

Will the library and information service please stand up and be counted

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Introduction

In the UK the library and information profession is under threat. The growth in electronic information services aimed at the manager at their desk - the end-user - has led to a belief in some quarters that libraries are no longer so important. Companies are jumping on the bandwagon of the latest hyped idea, knowledge management, and yet in many cases are bypassing the library when developing services. Surely a good librarian or information manager is a knowledge manager and always has been. Yes - the range of internal information being gathered may be wider than in the past, but the skills to analyse information, organise it and tailor results to meet the specific needs of the user have always been core to the information profession. Outside the corporate environment, library and information services are also suffering considerable financial pressures on all fronts.

On the positive side, 'information' is now on the national agenda in the UK, and I suspect in the Czech Republic to some extent, and the library and information service (LIS) profession has a wonderful opportunity to play a key role in both our countries' development. However, in the UK we are not known as a profession which shouts about its achievements; we have taken it for granted that libraries are a good thing. The Internet and intranet technology have the potential to be excellent tools to help us or we can allow ourselves to be usurped.

It is vital that we learn to market ourselves so that we can take our place centre stage in the information society or we risk being sidelined. In order to make a strong case for ourselves, it is essential that we are able to produce evidence of the value that we can provide and the impact that we have on our users and our parent organisations. At the British Library we have been funding research to devise and test methodologies to assess the value and impact of library and information services and I should like to share some of this with you. I will also outline the research that the Library is currently in the process of commissioning which will help the LIS profession to stand up and be counted as we approach the next Millennium.

Threats and opportunities

There are seven pressures in the UK, many government-led, which the LIS profession must grapple with. Firstly there is a move to improve the teaching of IT skills through the training of teachers and librarians. This is desperately needed as a recent report from the Technology Colleges Trust found that 80% of our teachers in the UK did not feel competent to use the Internet properly nor to use computers in teaching. Yet teaching IT, or even ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills is not enough if we don't teach children how to organise and evaluate the information that they find. And these skills are going to be needed by everyone, not just children, as we will be bombarded with electronic information in our homes through the television, in higher education through local and Internet-based information services, and in business through company-wide information services and directly from the Internet. Where better than in the library, be it school, college, public or company, to acquire these skills, and who better to teach them than the LIS professional?

Secondly, the UK Government is committed to the expansion of lifelong-learning to equip us with the changing skills that we need throughout our lives. We are no longer living in a static world; the pace of change is staggering and we have to constantly adapt our knowledge and skills to keep pace. We don't stop learning when we leave school or university and libraries of all kinds have a central role to play in facilitating this learning, be they in the public or private sector. There has been much talk about the 'Information Society' and how it should now be the 'Knowledge Society' but I believe that what we should really be aiming for is the 'Learning Society'. Gaining information and knowledge are just steps along the way to learning. After all, why does a company executive ask for a particular piece of information about another company? - so that s/he can learn something which will help him to make a better decision when doing business or competing with them.

The third Governmental pressure links to the second - the building of partnerships. They say no man is an island, and neither is a library. As a profession we have a long history of cooperation as we realise that no library can hold all the information needed by its users, and indeed the advances in technology make the holding of much print-based information unnecessary. However the UK Government is now encouraging further partnerships at local and regional level for the provision of learning and financing of projects. In the library world we are increasingly developing partnerships, for example between public and academic libraries, between the voluntary sector and public libraries, between corporate and academic libraries. This is partly because new networking technology now enables us to cooperate much more efficiently, but it is also being driven by economic pressures.

Which brings me to my fourth pressure - financial cut-backs. We are constantly hearing the phrase from our New Labour Government 'No new money', which with inflation effectively means less money. What is true in the public sector is also true in much of the private sector - trying to do more with less. So often when times are hard, it is the services which don't stand up and shout how vital they are which are particularly vulnerable and likely to be cut. In both the public library and academic library worlds we have seen cuts in opening hours and bookfunds whilst at the same time an expansion in the use of technology. In the corporate sector there have been many LIS staff redundancies as companies have invested heavily in internet and intranet technology yet a good information department has the capability to save the organisation considerable time and money if only they had the hard evidence to prove this.

