



Performance evaluation as a tool for strategic decisions about serving visually impaired users: The case of the Lithuanian Library for the Blind



Zinaida Manžuch^{a,*}, Elena Macevičiūtė^b

^a Institute of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University, Saulėtekio av. 9, Vilnius, LT-10222, Lithuania

^b Institute of Book Science and Documentation, Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University, Saulėtekio av. 9, Vilnius, LT-10222, Lithuania

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 December 2014

Received in revised form 5 September 2015

Accepted 3 May 2016

Available online 31 May 2016

ABSTRACT

The complexity of serving diverse and dispersed target audiences of visually impaired persons suggest that there is a need to analyse the performance of libraries for the blind. This issue is currently neglected in library and information science research. Library managers and policy-makers can employ performance data for developing new strategies for service delivery and sustainability. The balanced scorecard and historical benchmarking approaches were applied to analyse the performance of the Lithuanian Library for the Blind (LLB) in 2008–2012. The concepts of strategic issues and strategies were employed to demonstrate how performance evaluation findings may be used for the purposes of strategic planning. The findings revealed the attractiveness and sufficiency of cultural services, but also the inability of the LLB to reach its target audiences, the inefficiency of internal processes, low use of information resources and electronic services, and a lack of sustainability in organisational learning. A model of service provision in collaboration with public and academic libraries for publishing and distribution of literature in accessible formats was suggested to the LLB. It is in line with the policy and legal decisions necessary for achieving the Library's main goals.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Libraries for the blind serve the information needs of users for whom only the disability is common. These libraries face complex tasks in organising their services, such as production and supply of documents in accessible formats, reaching dispersed audiences, and satisfying diverse needs while addressing users with different profiles. With growing recognition of the rights of disabled persons, libraries for the blind have expanded to include persons with print disabilities (United Nations, 2006), i.e., those who cannot read traditional materials due to visual, perceptual, cognitive, physical, or other disabilities (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2012).

Under the conditions of economic change, expanding audiences, increasing transparency and accountability of public sector organisations, as well as political, legal, and technological changes, libraries for the blind invest in finding the most effective ways of providing services. The effective provision of services requires careful planning. The management literature suggests that strategic plans for developing, improving, and sustaining services should be based on data about the performance of an organisation (Bryson, 2004). This knowledge allows for judging whether the current strategic goals are achieved or whether there is a necessity to formulate new

objectives or to change the way they are attained. Performance evaluation means attempting to determine achievements and gaps in an organisation's activities and includes decisions about what to assess, evaluation methods, systematic collection of appropriate data, and the process of assessment itself (Poister, 2003).

1.1. Problem statement

Performance evaluation is closely related to the functions of control and planning as it enables an organisation to gain feedback on its activities and plan how to modify activities (Agarwal, 1982). The role of performance evaluation in strategic planning is twofold. On the one hand, it allows for the translation of strategic objectives into measurable actions. On the other hand, performance evaluation results inform the development of strategic objectives by providing data on gaps and achievements of an organisation. Developing strategies is often a challenging enterprise for libraries (Buchanan & Cousins, 2012). It is not always clear how to carry out performance evaluation and use the findings for developing strategies. The situation is complicated by the fact that there is a lack of empirical research regarding performance evaluation in libraries for the blind in spite of multiple initiatives to evaluate performance of libraries of other types. Thus, this study¹ explores the main

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: zinaida.manzuch@mb.vu.lt (Z. Manžuch).

¹ This study is based on the results of the national project LiBiTOP—The Feasibility Study for the Optimisation of the Lithuanian Library Network—a research initiative that sought to analyse the strategic environment and performance of the major Lithuanian libraries.

achievements and shortcomings that emerged in the course of assessing how effectively the mandates of the Lithuanian Library for the Blind (LLB) have been implemented and to show how these findings can be used by library managers and policy-makers for developing strategies to introduce, deliver, and sustain library services.

Two research questions were formulated for the study:

- What are the main achievements and gaps in implementing the mandates of the LLB?
- How can the main achievements and gaps be used for developing the LLB strategies?

2. Literature review

Measuring library performance and quality is a popular topic in library research, with a biannual conference (Library Assessment Conference) organised by the Association of Research Libraries, an international journal (*Performance Measurement and Metrics*²) with three issues a year, and books and articles on library quality, performance, efficiency, and impact appearing every year throughout the world. But the picture changes when focus is directed to libraries for people with visual disabilities. A recent content analysis of disability and accessibility issues in the library and information science literature from 2000–2010 revealed the absence of performance or quality evaluation topics. While researchers and professionals did pay attention to visual disabilities during this period, the main concerns were issues of accessibility to electronic resources as well as numerous descriptive accounts of library services to disabled persons (Hill, 2013). The insufficient focus on quality of library services to disabled persons in international research was recognised by Hennon, who pointed out the prevalence of legal and assistive technology themes (Hennon, 2006).

