g., Negroponte, 1995). Because the prevailing social imaginary consists partly of values, and value measurement should hinge on these shared values, this chapter gives more space to recent work on impact and value measurement and its relation to this third justificatory task of evaluation. It is, however, important to recognise that there are different perspectives outside the West and its privileged élites. The value of libraries to human flourishing seems less in dispute in developing contexts, where the proof that libraries change lives is a given and seems not to require campaigns, straplines or competitions.

Ten years ago, the author questioned whether the performance measurement frameworks that libraries were employing were sufficient, or whether in fact the forms of measurement used actually inhibited performance (Town, 2000), and suggested four hypotheses which might help to frame better measurement. Ten years on, some of these factors have indeed been used to frame new measures, as a result of both

external pressures and internal professional recognition. The factors identified then were:

- quality management
- digital development
- library development stage
- staff as a key resource.

These are reflected in some of the trends identified below. A key difference now is that the question of the effectiveness of library evaluation has shifted from an internal professional debate to a broader one, amongst stakeholders, around the justification of libraries themselves. Evaluation is therefore a critically important element amongst other future challenges.

Recent key trends and frameworks

What are the changes to which libraries have been responding in their measurement systems? In order to simplify the answer the author has reduced these to four critical trends. Each produces pressure for a distinctive type of evaluation evidence. These might be expressed as:

1. Digitisation of content and process
2. Quality, customer satisfaction and culture
3. Economic reductionism
4. Worth: value and impact.

The digitisation trend implies that as the main means and forms of communication, publication and knowledge become digital, so measurement and evaluation relating to digital resources and services will be the main concern, and possibly the only measures ultimately relevant. The second trend is exemplified by the wave of quality management that swept through western industry in the final decades of the last century and that subsequently flowed into libraries. This trend encompasses a view that only customers judge quality, and therefore evidence from customers in evaluating service quality will be paramount. The third trend has perhaps been ever present, but has increasingly impacted on libraries when ideologies that label public services as a social evil have held sway, or when the economic context is difficult and

efficiencies or cuts are sought. In such times paymasters seek a reduction of libraries to basic financial elements that can be traded off, made more efficient, competed for or removed entirely to balance the books. These three trends together have combined into a fourth narrative which might question the future existence of libraries as unnecessary in a digital world, unresponsive and irrelevant to changing customer requirements, and an uneconomic and declining luxury. To counter these arguments new forms of proof of impact and value become necessary as a basis for a justification of continued investment, or in extreme cases, existence.

Nearly 60 years ago a prescient paper was written which suggested a natural history of the development of academic libraries (Lancour, 1951) and, by implication, the way in which measurement systems might also develop. It suggested a history of three phases of focus for academic libraries: storehouse; service; education. This can be used to characterise the history of evaluation in all library contexts, and supports the idea of the trends above. At the outset the library adopted mainly internal measures, based on the original value proposition of the library as storehouse. This has been followed by the recognition of service and service quality, driven by the broader quality movement, with associated methods and measurement tools. The final and current challenge is to link our measures to the broader aims of our institutions (education, in the case of academic libraries) and society in general. This may of course simplify the picture too much; there has perhaps always been some evaluation activity across the whole spectrum. However, the idea of a progression from the internal focus on physical collections and an agreed set of associated processes, through to more externally focused measures of first immediate customers, and then to a broader range of stakeholder interests, would seem to hold good. This has also moved the focus of evaluation from the immediate and concrete towards the more transcendent contribution of libraries.

Digital developments

It is evident that the content of libraries is changing, due to digital developments, and that this is not simply an exchange of content of one kind for another, but a trend which fundamentally alters traditional processes, usage and library boundaries. Most libraries are still in transition, and the 'print is dead' message is not completely borne out in the current measurement of library activity. Early assumptions about the decline of certain types of library usage (in particular, physical visits)

have not been valid, as libraries have renewed their physical offerings, while other measures do show less use of, for example, enquiry services, and less concern for personal service.