Moving on to my fifth pressure - new communications technologies. I love the Internet and computers. My life would be much poorer without them and I even have a PC at home which I use for emailing friends every day. BUT, the technology must be the slave and the user the master, not the other way around as often seems to be the case these days. Tim Owen referred to two recent reports from Reuters on information overload *Dying for information* and *Glued to the screen*. In *Glued to the screen* (1) I was intrigued that the only question for which the highest response rate was from the UK (54%), as opposed to any of the other countries surveyed, was Question 9: How often do your colleagues find it necessary to take material home with them or work longer hours to keep abreast of the quantity of information accumulated? We are obviously a very conscientious nation! Question 16 received an extremely encouraging 86% positive response rate: Do you believe that schools and colleges should be doing more to prepare today's children to deal with the vast quantities of information in an effective, efficient manner? This takes us back to the first of my pressures.

Question 11 in *Glued to the screen* asked which strategies companies should adopt to help people deal more effectively with large quantities of information:

- i. invest more in training courses which are designed specifically to help people in the gathering, management and use of information (83% Yes)
- ii. put in place rules which help to prevent situations of information overload occurring in the first place (73% Yes)
- iii. the company should treat information as a “boardroom issue”, and thereby elevate it in terms of importance (57% Yes).

The option they didn't suggest was : Do you think your company should invest more in its information department, or start one if it doesn't already have one, so that information professionals can properly organise and analyse the information needed by managers, thus saving them time and much stress, and thereby saving the company time and money. Indeed, I didn't find a mention of libraries, information staff or information professionals throughout the report. A cynic might suggest this was because Reuters wanted to encourage take-up of their own electronic information services as an answer to information overload. Nevertheless for an information professional such as myself, it was a glaring omission. I don't so much blame Reuters for this as members of my profession who have been too quiet about what we have to offer. We have to focus on our customer needs just as much as commercial electronic information providers.

And so to my penultimate pressure: concentrating on serving our customers, meeting their needs rather than concentrating on our internal processes. The last Conservative Government in the UK initiated the Citizen's Charter Unit to award Charter Marks to those public bodies that developed a code of service for their users. These codes set certain standards against which performance could be measured, for example the time taken to answer the phone, to reply to a letter or to obtain a book on inter-library loan. All these are outputs, which are easily measured, not outcomes - such as the value of a piece of information or the benefit gained from reading a particular book - which are not nearly so easily measured.

The new Labour Government is carrying on the previous administration's work in redesigning how it interacts with the citizen and company for the provision of public information, through the Better Government initiative. A White Paper is expected to be published in June which will address how information management will be used to restructure government information around the life events of its citizens e.g. birth, setting up a business, emigrating, which is a radical departure from the current rigid departmental structure which means little to the ordinary member of the public. Of course private companies have long realised the necessity of meeting their customer needs as a top priority but it is new to the public sector. Even the British Library is not immune: we are currently looking to see how we can change our culture to be more customer-focused.

Which takes me back to where I started and my final pressure: the bandwagon of knowledge management. Clive Holtham (2) of the City Business School may be right in that it is a passing fad, however it is one which presents the LIS world with an exciting opportunity to stand centre stage or get written out of the script. Anne Fisher, of the UK Library and

Information Commission, gives a useful summation of knowledge management in a recent article in the *Library Association Record* (3):

“ Knowledge management involves the identification and analysis of available and required knowledge, and the subsequent planning and control of actions to develop knowledge assets so as to fulfil organisational objectives... In essence, the effective management of knowledge assets forms the cornerstone of the learning organisation.”

She suggests that this is an area where library and information professionals have not taken the lead because knowledge management has been seen as predominantly concerned with internal knowledge, whereas the library is concerned with external information.

“It is likely that , as intranet technology develops, internal and external knowledge analysis and provision will be integrated. But librarians and information service professional may still be hampered by the perception that their role is to acquire information, not to analyse and contextualise it. It is at the point when the information is sifted and has context and meaning applied to it that it takes on the characteristics of knowledge. Information management will still be perceived as lower in the hierarchy of value within an organisation.”

