World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Performance indicators for national libraries in Asia/Oceania: preliminary proposals based on a survey of Asia/Oceania libraries

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ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses the need for national libraries to evaluate their performance and measure their effectiveness. Although performance indicators for academic and public libraries are well developed and used, little has been done for national libraries. At the recommendation of the IFLA Standing Committee for National Libraries a survey on the use of performance indicators is being undertaken for national libraries in Asia/Oceania. The findings of the survey will provide a useful contribution towards the development of performance indicators for the national library and add to the corpus of published literature on national libraries in the Asia/Oceania region. . The questionnaire used in the study of performance indicators used by European national libraries has been adapted for this study. The availability of comparative data in Europe and Asia/Oceania will provide a basis for comparative study of the management of national libraries in these two regions. It is hoped that the data from the survey will enable a generic set of performance indicators to be developed, which can be used as a tool for evaluating the performance of National Libraries in Asia/Oceania and Europe.

INTRODUCTION

Performance measurement has been the method of choice in tracking quality achievements of an institution. On the international library scene, two important documents have been published as guides to evaluation of performance in libraries. The first is **ISO 11620: International Standard on Library Performance Indicators**, which was published in 1998. In this standard a series of performance indicators has been identified to measure all aspects of library performance with the exception of library promotion, human resource and user education. The other important document published recently is **International guidelines for performance in academic libraries**, which was developed by the IFLA University Libraries and Other General Research Libraries Section (Poll, 1996). Both these documents emphasize the importance of library performance measurement and the need for data collection by libraries. Although it is pertinent to make historical comparison within a particular library, this can only occur if there is no change in the library's policies. Differences between institutions are not limited to the different sizes of the institutions themselves but are also due to the differences in local policies (number of book loans, length of book loan, different types of membership), which automatically invalidate these distinctions.

Performance indicators are simply management tools designed to assist library managers in determining how well their service is performing. They provide evidence on which to base judgements, since performance data needs to be interpreted before such assessments can be made. In considering performance indicators we are dealing with absolutes. Performance indicators contribute to the process of evaluation, but the latter is a broader term for the assessment. As indicated above, there are various approaches to the assessment.

Jacob Harnesk in *The ISO Standard on Library Performance Indicators* summarises performance indicators as follows:
> *Numerical or verbal expression derived from library statistics and other data used to characterise the performance of a library including simple counts and ratios.*

It would be interesting to compare performance indicators used by national libraries in different countries. This sort of comparison is an essential dimension of evaluation, whether we are comparing management policies or service policies. The first hurdle is to overcome the obstacles posed by the heterogeneous policies adopted by national libraries. That is why the process allows for a sort of partnership in the form of a gentlemen's agreement with other libraries. A certain number of those libraries that have adopted similar orientation may agree to make the same choice of indicators intended to evaluate the services of the same kind. (1)

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF NATIONAL LIBRARIES

Maurice Line (1983), in one of the early attempts to consider performance measurement at the national library level, acknowledged the difficulties in such an exercise in respect of a national library's core functions. In addition to the need for national libraries to maintain a fine balance in terms of determining priorities and allocation of functions, a major problem is the phenomenal increase in the volume of publications in a variety of formats, and the difficulty of knowing what has been published. It would be difficult for a national library to measure its success in collecting

and preserving the nation's literary heritage, as the total population against which it can be measured is unknown. Line recommended that: -

> "…some consensus as to performance criteria and measure should do much to further the national library development that is of such importance in many countries for the whole system."

<div align="right">(Line, 1983:41)</div>

Some of the problems associated with the evaluation of national library performance lie in their variegated and wide-ranging roles and functions, which are usually prescribed as statutory provisions. These consequently result in vague and broad objectives, which are difficult to measure in terms of effectiveness. For example, Aje (1997), recognising that objectives are developed from functions, formulated a statement of objectives which epitomises the results expected to be achieved through national libraries, namely:

> *" …to ensure access to the total fund of recorded human knowledge in the world for the benefit of the nation's citizens."*

The difficulty of measuring an objective such as the above becomes obvious when attempting to quantify the sum total of the world's recorded knowledge. It also raises the question of levels of access, what would be beneficial to the nation's citizens, and who should determine these and from whose perspective would effectiveness be viewed?

