

LIBRARY QUALITY MEASURES

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Abstract

Paper discusses the various indicators of assessing quality of the library services giving emphasis on input processing activities mainly responsible for quality products. Asserting that quality of output primarily based upon quality of input given by the library staff, therefore suggests that more weightage should be given to acquisition, content analysis, professional aptitude, maintenance etc rather than merely measuring the level of users satisfaction. Concludes, endorsing 5th point out of 14 points of Deming to improve constantly and forever the system of production (preparing documents for use) and services applicable to libraries to bring changes in the existing scenario.

Keywords : Total Quality Management, Measuring Services, Quality Measurement, Library Effectiveness, Library Evaluation

1. Introduction

The primary concern of every organization is to achieve its goals and objectives outlined in its mission statement. The success and failures of any organization are monitored and evaluated against the achievement of these goals. Management plays an important role for such achievements which always aim at getting maximum output in the form of profit, more production etc. with efficiency and quality by minimum output [1]. Libraries though service institutions cannot be exception to evaluation and assessment. Service quality has become a vital element of evaluation particularly in non-profit organizations like libraries to add value to it. Management always had been continually focused at more production and improving quality. This approach requires an assessment process that should be highly customer and quality focused. Assessing quality is a multifaceted process that focuses on measurement of input activities and outcome [2].

Quality measures presuppose evaluation and measurement against some established benchmarks and standards for further improvements in the system. Library managers have the continuous duty to see how well their library services are being offered, and identify areas of potential improvement which have more utility value. Evidences are also needed to support the work of refining methods, redefining existing services and developing new ones [3]. What has to be evaluated and measured include input, output (outcomes) and impact or benefit derived. Library operations involve many inputs in the form of manpower, resources, physical facilities, technical processing etc. Output is mainly service part which includes circulation statistics, answering of queries, working hours, services being offered, utilization of resources etc. Every one believes that libraries play an important

role in overall development of an individual and nation as a whole. Since library is considered a powerhouse of information and knowledge, therefore evidently has the potentiality to contribute in almost all the activities of all human beings. This simply remains a perception unless the output is demonstrated and evaluated. The impact of libraries has to be measured qualitatively as well as quantitatively which require performance indicators both at input as well as output levels. Libraries benefit the community and leaves positive impact. This fact neither can be denied nor proved conclusively due to lack of methodology. But this intangible beneficial impact or effect has to be quantified and measured which is not an easy task being insusceptible for measurement. It is known fact that the quality of the end product depends on the quality of the processes involved in converting output into end product at every stage of each operation. In the chain of whole process, a small lapse may affect upon the end product. To test the quality of the product or the output, qualitative as well as quantitative evidences are to be assimilated for benchmarking.

2. Evaluation Indicators

Sawhill and Williamson [4] asserted that every organisation, no matter what its mission or scope needs three kinds of performance metrics: *its success in mobilization its resources, its staff effectiveness on the job, and its progress in fulfilling its mission*. To measure these three areas, qualitative as well as quantitative measures or evidences are required. Davies [5] has suggested following questions to be answered by the manager to understand and improve upon the existing position:

- How have we done?
- How are we doing now?
- How can we do better?
- Where are we going?
- How do we get there?
- How are we making a difference?
- How do we get the resources?
- And some times, if we try very hard with assessment techniques- How has what we do changed your life?

By doing introspection of the various jobs being performed on the basis of these questions, lead any manager to proceed towards improvement discovering quality. There are number of criteria on which the quality of the services could be determined. Library of Michigan formed a committee of 22 librarians and trustees to discuss the quality measures for Michigan's public libraries [6]. They divided library services into six categories, *Human Resources, Governance, Services and Collection Development, Technology Facilities and Equipment, and Public relations*. The committee submitted more than 400 measures divided into six categories, grouping them further under core, elective and

long range planning sub-categories. The members agreed on the following six compelling reasons for statewide quality measures:

- They would give us credibility
- They would give us shared vision for library services
- They would give us an educational tool for library staff and boards, government officials; such as township supervisors and county commissioners, and general public
- They will display achievements with our current funding
- They will provide a base and explanation for increased funding
- They would inspire us to improve services throughout the state.