The influence of digital developments on library evaluation and measurement has perhaps not been as marked as their influence on libraries generally. Work goes on to count activity associated with digital resources (see, e.g., Shepherd, 2006), and this is of necessity a joint effort across libraries and providers in a way that demonstrates that the boundaries of the library service in terms of delivery and ownership are no longer evident to users. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL)[1] in North America has been a focus for activity around new digital measures, with the creation of a variety of new tools. ARL has also recognised the fundamental content shift in its membership index, removing the size of physical collections from its criteria, which are now based on input measures alone.

There has not yet been as much work on how user behaviour has changed in this context, and there are dangers in simplistic interest in activity alone (Town, 2004). A key requirement for the future will be the re-creation of the fundamental understanding of use which in the past was available from information science studies. Assumptions are currently made about users as 'digital natives' or alternatives, and there is recent work in the academic area (helpfully summarised by Connaway and Dickey, 2010), but until more evidence is collected this evaluation trend has, perhaps surprisingly, not generated the changes of concept on which a different construct of libraries can be based.

Quality

Quality has been a much stronger driver for changes in evaluation, and consequently in the construct of libraries, than have been digital developments. While most libraries remain a hybrid of digital and physical offerings, few libraries would now not categorise themselves first and foremost as a service. This change has perhaps not been much commented on, but it is a radical change from 60 years ago, when service elements were in some places sometimes a distraction from the demands of the storehouse construct. Indeed, it could be argued that the assumption that libraries are now just another service among many within their broader organisations has led to a reduction in the recognition of libraries as transcendent services (alongside others that

clearly are not), less priority given to longer-term preservation aspects, and sometimes to the assumption that we are solely a service profession.

From the evidence of a survey of assessment initiatives in academic libraries (Wright and White, 2007; Killick and Stanley, 2009,) the overwhelming majority of new measurement efforts over the past 10 years might be characterised as quality oriented. The main rationale provided by the libraries themselves is the self-generated pressure to understand more about users, proving the point that the internal construct has shifted towards the service ideal. Surveys have been the most commonly used quality tool within the academic context. As an example, the LibQUAL+ survey[2] has been used throughout the world over the last 10 years, providing a reliable, valid and acceptable instrument for research libraries in multinational contexts. The ability to provide benchmarks of user satisfaction and comparison around the globe is an unparalleled achievement. Interestingly, the survey dimensions (information control; library as place; effect of service), and hence the underlying construct of libraries, have remained consistent for several years, in spite of digital developments. These detailed market surveys have now been accompanied, and in some cases displaced, by broader organisational or national surveys. The National Student Survey[3] is an example. A side-effect of this displacement is the reduction of the concept of the library to that encompassed by the single issue chosen for the question, which is either purely instrumental or limited to a single market segment.

Fortunately this reduction has been balanced by the broadening of the quality concept to what might be termed meta-levels. Since Kaplan and Norton's seminal work on the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1996), the concept of a measurement framework reflecting the interests of a number of stakeholders has been attractive to those wishing for a more holistic or strategic approach to measurement. Kennerley and Neely (2002) suggest that organisations perform better with a balanced framework than without, and a number of libraries have taken this up. The Balanced Scorecard application[4] at the University of Virginia shows the strength of this approach as more than just a measurement framework, but rather, a cultural instrument (Self, 2003). Wilson has been working on a cultural framework in order initially to answer the question of whether benchmarking exercises made a real difference to library quality (Wilson and Town, 2006). This study led to the reshaping of a Capability Maturity Matrix from the software industry[5] for library purposes, and suggests that quality improvement needs to be based within a culture that can support multiple improvement projects. The

finding that sophisticated tools like benchmarking will be effective only where the culture can absorb and embed the lessons learned is a valuable one, and shows up the way in which quality has led to new constructs of the library, at least within those libraries that embrace it systematically.

Economic and financial measures

The response to the need for financial measures is covered in more detail in the following section. Despite the financial pressures on libraries, standard approaches to costing have not been a strong feature in library evaluation. One recent international benchmarking exercise across a number of research libraries found no consistent approach to costing and financial analysis on which to base comparisons. There is a surprising lack of data and focus on financial measures within our profession. This might simply demonstrate that there are more interesting truths to discover about libraries. However, these truths may be in danger of being submerged in a world which seeks to know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Libraries seem to be very resistant to external pressures to produce a construct of themselves in financial terms, and this could be seen as a weakness rather than a virtue in times of economic constraint.