The emergence of guidelines for implementation of performance measures in libraries is indicative of the development and its implementation. *'Keys to success : performance indicators for public libraries'* (King, 1990*), was* one of the earlier guides for performance measurement in public libraries. The Joint Funding Council's *'The Effective Academic Library'* (1995) demonstrates significant achievement in the development of indicators for evaluating performance in public and academic libraries. IFLA has also produced its international guidelines for measuring performance in academic libraries with a caveat on its applicability in respect of financial performance (Poll, 1996).

There are a variety of possible referents against which performance data can be compared in order to assess effectiveness. National libraries usually measure themselves against stated organisational goals, but it is often difficult because of multiple, contradictory and ambiguous or changing goals. A common practice in the National Library of Malaysia and many other national libraries is for each to effect a comparison with itself based upon the previous year's performance to assess improvement.

There are differing ideas about what evaluation is and why it should be done. Blagden (1990: 4-23) provides a useful summary. The management approach sees monitoring performance as an integral part of good management, which is undertaken for two reasons:
1) To convince the funders and the clients that the service is delivering the benefits that were expected when the investment were made.
2) As an internal control mechanism to ensure that the resources are used efficiently and effectively.

In response to the question on whether an organisation's performance can be meaningfully compared with another organisation's performance, generally the value of comparative evaluation is recognised, but problems are anticipated in finding similar organisations for comparison. All organisations are different and this entails problems in selecting indicators that are common to both organisations. Moreover, extreme caution needs to be exercised in the use of such comparative data.

NEED FOR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR NATIONAL LIBRARIES
Although established as national cultural institutions, national libraries cannot take for granted their permanence or continued existence, as economic pressures and considerations inevitably lead governments to take a long, hard look at institutions which appear to be expensive cultural symbols of national prestige, without demonstrably contributing their fair share to the national economic good. Like other public service institutions or those financed from public funds, national libraries have come under increasing pressure to demonstrate results and outcomes of their activities and to justify the use of resources allocated to them. Administrative and budget reforms in the public sector have affected the national libraries, particularly as they come directly under the purview of the central government, and thus are subject to closer scrutiny and monitoring through various budgetary and audit procedures. Although a national library, with a few exceptions, is unique in the functions that it performs, it nevertheless has to compete for public funds with other central government departments. The national library's ability to demonstrate the impact its services have will to a large extent influence the priority it will be given in the allocation of central resources.

The uniqueness of many of the functions that it performs means that the degree of dependence on the effectiveness of its performance in these functions is greater, as there is no recourse to other agencies if a national library does not deliver, or does not deliver in time or to the standards required. In these functions, it has to be able to ensure its effectiveness; in essence, to guarantee it.

An effective national library is a national imperative in view of its wide-ranging functions and the vital role that it needs to play in the development of the nation's library and information services. A systematic assessment of its organisational effectiveness is essential in ensuring that it performs to expectations. It can be argued that an effective national library to a large extent mirrors the effectiveness of the nation's library and information services.

The uniqueness of national libraries and the variety of their functions necessitates an in-depth study of individual organisations rather than a broad and inevitably more superficial treatment of a range of national libraries. With very few exceptions, there is usually only one national library in each country performing many functions, which are unique in their respective countries. However, although national libraries perform many similar functions, they differ greatly in their origin, purpose, functions and priorities.