In the same issue, Chrissie Stewart (4) offers practical advice on how to play a full part in developing your company’s knowledge management strategy:

“If your organisation already has a Knowledge Management strategy, make sure you get a copy and send comments to the appropriate senior manager, pointing out the areas where you are already contributing to Knowledge Management and proposing additional support. Cultivate your IT department and ensure that you are involved in any Intranet/Internet activities: again make sure they are aware of your expertise and propose partnership with them, not competition. If your organisation does not already have a Knowledge Management strategy, write one for them.”

So as we have seen, the library and information profession is subject to a lot of different pressures, but they provide positive opportunities as well as threats and it is an exciting time to be working in this area. How do we ensure that we are listened to, that we can prove our worth to the organisation and its users, be it public or private, and that we swim with the opportunities rather than sink with the threats?

Quantitative *versus* qualitative data

In the UK we are more and more being pushed into producing performance measures to provide targets for improving performance, whether it be the time taken to answer the phone or to reply to letters, and in the case of libraries these include such measures as the bookstock, number of loans, numbers of visits etc. Indeed, the British Library has for some years been funding the Library and Information Statistics Unit at Loughborough University which regularly publishes a range of statistics covering the various library sectors and the book market. Its main annual publication is the *LISU Annual Library Statistics - featuring trend analysis of UK public and academic libraries* (5) but increasingly popular is *The L.I.S.T.* (6) - a statistical sampler of Library and Information Statistical Tables which goes in your pocket and is distributed widely free of charge. [It is hoped to have copies available for

conference delegates.] At the moment LISU are undertaking a statistical survey of special libraries in 10 sectors, including 5 industry sectors, the voluntary sector and government departments which should be available later in the summer. All this data is very necessary and is particularly useful in comparing how your organisation stands against the national norm, however it only paints part of the picture. It shows the measurable outputs - the programme of service - but not the outcomes. Outcomes can be described as the actual experiences of the users, the value of the service/information to them, the benefits gained and perhaps the learning that took place, and the impact on their behaviour, in other words qualitative rather than quantitative. Outputs are fairly easily quantifiable and, whilst any statistics are open to interpretation, they represent 'hard', objective evidence. On the other hand, anecdotal, qualitative evidence is more a matter of opinion and judgement, it is subjective, however as long as it is rigorously collected in a systematic manner, there is no reason why it should not be equally valid.

Value and impact studies

Various impact studies have been undertaken in the past and various methodologies developed. I would particularly stress the work of Griffiths and King (7) which has acted as a backbone for many other studies. Over many years they have developed a framework for measures which include:

Inputs (Resources), including amount of resources and costs

Outputs (Products/Services): amount of output and attributes such as quality, timeliness, availability, and accessibility

Usage: amount of use and non use as well as factors affecting use/non-use

Outcomes for the community/organisation (Consequences of use and non-use): time saved, improved productivity, improved quality of work, achieving organisational/community goals and value derived

Nation/Society (Environmental characteristics): target population, user/non-user population, user/non-user information needs

Another technique is that of Priority and Performance Evaluation (PAPE) which has been developed in Australia by Broadbent (8). Criteria are developed for the library/information unit which are desirable, for example access to databases, competence of staff, understanding of user needs, efficiency of the interloans service. Top managers, information users and the information managers - the three stakeholder groups - are each asked to rate these factors in priority and also to assess the performance under each heading. By comparing results, it is possible to identify the areas that need special attention, for example those that are high priority and ranked low on performance and *vice versa*.

It would take the entire conference to describe in detail all the various research that has been done on impact studies but for those with a particular interest in this area I would recommend *The value and impact of information* edited by Mary Feeney and Maureen Grieves (1994) (9), which includes the text of various British Library policy briefings on the subject, such as the work of Griffiths and King and Broadbent. I shall concentrate on two areas, one relating

to the value of specific information and one to the value of a service, which have been recently funded by the British Library.