Worth

In a recent conference, a demand for proof of worth was voiced by a university leader (Lombardi, 2007), which, when developed (Town, 2009a), suggested that there were only two 'bottom line' measures of worth: impact on research (and ultimately research reputation) and impact on the financial bottom line. This rather narrow view can, however, serve as a reflection of the two pressures that have recently been growing in library assessment for impact and value measures that have meaning for broader stakeholders and society. So far in this chapter, the term 'worth' has been used to mean the combination of these two measurement strands, although value might be the more appropriate collective term (incorporating impact). A recent paper based on focus groups with senior UK academic librarians commissioned by the Research Information Network (RIN) generated the following observation (RIN, 2010):

> There is a strong feeling among senior librarians that they have failed effectively to communicate the value of their services … there is an increasing risk that much of what libraries actually do may be invisible in a virtual environment. … We believe it is important that libraries should be able to show … that they provide services with demonstrable links to success in achieving institutional goals. Return on investment is thus an increasingly important issue. Libraries need to be more proactive in seeking to understand user behaviour and workflows; and in rigorously demonstrating the value of their activities … The focus of performance indicators up to now has tended to be on inputs and outputs … rather than addressing the much harder issues relating to impact and value. … We believe it is essential that more work is done to analyse the relationships between library activities … and learning and research outcomes.

This summarises the current challenge for library evaluation, and also hints at some potential answers. In simple terms, it suggests that we need to understand our users better, as this will be a route to value, and we need tools such as return on investment (ROI)[6] to make the link to value and, ultimately, to institutional goals. The next main section will consider some responses to this demand for value and impact measures. This demand for proof of worth is an additional pressure on libraries, and does not reduce or replace the need for the many other forms of assessment in use. There is also an associated danger of reductionist thinking on the part of both stakeholders and librarians in understanding and responding to this pressure, especially when paymasters and others attempt to base these proofs on a limited range of utilitarian or financial measures.

Cross-pressures

The collision of the products of the different themes and influences described above is now everywhere apparent, generating cross-pressures on evaluation for library managers and their stakeholders. In practice, few libraries can or do take a single path in response. Evidence (see Killick and Stanley, 2009) from examples from the UK academic library context is that many different approaches and methods are taken up at different times in a contingent fashion. Library managers and leaders are now regularly assailed by a range of demands or opinions relating to

evaluation. To demonstrate these cross-pressures through personal experience during a single week early in the first year of this new decade:

1. A blog suggests that in the new digital age information literacy is the only measure of a library's contribution.

2. An e-mail draws attention to the results of a national student experience survey and demands that it be taken seriously as it may affect student recruitment.

3. A financial benchmarking exercise requires the itemisation of all expenditure on staff in a year to be apportioned to particular categories for comparison with other similar institutions.

4. An academic wishes to discuss the impact of management changes in the cathedral library on both the learning of history students and the reputation of the university in its local community.

5. A presentation is required for a strategic board (which will draw heavily on quantitative survey results) to demonstrate that our plans for new library space will make a measurable difference to student learning.

6. A letter from a grant-awarding body judges the impact of our archives service on research against other services in order to apportion funding.

All this generates an implicit sense of the continuous need for justification of the library, prioritisation within itself and alongside all the other potential methods and techniques of enhancing learning and research.

An observation from the above is that although librarians are constantly admonished that the world has changed and libraries should change, the resulting range of concerns is broadening rather than reducing, and that the more traditional aspects of the service are still valued. The Web may have turned the world upside down, print may be dead, and scholarly publication may be in revolution, but the death of libraries and the end of library evaluation appear to be some way off. This does, however, present opportunities; libraries are not merely passive recipients of these pressures and changes, but active agents with a role in shaping the world, as much as in responding to it.