BACKGROUND OF THE SURVEY
At the Conference of Directors of National Libraries held in Scotland on 21st August 2002, a proposal by the Standing Committee on National Libraries that a workshop on benchmarking and performance evaluation would be held during the IFLA Conference 2003 in Berlin was agreed to. Data for this workshop would be collected through a survey to be conducted by the

National Library of Malaysia and National Library of Slovenia. The National Library of Slovenia is given the task of surveying national libraries in Europe while the National Library of Malaysia is to conduct a survey of national libraries in Asia/Oceania region.

The objectives of the survey are:
(1) To construct the profile of Asia/Oceania national libraries pertaining to performance evaluation.
(2) To use findings of the survey as a basis for the establishment of a generic set of performance indicators for national libraries in Asia/Oceania.

METHODOLOGY
The methodology used in conducting the survey is a structured questionnaire with pre-coded answers and a few open-ended questions requiring single-word and short responses. The questionnaire was distributed by mail, fax and e-mail on 8th April 2003. The questionnaire used was adapted from the questionnaire used in the survey of performance indicators in European national libraries. This will allow for comparability of data and findings between European national libraries and those in Asia/Oceania. Because of the time constraint, respondents were required to return the duly completed questionnaires within 3 weeks (end of April 2003).

COVERAGE
Geographically, the survey covers 30 national libraries of countries in the Asia/Oceania region. The majority of national libraries covered are members of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) with the exception of the National Library of Taiwan, National Library of Bangladesh, National Library of Thailand, National Library of Cambodia, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Brunei Darussalam and the National Library of Fiji.

This group comprises a rich mixture of diverse ethnic groups ranging from Iran in the Middle East, through East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian groups to Fiji in the Oceania region. With the different geographical regions and different levels of economic status, (developed, developing and underdeveloped) plus a variety of cultural backgrounds, the study of this region would be very interesting and appropriate.

The national libraries of Asia/Oceania were established as early as 1902 in the case of National Library of Australia. Most of the other national libraries were established within the second half and later part of the 20th century. Some of the national libraries carry out dual functions as a national and public library, as in the case of Singapore; as a Parliamentary library which acts as a National Library, as in the case of Japan; and under the direct control of the President in the case of the National Library of Indonesia.

The breakdown of the countries is as follows:
Middle East
1. Iran
2. Israel
3. Kuwait
4. Saudi Arabia
5. Syria
6. United Arab Emirates

South East Asia
1. Indonesia
2. Laos
3. Malaysia
4. Myanmar
5. Philippines
6. Singapore
7. Vietnam
8. Thailand
9. Cambodia
10. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Library, Brunei Darussalam

East Asia
1. China
2. Japan
3. Korea
4. Taiwan

South Asia
1. India
2. Pakistan
3. Sri Lanka
4. Kazakhstan
5. Bangladesh

Oceania
1. Australia
2. New Zealand
3. Papua New Guinea
4. Niue
5. Fiji

SELECTION OF INDICATORS
The indicators were adopted from *ISO 11620:International Standards for Library Performance Indicators*, 1998. It is important in putting the model into action to look at the various elements:
i.   Overall purpose/mission
ii.   Aims/objectives – What are you trying to achieve?
iii.   Outcome/impact/achievement indicators – How would you know if you are making a difference?
iv.   Service infrastructure – Output/service performance indicators
v.   Processes that contribute to realising the aims/objectives – Includes activities and capacity building
vi.   Review of indicators – Process/performance indicators
vii.   Baseline data – Collected to ascertain where the service is now
viii.   Targets – Grounded in baseline data
ix.   Implementation and monitoring

It is difficult to measure intangible benefits (such as enriching peoples lives, personal development, community empowerment). It should be possible, however, to gather views systematically to assess whether aspects of the service are making a difference and how these differences are effected.

Output (sometimes called service) performance indicators should suggest themselves from the services that contribute to delivering the aims. In general, these indicators are likely to be less useful in telling what you need to know about how well the service is doing than are either impact or process indicators.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN
The instrument questionnaire is adopted from a similar survey undertaken by the Slovenian National Library for European national libraries. It consists of 3 main parts i.e.
Part 1 :   Profile of Library
Part 2 :   Strategic Planning
Part 3 :   Library Function

Part 1 : Profile of Library: the official name of the Library and the name of Director or Chief Executive is required.