Information for decision-making

Dr Joanne Marshall (10) carried out three studies in the early 1990s to assess the impact of particular pieces of information on a decision taken. The methodology was based on a critical incident follow-up, i.e. a recent occasion on which information was sought to enable a decision to be taken.. Two were in the health sector (Rochester, New York and Chicago) and one in the financial sector (Toronto). The methodology that she developed has now been tried out in the UK through 5 studies funded by the British Library, and for which Dr Marshall was a consultant. The five sectors were: banking, government departments, insurance, physiotherapy and the pharmaceutical industry. The results have been written up in *Library Management* (11) issue 2 for 1998 and the second half of the results will shortly be available in issue 3. In her summary, Maureen Grieves states that:

“In all cases a very high value was placed on the information sought and provided with 96% of the respondents in the pharmaceuticals and government department studies saying that it was of value and the lowest figure of 81% being for physiotherapists. That the information led to better informed decision making was confirmed by 97% of respondents in government departments, 96% in pharmaceuticals and 94% in banking, but only 74% in physiotherapy. The figures from the North American studies are remarkably similar for both of these questions.”

The British research was carried out on similar lines to the American studies and produced similar results, although a difference was that the UK studies did not concentrate exclusively on the library or information unit as the source of information. Indeed, some of the organisations used in the banking sector survey did not have their own library or equivalent and the physiotherapists had little access to formal information services. All respondents to the questionnaires were experienced managers or professionals who either took decisions, or contributed to decision-making, on a regular basis.

The comparative results between the studies are interesting in their own right, and Maureen Grieves has summarised them in a series of tables (*see Tables 1-3*). However for the purposes of this paper, it is the questions that were asked which it may be most helpful to stress.

The first section looked at general attitudes:

- i. The information was of value and increased confidence in the decision.
- ii. The information led to better informed decision-making.
- iii. The decision-making process was handled differently.
- iv. The information provided new knowledge

	Banking	Pharmaceutical Industry	Insurance	Government Departments	Physiotherapy	General Practice	NHS Library & Information Services	Financial Sector in Toronto	Rochester Study	Chicago Study
Information of Value & Increased Confidence in Decision	93.20%	96.00%	82.00%	96.00%	81.00%	83.30%		80.80%	96.90%	98.60%
Information Led to Better Informed Decision Making	94.00%	96.00%	91.00%	97.00%	74.00%	89.50%		90.60%	96.50%	98.60%
Handled the Decision Making Process Differently	78.00%	58.00%	46.00%	61.00%	74.00%	70.00%	79.00%	93.10%	84.00%	
Information Provided New Knowledge	94.20%	98.00%	89.00%	96.00%	87.00%	63.20%	73.00%	93.60%	93.10%	95.90%
Information Substantiated Prior Knowledge	83.50%	61.00%	82.00%	72.00%	66.00%	73.70%	66.00%	74.90%	79.50%	82.90%
Information Refreshed Memory of Detail or facts	80.50%	67.00%	59.00%	76.00%	75.00%	68.40%	57.00%	78.30%	94.50%	94.40%
Information Aded a New Dimension	69.80%	35.00%	37.00%	56.00%				46.40%		
Saved Time	79.00%	81.00%	71.00%	68.00%	75.00%	42.10%		67.05%	84.70%	
Contact with Information Centre Weekly or Monthly	86.20%		45.60%	41.00%	35.00%				70.00%	86.60%

Table 1 General Summary of Attitudes to the Information Provided

- v. The information substantiated prior knowledge.
- vi. The information refreshed the memory of detail or facts.
- vii. The information added a new dimension.
- viii. The information saved time.

These are all questions which are independent of the type of organisation and could be adapted to suit any circumstances - including your own. Other categories of questions addressed the positive effects of obtaining the information and how it helped to avoid negative effects:

	Banking	Pharmaceutical Industry	Insurance	Government Departments	Financial Sector in Toronto
Improve image of the institution	68.20%	41.00%	49.00%	50.00%	57.90%
Improve procedure or policy	50.90%	36.00%	37.00%	70.00%	36.80%
Improve relations with client	67.40%	25.00%	66.00%	47.00%	62.20%
Approve funding	56.00%	30.00%	20.00%	50.00%	57.50%
Handle unexpected emergency	37.30%	28.00%	25.00%	36.00%	24.70%
Proceed to next step	80.90%	86.00%	73.00%	83.00%	72.90%
Decide on a course of action	88.00%	96.00%	80.00%	91.00%	82.90%
Exploit a new opportunity	68.70%	73.00%	70.00%	51.00%	63.20%