3. Assessing Service Quality

To make an exact assessment of the quality of library services still remains a difficult area to be investigated. However, level of users' satisfaction with the services is ascertainable by using methodology like LibQual+ instrument and some other methodologies. LibQual method is based upon users' evaluation instead of relying on input resources. This approach does not hold good in Indian context. Though most of the end users are not much aware of the desired levels of services and often remain contented even with the minimum level of services. Therefore, users alone cannot make proper assessment of the quality of the services alone. Nevertheless, user satisfaction may remain one of the important components of quality evaluation which need to be combined with many other indicators about which users are unaware. It is being felt by the authors of this paper more weightage need to be given to the library operations being performed at input level which cannot be gauged by the users alone.

Quality is dependent on team as well as individual performance in any organization to get total quality management. Implementing TQM principles in service-based organizations is often difficult, given the lack of "physical" output by the organization [7]. The overall service satisfaction is built up over time and is the result of numerous transactions of varying quality. Making the difference between the customers' satisfaction refers to a specific transaction, whereas service quality is the collective judgment based upon all of the previous encounters [8]

4. Quality of Products

A number of studies have been conducted on users' satisfaction with the services in India as well as abroad. But research and literature on quality of products, which lay the foundation of services, are lacking. As such, the evaluation of the service products becomes increasingly important to make assessment of the quality. Product quality addresses the employee's direct contribution to producing top quality product and services that fulfill the needs of the customers, both external and internal [9].

A German Project sponsored by German Research Council used integrated quality management system [10]. The indicators used were: *users, internal process, and potential* (innovations). Such more studies in India need to be conducted. Foundation of service quality is the internal process, which includes technical processes, packaging and repackaging of services. If products are standard with expert inputs, there is every possibility that impact on customers would obviously be more. Index indicators are many such as circulation statistics, opening hours, space, building, collection (including recent addition, attendance of users, service attitude of staff etc. But these statistics give the quantity only and quantity alone can't determine quality. Processing more books inaccurately, answering large number of reference queries unsatisfactorily don't contribute in quality services. Barry McIntype [11] has suggested E-Index (Excellence Index) internal process which includes *collection size per head, rate of acquisition, collection discard per capita, number of staff per 1000 population, collection turnover rate, circulation per capita, expenditure per capita, location, facilities and leadership*. Thomas Childers and Nancy Van House in their study on public library effectiveness [12] emphasized on *material quality, staff quality* including their *service attitude and users' evaluation*.

Many management gurus like Deming, J M Juran, Philip, Crosby believe in quality in job process. These all quality gurus and philosophers are totally antithetical to the often-cited management by objectives (MBO). Professionals rarely make their own assessment of their performance rather depend upon their clientele. The product is first tested at the factory itself before it is sent to the market. Similar analogy should be adopted by libraries to ensure the accuracy of their service products. There is no doubt that users' evaluation is one of the important parameter of measuring services. But users are not much aware of the internal processing being done behind the scene.

Deming [13] adopts a new religion of leaping from measuring results to measuring the process by which the results are achieved. According to him quality does not come from inspection but from improvement of process [14] which are lacking in most of the libraries. What is required is evaluation and measurement of both internal and external performances to make assessment of quality of products and their utility. Competency of the staff is basic requirement to improve both internal as well as external processes, provided they have all possible working facilities. A commonly used phrase is also applicable here which states that 'people who know where they are going are more likely to get there. The consensus is now emerging on definition of quality system of continuous improvement that meets customers' needs [15]. Some of the internal (input) activities are discussed as under:

5. Acquisition Policy

The most important quality measurement factor is the acquisition procedures and policies of the libraries. Most of the libraries either don't have written acquisition policy, if some have, implementation

or time-to-time revision is lacking. Size of the collection is important, but more important is to have best possible collection. The importance, which should be given in acquisition procedure, is lacking. Document selection and procurement both need continuous improvement and active participation of users and the library staff. Small collection would be more valuable than the large one if collection is balanced and well presented by standard resources. But developing good collection is difficult task, which involves participation of the users and staff both. However, this partnership has proved unproductive. Evaluation of the collection is hardly done by the library staff. Those who are involved in the process of selection are not accountable for their standard or substandard recommended titles. New books are added in every library, but how many of them are used? Why those books, which have been recommended and purchased, don't find their users? Even those who have made the recommendations were not even found to refer them for years. In such situation, some improvement steps need to be taken to improve the system; otherwise libraries may become resource drain institutions. Publication industry is mushrooming. More and more substandard books are being added to the collection at the cost of standard ones. Responsibility cannot be fixed neither on the library staff nor on faculty members responsible for collection development. The genuine problem with faculty members is that they are not able to devote more time in the process of selection of material. If wise selection has to be done, it is quite time consuming process. Though libraries acquire sources like *Books in-print* and other sources book reviewing journals which are acquired for the purpose but are rarely used by the users and the library staff even. The principle of balanced collection is not being applied. More and more books continue to be added with the similar contents but with different titles