In **Part 2 : Strategic Planning,** nine (9) questions related to strategic planning are addressed. This is to relate performance indicators to strategic planning as a management tool for the national library.

In **Part 3 : Library Function**, 27 questions of the following are asked:-
1. Functions of the National Library.
2. Ranking based on prioritising the main functions.
3. Financial resources available for library operations.
4. Whether the National Library is dependent on performance evaluations for its finance.
5. Type of statistical data collected regularly.
6. The availability of on-line library statistics.
7. International standard on library statistics.
    - Whether international standard library statistics ISO 2789:1991 are adapted as national standard.
    - Whether ISO 2789:1991 is used in the collection and interpretation of data on library performance.
8. International standard on performance indicators.
    - Whether *International Standard on Library Performance Indicators* ISO 11620:1998 is adopted as a national standard.
    - Whether ISO 11620:1998 used in evaluating library performance.
    - Whether ISO 11620:1998 is applicable to national libraries and to rank in terms of importance each indicators specified (27 indicators).
    - To indicate the most typical performance measurement of the National Library and to   rank each measurement (14 performance measurement).
9. To enquire whether the library has a defined working decision/management information system (MIS).
10. Whether the library conducts performance evaluations on the type of services, frequency and methodology used.

11. Indication of core functions of the National Library that should be evaluated, whether periodically, continuously, or not necessary (21 core functions identified).
12. Whether the library has a benchmarking programme.
13. To name the institutions used for benchmarking.
14. To indicate whether the library is involved in any quality project (e.g. ISO, Program Evaluation, TQM).
15. To give a short description of a quality project if applicable.
16. The publishing of a quality manual if a quality project is undertaken.
17. Whether user satisfaction studies are carried out.
18. Whether cost-benefit analysis is carried out.
19. Whether the library uses performance measurement or a quality management system and the aim of its implementation.
20. Whether there has been any significant change in the institution as a result of the implementation of a performance measurement activity.
21. Whether any study was done to evaluate the library's image, and the medium used.
22. Whether the library has measured the level of literacy of users and the community.
23. Lastly, respondents are asked to give their opinion on the future direction of their national library.

The national library is also required to enclose a bibliography of publications or articles about performance (or quality) measurements in national libraries that have been published during the last 10 years.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

It is hoped that the questionnaires will have been duly returned by end of April or early May

2003 to the National Library of Malaysia. The work schedule is as in the Gantt Chart below:

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August
Establishment of committee	▓							
Start of questionnaire design		▓						
Amendment of questionnaire			▓					
Finalisation of questionnaire design			▓					
Distribution of questionnaire				▓				
Received duly completed questionnaire					▓			
Data inputting and data analysis						▓		
Preliminary report							▓	
Final report ready							▓	
Presentation of report at IFLA Conference Berlin, Germany								▓

FINDINGS
The survey relies heavily on data to be supplied by the national libraries surveyed and a high response rate to the circulated questionnaire. There is a fundamental need to understand how the library is performing now, so as to plan its development for the future. This is the role of performance measurement. The findings of the survey will be outlined and included in the final report of the IFLA Standing Committee on National Libraries. Preliminary proposals of performance indicators for national libraries in the Asia/Oceania region can only be established after the survey is completed.
CONCLUSION
It is hoped that the outcome of the survey will be useful in determining performance indicators for national libraries in Asia/Oceania. As national libraries face more and more challenges in ensuring that their services continue to be relevant and effective, it is also imperative that end-user satisfaction and cost-effectiveness in providing these services be the ultimate goal. Only with these perspectives in mind can national libraries in Asia/Oceania measure up to the expectations of their client base and stakeholders.

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