Table 2 Extent to which the information positively affected activities

	Banking (with Libraries)	Banking (without Libraries)	Pharmaceutical Industry	Insurance	Government Departments	Financial Sector in Toronto
Avoid Wasting Human Resources	63.00%	67.30%	79.00%	68.00%	71.00%	66.20%
Avoid Wasting Organisational Resources	43.90%	36.00%	65.00%	43.00%	50.00%	38.50%
Avoid Loss of Time	71.70%	71.90%	81.00%	71.00%	68.00%	67.90%
Avoid Loss of Funds	42.50%	67.30%	36.00%	25.00%	37.00%	47.80%
Avoid Loss of Client	39.90%	50.10%	17.00%	40.00%	19.00%	40.10%
Avoid Conflict Within Organisation	47.10%	51.60%	41.00%	39.00%	60.00%	37.80%
Avoid Conflict With another Organisation or Legal problems	25.20%	21.90%	47.00%	44.00%	57.00%	20.40%
Avoid Poor Decision	73.10%	92.80%	79.00%	83.00%	89.00%	74.60%

Table 3 Extent to which information helped to avoid negative effects.

These figures provide considerable evidence of the value of the information to the organisation and could provide a useful tool in boosting the case of the library or information service.

In Joanne Marshall’s original Rochester study (12) she addressed changes in aspects of patient care as a result of information obtained and the results are quite startling:

- Change in advice to patients (72%)
- Choice of tests (51%)
- Choice of drugs (45%)
- Diagnosis (29%)
- Reduced length of stay in hospital (19%)

She also asked about the avoidance of negative events. 49% of respondents said that it cut out the need for additional tests and procedures, 26% thought it had reduced the need for additional outpatient visits, 21% said it had helped to eliminate the need for surgery and 12% said it helped with the decision to not admit their patient to hospital. But perhaps the most surprising figure is that 19% of respondents thought that the information obtained contributed to their ability to avoid patient mortality. You can’t get a more important benefit from information than that! Marshall’s work in the health sector has been followed up in the UK with 2 studies by Christine Urquhart and John Hepworth and colleagues in 1995 (13) and 1997 (14) to assess the value of information to clinical decision-making and to nursing continuing education which those of you working in the health sector may wish to consult.

It is worth mentioning here a small study undertaken by Nicola Bald and Christine Reid (15) to compare results when a manager carries out their own search for information (the do-it-yourself or DIY approach) as compared to an information professional. This was sparked off by the increasing use of the Internet directly by managers. Three companies were asked to supply three queries each, to be answered by an information professional and an ordinary member of the company who searches for information. The DIY approach came out about the same when judging the information for relevance, although the results for the information professional may have been better if the searches had been done by a member of the company as they would have had a greater awareness of the specific needs of employees than the independent service used. However the significant difference was the time taken to obtain the information:

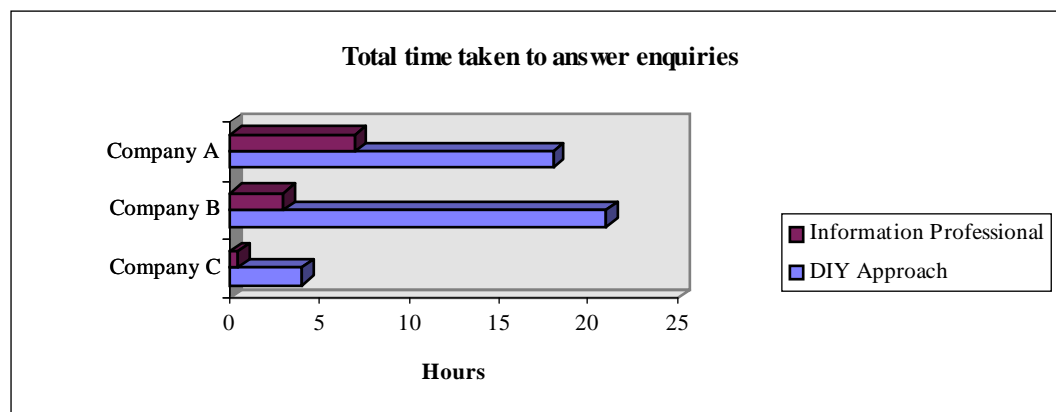


Table 4 Total Time Taken to Answer Enquiries

These results would be important for a company in any country, but for somewhere that has such high telecommunications costs as the Czech Republic, the consequences of employees spending so long online is more dramatic.

