Performance measurement in libraries and information services. Proceedings of the First Northumbria International Conference, 31 August–4 September 1995

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Performance measurement is not a new issue in library and information services management. What sets this publication apart from previous efforts is that not only does it read like a 'who's who' in the field of performance measurement but it also represents both the consolidation of trends in the field over the past decade and identifies newly emerging key result areas requiring further investigation, for example networked environments.

Within the available space, it is difficult to do full justice to this comprehensive set of proceedings. This review should merely serve to whet the appetite for further reading and assimilation. Although, a conference on performance measurement was previously held in Salford in 1988, the scale and scope of this conference programme, as well as the calibre of speakers and delegates it attracted, give it strong international status, for example Nancy van House, Charles McClure, Peter Brophy, Roswitha Poll, Geoffrey Ford, Andy Exon and Bob Usherwood. South African contributions included papers presented by John Willemse and Karen de Jager.

Paging through the weighty volume of proceedings, one forms the impression from the broad spectrum of topics covered, meant that there was something for everyone. The Conference proceedings are divided into six keynote talks presented by invited speakers followed by 28 seminar papers and six poster sessions. A useful feature is the inclusion of the question-and-answer session following the presentation. In the case of the poster session summaries, the reader loses some of the author's intent, as a result of the published format, which is a pity as this type of presentation is rapidly becoming an important means of disseminating research results. Taking the high standard of the papers into account, it seems strange that the Conference review forms such a weak contribution. As a reader who did not attend the Conference, the summary was eagerly scanned for some indication of where performance measurement is headed in the future. Its contents were uninformative and disappointing.

The range of papers includes broad overviews of performance measurement to numerous reports on specific projects, applications and implementation details. Nancy van House, in eloquent and visionary fashion, issued a cloaked warning to the library profession on being lured by a misguided use of performance measurement. Whilst the collection and use of data remain unequivocally important, she cautions that in an information arena of aggressive and increasing competition, librarians are not competing for jurisdiction in this field. She reminds one that performance measurement is not intended to eulogize library achievement or performance but rather that measurement and evaluation are means to 'construct sense in an ongoing reconstruction within our libraries and with the larger organisation' (p. 8).

A worrying trend evident in the contents is a strong sense of *status quo* characterizing the field rather than renewal and flow of new ideas. Perhaps it is a weakness inherent in performance measurement in library and information services where similar problems get addressed repeatedly in different ways but then each approach is elevated to panacea status. By contrast, scant attention has been paid to the impact that information technology is exerting on libraries in terms of services, clients and their staff. It is encouraging that McClure and Lopata are currently researching the measurement and evaluation of the networked environment.

It would be unfair toward the many authors featured in this publication to single out particular contributions as the variety of topics it contains is sure to meet individual interests. Dominant themes running through the proceedings include a number of papers on the vexing issue of quality management and total quality management (Cotta-Schonberg, Brophy, Usherwood, Urquhart & Hepworth). Other themes cover clients (Crawford, Burr *et al.*, Hart), service agreements and contracts (Carmel, Richard, Kinnell & Garrod), benchmarking (Town, Kinnell & Garrod), performance appraisal (Stein, Parker), aspects of information technology (McClure & Lopata, Webster, Ford, Armstrong), key result areas and

designing performance indicators (McClure & Lopata, Konings & Van de Gein, Johnson, Poll, Revill, Sumsion & Ward, Willemse, De Jager, Lithgow). A useful overview of performance measurement within an integrated management planning and review environment is contained in Willemse's paper which also provides a list of performance indicators for an academic library.

This volume should appeal to a wide audience. For the student of performance measurement, it makes for essential reading whilst for its advocates, the contents will serve as a useful reference tool. As a vote of confidence in the future of performance measurement, the announcement for the Second International Conference in September 1997 is available. If the proceedings under review are an indication of what can be expected at the forthcoming conference, it bodes well for future developments and new directions in this rapidly evolving and changing area of library and information services management.

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