6. Technical Services

Users may sometimes point out regarding the placement of books on the shelves. For example a book on mathematical physics may be useful to the students of mathematics as well physics but it cannot be placed at two locations. Users want the location of such documents preferably under their own subjects. This much intervention is often observed from the users otherwise they are satisfied whatever is the arrangement on the shelves. They are least concerned about the correctness of the technical processing and may rarely point out about the wrong shelving. Evaluation of technical processing (cataloguing, classification, indexing etc.) is rarely done. Classification may not matter much provided cataloguing particularly assigning of subject headings or keywords are correctly given which need professional competence as well as knowledge of various subjects. Accuracy as well as processing time in releasing the books also account for efficiency and quality. Moreover, time and cost involved in processing and acquisition should be cost effective and minimum. In one of the studies [16] of Indian university libraries, it was found that processing time ranges on an average from Rs. 118 -513 by applying observation method. The reason for this variation among libraries can be attributed to handling the job differently being done with different level of competency

and efficiency. If staff time and the corresponding cost is calculated based upon the annual output of technical staff is taken into account, the cost is alarming ranging from Rs. 246 to 2050 per unit. There is every possibility that users may rate a library spending Rs. 2050 on processing higher than a library, which only spends Rs. 246. In spite of so much cost involved in processing, even then accuracy is not ensured. It is believed that electronic environment reduces the time and cost of processing, nevertheless staff output matters significantly.

6.1 Outsourcing of Technical Servicing

All libraries with large collection have gone for outsourcing. Some still are planning to go. Libraries are being constrained to go for retro-conversion by outsourcing, as this large collection of books is not possible by the existing library staff. Who are doing this job? Some firms which engage some library science fresh graduates to carry out the contract. Some of them even don't possess basic degree in LIS and libraries expect. The understanding is that content analysis and other technical processing would be done correctly. Manpower engaged for the purpose is not able to deliver the goods as expected. As a result, some of the library staff is to be engaged in checking and editing work. How many staff can be spared by the library for this job, which are already short of manpower? How many records one professional can check in day? Proper checking can be done only when books are physical available. This process is quite time consuming. In such circumstances, cost involved in editing and checking goes much higher. It is almost the same cost involved in checking as in processing by external agency. It would be an interesting study if accuracy of records processed by outside agency is determined to find out quality as well time and cost effectiveness.

7. Maintenance

The very purpose of automation is completely defeated if readers don't find their material at the right location. In majority of the libraries, maintenance part remains neglected. The quality of the services in such situation tremendously falls down. Wrong shelving and broken sequence cause a lot of inconvenience to the users. Practice of shelf reading, shelf rectification and weeding out are hardly followed. Library signage and display also play important role in improving the convenience of the user in retrieval process.

8. Professional Attitude and Public Relation

Recalling Dr Ranganathan, who always emphasized that reference librarian should become partner in pursuit of searching information. This should apply to all staff members in the library. Most of the professionals still believe in giving directions to go here and there and consult this source or that source. Attitude of personalized service is still lacking. Reference services are not well organized. In fact, culture of reference service could not enter library environment. While evaluating the

reference services, number of queries answered does not matter, what matters is the way queries have been answered and with what competency. This attitude is lacking.

9. Conclusion

Rich collection if remains unutilized have a negative rating value compared to a small collection with extensively uses. Size of collection per user in the community may be high but would have least value if usability were low. Subject representation is also important in academic libraries. Measurement of quality of acquisition, technical processing, arrangement of documents and maintenance are core areas which could be measured professionally not by the users alone. These areas which have a lot of scope for further improvement should be taken seriously by the professionals and go on improving them continuously. If these areas are not improved, quality of services would remain a distant objective and this distance will not be bridged rather it will go on increasing. It is the input process, personal relationship with the users, willingness to extend help and assistance all the time, supplemented by proper maintenance are important components to assess the quality of library services. Merely outcome based assessment of quality particularly in Indian context cannot reveal the exact status Librarians should follow Deming approach to improve constantly and for ever the system of production and service [17].

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