Social impact of public libraries

Moving on to an assessment of the impact of services rather than specific information, I shall briefly take you through the framework for undertaking a social audit of public libraries, developed with British Library funding by Bob Usherwood and Rebecca Linley at Sheffield University(16). Whilst relating to social impacts, the framework could be adapted to other sorts of impact and other sorts of library. This study is one of a number which the British Library has recently funded under the Social Impact of Libraries programme which has found that public libraries have roles and impacts which are far wider than has been traditionally perceived and these have been neatly summed up by François Matarasso (Figure 1) in *Welcoming trespassers: an introduction to the social impact of public libraries* (17), a document aimed at policy- and decision-makers which brings together all the research.

As you can see from this extensive list, many of the impacts relate to the business community, either directly or indirectly by assisting job-seekers and improving the literacy and IT skills of the workforce.

The social audit carried out by Sheffield University compared the perceptions of library service held by local politicians, library staff and focus groups of users and non-users. The information for decision-making studies used questionnaires as the basic methodology for the research whereas the social audit process relies on face-to-face contact through individual interviews or focus groups. The focus group as a methodology, that is bringing together a representative sample of individuals for a group discussion to elicit their views on a topic, has gained enormous popularity in the UK. It has long been used in marketing, the Government is using it to gauge public opinion and even our own Queen is getting in on the act.

The “starting point for any social audit process is to identify and clarify the values against which the activities of the business or other type of organisation are to be judged.” (Zadek and Evans, 18). In this project the stated social objectives of the two local authorities - one rural and one urban - was to identify how far these objectives are being achieved in the eyes of the key stakeholders. The term ‘stakeholder’ is another buzzword that seems to have taken off in the UK in the last 2 years and can be taken to mean those who affect or are affected by an organisation. In this case the stakeholders were local councillors and library staff together with users and non-users of the libraries. Interview guides were drawn up for the individual interviews with politicians and library staff and a schedule of questions for facilitating the focus groups of users and non-users. Questions covered such issues as:

Established functions

- Culture
- Education
- Reading and literacy
- Leisure
- Information

- Public libraries are central to developing people's reading literacy at all ages.
- Support education services through school libraries and homework clubs.
- Provide a key support for self-directed education and skill development.
- Are a vital source of community-based IT training.
- Public libraries can contribute to people's skills, confidence and employability.
- Support job-seekers by offering information and research facilities.
- Work with employment services to offer in-depth support.
- Provide important support to small businesses and self-employed people.
- Public libraries support literacy from pre-school to after 16.
- Are valuable sources of information, contact and support for young families.
- Provide a wide range of out of school activities for young people.
- Offer meeting places and informal education sources for teenagers.
- Public libraries are a major source of information about benefits and services.
- Remain financially accessible to most people.
- Are heavily used by people on low incomes, who often have no alternatives.
- Can target support and services effectively to meet the needs of poor people.
- Public libraries provide vital health information services to thousands of people.
- They support the health service in meeting their information responsibilities.
- They contribute to people's well-being through leisure opportunities.
- They are an important form of informal social services, especially for older people.
- Public libraries are often important contributors to council development strategies.
- They are increasingly focusing their work on community development.
- They sustain a wide and rich range of local partnership networks.
- They are involved in many successful bids for developmental resources.
- Public libraries provide essential services to thousands of isolated people.
- Library services to ethnic minority communities are potentially important, but often remain under-developed in practice.
- Black and Asian groups have established their own libraries as mechanisms of community empowerment and development.
- Libraries extend across the whole of society, connecting the margins to the rest.
- Public libraries facilitate people's involvement in local consultation and democracy.
- They can develop and support community organisations.
- They are important, if under-developed, mechanisms for local empowerment.