One way in which this can be done is through narrative. The move from internal operational measures towards more strategic and cultural measures, generated to meet broader advocacy needs, requires a vehicle for communicating these effectively. Brophy (2008) suggests that

libraries are being challenged to re-invent themselves within the workflows and lifeflows of their users. Because context is all important, and the context of digital information is complex, new measures must draw rich pictures in order to be persuasive. Brophy's view is that ethnography, self-evaluation and narrative will assist here. Ethnographic approaches have already been adopted, for example at the University of Rochester (Foster and Gibbons, 2007). This could also be seen to flow logically from the simple strictures of total quality management that have emphasised the need for deeper understanding of customers. Narrative leads us, or leads us back to, the question of what story we are trying to tell about our libraries. What choices we make will define the new construct of the library. The next section will consider the potential role of value and impact evaluation in these stories.

Value as a key measure

Around 30 years ago, in an influential paper Orr made the key distinction between 'how good' libraries are, as opposed to 'how much good is done' by them (Orr, 1973). This laid a dual framework: the former reflecting library quality (equated with effectiveness) and the latter reflecting library value (equated with benefit). Orr did not reflect specifically on the philosophy of value, as the paper was a response to perceived pressures to incorporate new management science into libraries, but the distinction between these two aspects thus characterised has held good. While there has been great progress in measurement of quality, measurement of value has remained more intractable and less visited. Later perceptive commentary by Buckland (1982) suggested that this is because what is lacking is coherence, a sense of the whole, in our measurement systems. The emphasis on the former aspect of library goodness, realised primarily through instrumental levels of measurement, has resulted in library evaluation which does not reflect the holistic, collective, connective and transcendent contribution that libraries make.

Thus the challenge of developing value measures has existed for some time, and the resurfacing of a demand for proof of value is not surprising. In the UK and Ireland developing and collating a coordinated response to the demand for value and impact measurement in academic libraries has been through the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) Value and Impact Programme (known as VAMP) (Town, 2007 and Town, 2009a). Value and impact might be

considered to be two distinctively different facets, but both are clearly about answering the challenge to define the beneficial contribution of libraries. A body of theory and practice existed from previous work in UK further and higher education (Markless and Streatfield, 2008), including the Library and Information Research Group/SCONUL Impact Initiative (Poll and Payne, 2006) on which to draw. The SCONUL Impact Initiative was considered to be the basis for a model for evaluation and measurement in this field. An impact tool was subsequently commissioned, developed and mounted on the VAMP site.[7] The majority of early projects in this programme were related to information literacy, despite an initial desire to concentrate on research impact. However, it would seem that the development of information literacy in individuals is a very good example of the creation of something transcendent which continues to deliver value well beyond the boundaries of the library or parent institution. With the advent of information literacy, the idea of a contribution that was both transforming from the individual's point of view and an addition of transcendent value from the library's perspective has helped to sharpen concepts of impact in a positive way. Work continues in this area, with a tool for research impact being a highly desired product for proof of research library worth.

Turning from impact to value measurement, what follows is a brief review of recent views on value measurement, taken from a presentation to the 2009 Northumbria International Conference (see Town, 2009b). First, a caution made some time ago about the difference between cost and value:

> focusing on cost without being able to demonstrate [service] value and quality … leaves the initiative to people whose chief concern is cost-control or profit: the funders and the vendors. (Whitehall, 1995)

In other words, there is a danger in giving ground to pressures for cost data without a framework which translates costs into value. Whitehall's warning has been largely unheeded in some areas; for example, the lack of any real credible qualitative data on e-resources has resulted in large volumes of academic library budget being handed over to vendors without any corresponding reverse pressure for value-for-money measurement guarantees. Missingham (2005) reviewed a range of recent value studies in libraries. In doing so, she proposed a natural history of value initiatives, suggesting three successive steps:

- activity-based costing for output efficiency
- perceived value based on labour saving
- balanced scorecard pressure for 'hard' value measurement.