The lack of comparable quantitative performance data was mentioned in an international study on the management, major activities, and strategic environment of libraries for the blind commissioned by the IFLA and others (Rightscom, 2007). Useful statistical data about titles in accessible formats produced per year, size of collections in accessible formats, and many more were provided in the report. However, these data, though informative, are not comparable because of country differences. The study also showed that a number of libraries and institutes serving visually impaired persons have established indicators for measuring performance. The reach of target audience, user satisfaction or attitude toward the service, speed of supply, and range and depth of materials in accessible formats are mentioned most often (Rightscom, 2007).

Some aspects of library performance are occasionally analysed. These mostly deal with the satisfaction of users in individual institutions (Kotso & Mohammed, 2011; Whyte, 2005) or the networks of libraries serving visually impaired users (Forghani, Kiani, & Tajdaran, 2011; Kharamin & Siamian, 2011). However, these studies analyse public and academic libraries that are not specifically established to serve solely print-disabled or visually impaired persons. Studies evaluating the capacity of public or academic libraries to serve disabled persons in general and visually impaired persons in particular are also common in library and information science literature. Usually, the authors investigate library services, information resources, equipment, and premises (e.g., Majinge & Stilwell, 2013; Willis, 2012).

To summarise, the main focus of current research is still on evaluating whether functioning and viable information services for visually impaired persons are in place. Insufficient attention is directed to the need for the effective organisation of service delivery, not solely its availability. Performance evaluation is also rarely seen as an instrument for strategic decisions leading to improved service delivery in the whole network of libraries serving visually impaired persons.

Performance issues in general are abundantly discussed in the library literature, and the link between performance evaluation and strategic planning is widely recognized (Dole, 2013). However, as Dole puts it, “library literature contains numerous studies of strategic planning and assessment as separate tools, but fewer articles about the integration of the two” (p. 288). Several relevant studies covering both themes focused on analysing how performance evaluation was embedded in strategic planning processes (Taylor & Heath, 2012), assessing existent strategic plans using the balanced scorecard approach (Kettunen, 2007), elaborating on general principles and providing examples (Bowlby, 2011), and examining the current state-of-the-art in using performance evaluation for planning (Lakos, 2007). However, no studies described how to carry out performance evaluation and use its results for library planning when there is no strategic plan in place.

3. The role of the LLB and current trends in serving visually impaired users

Every organization is influenced by external changes that encourage it to enhance existing strategic actions or develop new ones. Therefore, identification of relevant and significant changes, that is, trends in the environment, is critical for strategic decisions. For the purposes of this research, a trend is understood as a change that has taken place over a certain period of time and has a considerable impact on the future of an organization (Pillkahn, 2008). In this section, relevant trends that were identified in Manžuch, Macevičiūtė, and Adomavičius, 2012, along with necessary updates, are provided based on the major mandates of the LLB.

The LLB is the major institution responsible for information and cultural services to visually impaired persons, and because of this, it has the status of a library of national significance (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2013). It is a middle-sized library with a staff of 59 persons (Lietuvos aklyjų biblioteka, 2014). The mission of the LLB is “to satisfy the information and literature needs of blind and [partially sighted] persons ..., actively contribute ... to the education, cultural life, and rehabilitation of the visually impaired, encourage their integration into society” (Lietuvos aklyjų biblioteka, 2014).

The major legal source of the library mandates is the Statutes of the LLB. According to these, there are three major mandates of the LLB: provision of information services to the blind and partially sighted; provision of cultural services to the blind and partially sighted; and publishing of documents in accessible formats to ensure information provision to users.

The first trend in the external environment is that the target audience of the LLB is compact and steadily decreases. In general, data about the community of visually impaired persons in Lithuania are fragmented and incomplete. The major source of data is the Lithuanian Union for Blind and Partially Sighted Persons, which is the largest community of visually impaired people in the country. According to the Union, there were 6,375 registered visually impaired members of the Union in Lithuania in 2015. Statistical data show that since 2013, the number of members has gradually decreased each year by 3% (Lietuvos aklyjų ir silpnaregių sąjunga, 2015). Of course, here it is important to note that the relationship between membership in the Union and the size of the community is not straightforward and the decrease of members may be caused by diverse reasons.

The second trend is that information services to the visually impaired in Lithuanian libraries are fragmented and introduced slowly. The major provider of services is the LLB itself. It serves 3,239 visually impaired users (Januševičienė et al., 2014). The library provides services to users in the central library in Vilnius and through five branches in other Lithuanian cities. The LLB also established 60 service points in other institutions to provide users with information in accessible formats in regions: municipal public libraries (21 points) and organizations for the blind. Information in accessible formats can be also reached by means of the virtual library for the blind, ELVIS. The virtual

² <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/pmm>.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1099165>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1099165>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)