Figure 1 The social impact of public libraries

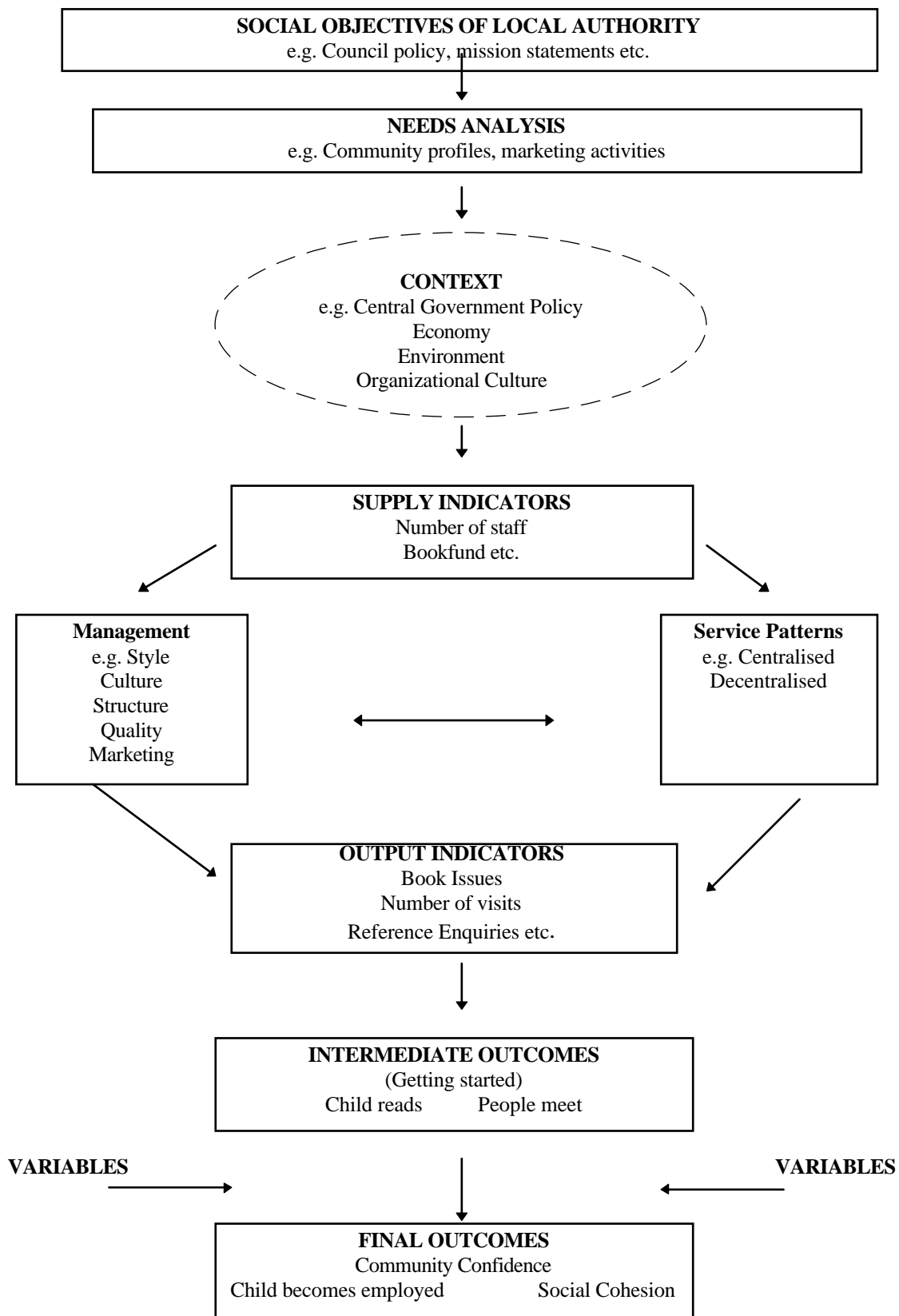


Figure 2: Framework for an informed value judgement

Social and caring roles

- Personal development
- Social cohesion
- Community empowerment
- Local image and identity
- Health and well-being

Economic impact

- Business information
- Job-seeking and training opportunities
- Libraries and economic vitality
- Tourism
- Cooperation with other local authority departments
- Other economic impacts

Equity

- Equity as administrative justice
- Equity of access
- Equity between groups and communities

Management and other issues affecting impact

- Resources
- Awareness and marketing
- Library rule and culture
- Structure
- The relationship with local politicians
- Crime as a barrier
- Location

The resultant rich collection of findings ‘tell a tale’, or in fact many tales, of the value that the libraries had for the communities in which they were situated. Mostly they were anecdotal but were none the less valid because of the stringent manner in which they were obtained, and both local authorities involved have found them extremely useful in planning their future services. This information, together with the quantitative data about the library’s outputs, can assist the library service to come to an informed value judgement about its service provision. In the course of the work, Usherwood and Linley developed a framework for this informed value judgement which is reproduced as Figure 2.