Note that this assumes value to be solely an economic question, although Missingham does however also make the key point that the demonstration of value needs to be linked to the organisation's value statements. The paper's conclusions were based on five studies, including the British Library, three US public library systems and a national bibliographic service in New Zealand. These initiatives suggested varying benefit ratios for libraries around the 1:4 to 6:5 levels. Many questions arise from this. Does the variation reflect real differences across communities? Larger libraries give higher returns, but what is the precise level of good? A 1:4 return might appear slight in absolute terms. Missingham concluded that contingent valuation does not provide a 'magic bullet' for library value measurement.

In another study (called a 'meta-analysis') of return on investment, Aabo (2009) considered this to be a new field, and driven by the financial crisis' generating a need for worth estimates in monetary terms. This work is a review of reviews, covering 17 US public libraries and 43 other international initiatives. It found a lack of consistency in methodology, limiting valuation comparisons, but again the scores are generally within the 1:4 ranges. However, 80% of the studies are from the USA, and over 80% are from public libraries, suggesting that this is a particularly attractive technique in some contexts and sectors. The variety of methods included cost-benefit analysis, contingent valuation, and secondary economic impact.

In a North American perspective, White (2007) considered ROI to be an old tool with potentially new uses, and was more directive in his suggestions for application. This paper recognised that use of the tool in libraries has often been defensive or reactive, and echoed the previous conclusions that there is currently no professional consensus on methodology for value determination. White suggests a more internal and instrumental use of the tool for predictive, small-scale investment decision making, for post-implementation value assessment and for introspective use to evaluate unit-to-unit service within the library. A key comment is that these tools could also be applied in more offensive use for library intangible benefits, and this seems an important suggestion, leading towards methods which might answer the need for a more holistic picture of library value.

Kostagiolas and Asonitis (2009) suggested that intangible asset measurement is important because the recognition and evaluation of the full range of the value of assets is key to assessment of overall library value. The valuation of intangible assets will supplement that of real assets, which have tended to be based on the concepts of the library as storehouse, or a set of clearly defined service processes, and therefore do not satisfy the criteria of transcendence or of holism. This paper equates intangible assets with knowledge assets, and these are recognised as difficult to evaluate. However, there are methods for resolving this, and an approach of this type requires an intellectual capital reporting model, using similar tools to those already recognised above, such as ROI and contingent valuation. A key area where this paper broadens the viewpoint towards the holistic and the transcendent is in the recognition of additional dimensions suggested for assessment:

- human capital
- structural capital
- relational capital.

This begins to recognise that there are valuations to be computed not simply for what the library does in instrumental terms, but that there is also a value in what has been built by the library in terms of its staff capability and capacity, in the services built around both real and virtual collections and in the relationships which the library has with both its immediate stakeholders and broader society. Not only are most of these aspects not measured by current frameworks, they are also not yet generally recognised as being objects for measurement and evaluation.

The conclusion from this is that the traditional tools for value measurement will provide only a partial answer to the demand for proof of worth. Economic value tools may be primarily instrumental; offering something new within our current frame of reference, but not providing a transcendental answer of the kind sought. Some of these tools may be better employed internally for individual valuations rather than for a whole library approach, because their frame of reference fails to take into account either intangible assets or broader definitions of value. In other words, one of the reasons that libraries may be undervalued is because the techniques and measures for true and complete valuation are underdeveloped. Because behaviour follows measures, if there are no effective measures for these substantial assets which libraries build and generate, then behaviours will not be directed to maximise these assets. Paradoxically, measures such as satisfaction with library staff derived

from surveys actually direct one away from library staff as an asset because users are not in a position to appreciate their true value to the enterprise. This leaves open the question of how best to measure library value. In the next section a potential resolution is offered which might serve to draw the strands of library evaluation together into a new framework based on the relationship between value and values.

Values and value: a possible resolution

The current economic crisis has generated some challenge to the previous dominance of measurement and evaluation based largely on a limited range of economic values and judgements. Libraries which see themselves as a common good can take some comfort from, for example, Professor Michael Sandel's 2009 Reith Lectures (as commented on in a British newspaper editorial; see Guardian, 2009):

> The credit crunch has exposed myriad mirages, demonstrating how the market can get things badly wrong when it comes to valuing things … when bureaucracies price things which should not be priced, they start trading them off against other objectives, instead of appreciating their absolute obligations.