Value and Impact Call for Proposals

With all the pressures facing library and information services, how can we develop research which builds on that already undertaken to help the LIS world meet the challenges of the 21st century? At the British Library Research and Innovation Centre we have recognised that value and impact is very high on the agenda for libraries in the UK and we have spent the last nine months identifying areas for future research through a wide consultation with the profession. As a result we have just issued a Call for Proposals and researchers were asked to return a brief application form by 18th May. It is hoped that it will be possible to provide a short analysis of the initial responses at the conference.

There are 14 research topics grouped in three main themes:

Educational, cultural and social value and impact of libraries and information services

- i. Impact of library and information service support for education from primary through to higher education
- ii. Impact of libraries on life-long and independent learning
- iii. Role of libraries in overcoming social exclusion
- iv. Impact of library and information services in implementing social policy
- v. Value of library and information services in providing access to public information
- vi. Role of libraries in dealing with the problems of information overload
- vii. Role libraries and information services play in providing access to information, especially electronic information, and in creating electronic information
- viii. Role of libraries in creating an awareness of, and demand for, information
- ix. Impact of library and information services on professional practice

Economics of information provision

- x. Cost-benefit analysis of library and information services
- xi. Role of libraries as intermediaries
- xii. What is a fair price for information?

Economic impacts of library and information services

- xiii. Impact of library and information services on economic development of the locality/region
- viv. Importance of information provision to business

As you will see ,many of these topics are applicable in the commercial setting. Under x. we are particularly hoping for research which applies the work of Griffiths and King and the PAPE methodology in the UK and we are also keen for research into information auditing and information as an asset.

Information auditing uses techniques developed by accountants and according to Liz Orna (19), it should provide answers to the following:

- i. What information does the company hold, where is it held and are there alternative sources?

- ii. How is it made available to those that need it?
- iii. To what use is the information put?
- iv. Who manages the information?
- v. What technology is used in the process?
- vi. What is the cost of all this information to the company and what is its value?

Information as an asset has been taken forward in the boardroom in the UK by the Hawley Committee, chaired by Robert Hawley. In an address to the Coalition for Public Information conference in March last year Dr Hawley stated that:

“Information is a unique intangible asset for two reasons. First, information is used to describe everything in an organisation - including intangible assets. It is, therefore, unique, in that no aspect of management can exist without information. Second, technology advance in computing and telecommunications is having a dramatic effect on the input, storage, processing and presentation of information. The effects of technology are to greatly increase the potential value and importance of information, in many instances, but also to expose information to risks and threats which previously did not exist. The effect of the information society ... makes this country especially dependent on a proper understanding of the value of information, the potential for wealth creation, for employment, and the other beneficial as well as the potentially adverse effects on society as a whole.”(20)

Future scenarios

So where does that leave us for the future? I pose two possible future scenarios.

Scenario 1 :

- i. We do not invest properly in library and information services.
- ii. We do not invest properly in the training of the whole community in information handling skills.
- iii. As a result of these, we end up with an over-stressed, unproductive workforce and economic failure for the country.
- iv. As more and more services are only available electronically we end up with information haves, have nots and cannots - a ‘knowledge underclass’ in the words of John Birt, Director General of the BBC, at a recent EC seminar on multi-media, resulting from information on cable TV costing more than the low- or unpaid user can afford.
- v. Local communities feel disempowered and there is a down-grading of democracy.

or

Scenario 2

- i. We invest properly in library and information services.
- ii. We start training in information handling skills in the primary school and continue this throughout life.
- iii. We have a productive and efficient workforce leading to an economically thriving community.
- iv. Good public information services are provided free at the point of use in a variety of formats and accessible in different places so that everyone has access to the information that they need.
- v. Local communities feel empowered and play a full part in local democracy.

I have painted a very black and white picture here and the truth will lie somewhere in between, but if we truly shout about our value as a profession we stand a much better chance of seeing a positive future for our children and our countries.

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