This offers a reminder that true value cannot be measured by financial measures alone, and that pursuit of a set of such narrow measures can be disastrous when unaccompanied by broader considerations. Consequently, adding a few economic value indicators to our current evaluation methods may not be an adequate response to the demand for value measures. What may be needed is some reflection on value in terms of these absolute obligations.

The lack of persuasive proof of the value added by libraries has hampered their cause; but blame can also be attached to broader leadership, which has been subverted by the same trends towards narrow measurement. The cross-pressure experienced by library leaders in this context has been recognised for some time, and some commentators have described those arising from different value sets:

> Civil society has more to do with attitudes, feelings and symbols … leadership [sees] an increasing emphasis on values … value-based management is second only to change management [in importance

> to leaders for continuing education] ... but most organisations consist of different value sets ... there is a focus on the importance of leaders as value creators. (Pors and Johanssen, 2003)

This suggests that there are conflicting values between different trends in public sector management, but that an understanding of values will be critical to effective future performance. Again, these demands do not replace the other many existing cross-pressures for data and evidence arising from earlier management trends, such as the quality movement.

The conclusion is that there is a specific new pressure for proof of value, which libraries have not yet succeeded in developing. However, a response based solely on a limited economic model may not be the answer; rather, there is a need for a broader assessment of the meaning of value; and for a recognition that value is dependent on values sets or systems. This surely offers an opportunity for libraries to represent themselves more effectively within a construct based on values, with clear evidence of how we add value within this overall values system. In other words, library leaders in civil society contexts recognise that there is something more here to libraries and measurement than the immediate concrete dimension. In simple terms, society considers a range of intangible things to be important alongside the economic and the practical; this has something to do with the values of that society; libraries should manage themselves according to values (but there may be conflicting value sets); in this approach, value (to society) is created as a result.

Two questions arise here. How can we link values and value? And how can we measure the value which libraries add to the achievement of these broader values? It is interesting that in most of the literature on library value the link between value and values is unrecognised. This is probably due to the conflation of the idea of value to economic value alone. Values have not been seen as the basis for a framework for measurement, although a values statement is considered a standard requirement by many organisations as part of its leadership framework.

Some more detailed consideration of the concepts of value and values seems relevant here. This is again developed from the 2009 Northumbria presentation (Town, 2009b). Value has been variously defined as worth, desirability, utility; or as the qualities on which these depend; or as estimated worth; or as a financial exchange or other form of equivalent (Sykes, 1982). More generally, value as 'the quality or fact of being excellent, useful or desirable' has been used as a starting point for discussions of value theory, accompanied by conclusions that precise

terminology has not yet been obtained (Rescher, 1969). There has been much philosophical debate about value over more than two thousand years, so it is not possible to do full justice to that here. There are some points worth noting from that debate. First, there is ambiguity over what value means. Consequently, value will mean different things to different people. Value is an idea; in other words, it has no independent existence and, like any idea, it can be described as 'arbitrary'; in other words, there is not likely to be a single wholly satisfactory answer to value measurement (Najder, 1975).

For libraries the challenge is to compute value, and because values are manifested, there will be something that we can measure arising from the way values are enacted in our libraries, and the way value is generated as a result.

> Whenever valuation takes place … values must enter in … in evaluation an indispensable recourse to underlying values is involved. Values cannot be deduced from … data or logic … they have to be chosen. Acts or series of acts are steered by multiple and changing clusters of values. (Williams, 1968)

These quotes suggest that valuation or evaluation assumes a certain set of values, and that values must be chosen. Consequently, according to this, library evaluation should be based on a clear and agreed set of shared values. Because values guide conduct, then the results of this conduct must be observable and potentially measurable. Some value assumptions may have been implicit in some existing measurement frameworks (especially those related to the quality movement), but there is little, if any, discussion in the literature connecting values and performance measurement within a common explicit framework.

There would seem to be a broadly accepted management science view that values and value are connected, and that both are relevant to effective organisational performance:

> Value creation is the objective of every enterprise, every worker and every leader. (Cameron et al., 2006)

Values in the work situation provide purpose to a job on the part of individuals, and motivation is considered to be proportional to the values perceived in the job. Because a value represents a slogan for the rationalisation of action, values provide impetus to correct actions, which then result in value creation. Many libraries have value

statements, but it may be that these have not been fully recognised or utilised to support improved performance or to help recognise how value is being added. An example from industry of the way in which this link has been recognised was the IBM experience (Hemp and Stewart, 2008), when the company saw a need to improve 'working together' within to reflect the company's new integrated solutions offerings for the external market. The solution was seen as a new set of corporate values, achieved through a 'Values-Jam', an intranet discussion amongst 320,000 employees to 'weigh in' on the new set of corporate values. Ten thousand comments were received, mainly dissonant and discontented, but the company leadership had the confidence to let the debate run, eventually leading to resurfacing of some original company values lost in the recent transition: dedication; innovation; and trust. Note that these may be difficult to measure, but it was accepted that soft corporate values (and, by implication, measures of those) had to coexist alongside hard financial metrics.

At the University of York Library and Archives, we have used this inspiration to conduct our own values investigation using a Web 2.0 consultation tool, followed by an all-staff conference to settle a new statement of values. This included a recognition of conflicting values sets as characterised by Cameron et al. (2006). While this started out as an investigation of staff values, we extended the question to what users valued or would value about our services. This would make the link between our internal value set and the adding or creation of value for the broader academic community. By asking what users value, instead of what they want, need or rate as satisfactory, we received answers which were surprisingly different from what we had learned through quality approaches.

In terms of the effect on library constructs, a more holistic academic vision of the library as 'a real tangible physical expression of knowledge' emerged, which revealed current weaknesses in our construct of what is needed to deliver the virtual equivalent of former physical libraries. A physical library lays out knowledge in a way that virtual libraries do not, with density steering appreciation of the literature of a discipline. These issues had not been identified through our satisfaction surveys, with their separation of content, service and physical dimensions. The value of the library as the 'intellectual heart, a collection of knowledge made without fear or favour' and as a visible 'celebration of scholarship' raises questions about how we can compute the value of this kind of intangible contribution and reflect it in both library construct and practice.

The student vision also revealed a new set of priorities, much more closely linked with day-to-day pressures and contextual experiences, and suggesting a need for much closer involvement of this group in design and delivery of service. Almost no response to our question suggested economic tools as being particularly relevant to proofs of value, although value for money was an issue for students in an increasingly difficult economic climate. From a student perspective, a construct of the library as a social as well as an academic service came through strongly.

Conclusion: value, values and transcendence

The contribution of library evaluation to the role of libraries and their place in society is likely to be in the development of value and impact measures which demonstrate proof of worth, and which also provide a construct for the future library that is robust enough to withstand future challenges. These measures will be in addition to current frameworks, because these existing frameworks work at the level of operations and within institutions, rather than at the level of fundamental justification or of considerations of worth which transcend these boundaries. The framework for proof of value will arise from consideration of the values of organisations or societies, and will extend well beyond economic value contributions. Some library leaders maintain a pessimistic view that libraries would not have been invented if we had started within the current digital context. This demonstrates precisely the lack of appreciation both of the value that libraries add holistically as a system and of the value generated by our less tangible assets. The quest for value measurement is implicitly a demand for evidence of transcendent contribution. Internally focused evaluation tools will not provide the answers. These broader contributions may relate to individuals, wider groupings or society, and evaluation will require a similarly broad scope to compute their value. A complete and holistic picture of the value of libraries will emerge only through additional work on gaining a better understanding of how users engage with libraries in this changing context, and also on methods for assessing the value of intangible assets which are not the objects of current measurement systems. Only then will the full story of the transcendent library be told.

Notes

1. http://www.arl.org/.
2. http://www.libqual.org/about/about_survey.
3. http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/.
4. www2.lib.virginia.edu/bsc/index.html.
5. http://www.sei.cmu.edu/cmmi/.
6. http://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/returnoninvestment.asp.
7. http://vamp.diglib.shrivenham.cranfield.ac.uk/.

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