

## **Evidence-Based Decision Making in Library Management**

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**Abstract.** A fundamental problem of practical sciences such as librarianship is that theory does not always match practice. To put it another way, the idealistic writings in books cannot solve the real problems which are encountered in library management. For this reason, it would be better if managers attempting to solve problems, instead of paying attention to applications which are fashionable in the field of library management and theoretical ideas in books, took decisions with reference to the administrative and economic structure of that particular library. Apart from this, a mistake is often made when managers take decisions based on their own ideas and judgements or on certain ideologies. These decisions which in the course of the decision-making process are made according to opinions usually lead to loss and failure for the institution.

Evidence-based decision making, which is a subject which is relatively new to the field of librarianship, means to use the available data and realities within the existing situation in the best possible way and to stress that a solution which fits one library will not necessarily fit another. In this study, the concept of evidence-based decision making and its importance in library management will be discussed.

**Keywords:** Evidence-Based, decision making, library management, librarianship, decision makers.

### **1. Introduction**

Library professionals often find themselves in situations where they need answers to questions that emerge from their professional practice. Librarians need to have evidence on which to base their informed decisions. Evidence based library management (hereafter EBLM) is a relatively new concept for librarians. This paper will present a study that explores the way in which librarians use their knowledge and evidence upon which to base their decision making.

In the literature, we see that the evidence-based approach was, in general, first used during the decision-making processes of managers and that it began to be important from this point onwards. Among the reasons why this subject became

increasingly important, can be shown the fact that the factors affecting the decision-making process are many and varied.

## **2. Decision Making Process**

In fact, the changes which are being experienced during the present period are completely different from the changes undergone in previous periods, which means that it is no necessary to gather data from very many different channels when making a decision. In order to reach the best possible decision, it is important that the evidence which is collected, or which will be collected in the future, should be processed in the right way. For example, the approaches in the discussion lists to the matter which is to be decided on, the experience of the participants, their conference presentations and reports, the academic work that has been done (articles, books, theses etc.) will constitute the basic information sources of the decision-making process. For this reason, when making decisions, people must have in their hands a great amount of evidence which they can employ during this process. However, the chief problem is not being able to see these pieces of evidence, or not recognising them.

In recent times, in particular, the claims of management gurus, because of their popularity, seem to have attracted a great deal of attention. These approaches certainly contain some grains of truth but if they are accepted as complete realities, this may be very damaging to the institution, to the managers and also to the workers.

## **3. Not Opinion-Based, Evidence-Based Decision Making**

Information enables people to choose between the existing options. To make use of the available information at the right time increases performance and productivity (Keten, 2012). However, in the evidence-based management process, evidence alone does not tell librarians what they should do or demonstrate how they should do it. Evidence gathered from the first step of the evidence-based management process, which consists of reviewing the literature, remains only raw data, unless these librarians are competent managers with the capacity to make and implement decisions.

This is because raw data never demonstrates what needs to be done. It only enables more correct decisions to be made. For this reason, the experience and management skills of the managers will indicate in which department of the library the evidence can be applied, or if it can or cannot be used in general, and this is a very important point.

Therefore, librarians and library managers who are involved in the decision making process critically examine their own experience, the structure of the institution, the features of the existing situation, the expectations of users and many other factors, then synthesize all of these factors before an evidence-based decision can be made.

A number of fundamental questions may be formulated which will help librarians to reach evidence-based decisions. Koufoganakis and Crumley (2006) and Lerdal (2006) suggest the following questions:

- 1- Has enough research been done to enable a decision to be made?
- 2- Will work carried out based on this research raise our library management to a higher level?
- 3- In which area does research most need to be carried out?
- 4- Are there any other approaches to a solution, or is there only one possible solution?
- 5- How much time is needed to complete the research?
- 6- By which time does the research need to be completed?
- 7- Is there limited access to the information sources required for this research?

People's decision-making processes usually involve choosing between two or more alternatives and we meet with this situation all the time and in every area of life. Particularly in management decisions, the efficient and effective use of information is extremely important. According to Daft (1991) the management decision-making process begins with managers being faced with a problem or presented with an opportunity. The process continues with the identification of reasons and their analysis, the development of alternatives, the choice of the necessary option and its application.

The process concludes with the evaluation of the chosen option and the receipt of feedback. Every need to take a decision follows the same pattern and involves the same processes (Keten, 2012).

As we can see from the table below, the evidence-based decision-making process comprises 4 basic elements, that is, experiences and beliefs, institutional realities and participants (stakeholders). The subject of evidence and experience has been mentioned above. On the subject of institutional realities and stakeholders, where the library is concerned particularly, many details such as the budget of the library, the physical characteristics of the library, the character and size of the collection, the number of personnel, the competency of the personnel, the competency of the management and the geographic location represent the realities of the institution. The most important participants (stake-holders) of the library are the library users.



### **The Components of Excellent Library Management**

As stated above , in the decision-making mechanism it is necessary, in order to reach the best possible decision, to choose the best option from several alternatives. To evaluate these various alternatives and make a decision, it is essential to gather together all the information related to the topic.

However, collecting all the information necessary to make a correct decision sometimes results in an excessive amount of information or “mountain of

information”, as it can be called. Consequently, this situation, instead of making it easier to make a decision, may actually make it harder. At this point, what is needed is evidence-based, and not opinion-based, decision making.

#### **4. The Basic Problem: The Gap Between Theory and Practice**

As we mentioned above, the basic problem of practical sciences is that theory and practice do not always correspond. Therefore librarians, and new graduates in particular, when they first start work, notice that there is a serious difference between the theory in the books and actual applications. In this situation, while the experienced librarians follow an evidence-based path, the new graduates, or those who are fond of book knowledge, continually try to adopt new fashions in applications. It is at this point that evidence-based librarianship attempts to fill the gap that exists between theory and practice.

In a research study by Turner, it states that the difference between the results which are frequently obtained from practical studies and the things written in books of academic research have caused problems (Turner, 2002). In fact, it is said that librarians, when making decisions, do not usually rely on the results of academic studies. For this reason, these librarians who do not make decisions based on evidence are often not in agreement with colleagues (Gemoni, Haddow and Ritchie, 2004).

This problem, which particularly affects the applied sciences, creates a division between “appliers” and “researchers”. However this does not alter the fact that both these groups are serving the same purpose. In fact, both groups, in making their researches, have sought the approval of academic circles; they have used the same methods such as questionnaires (surveys), observation and secondary sources (Booth, 2003). It can be said that this problem does not only apply to librarians but also to nurses, doctors and psychologists.

For years, attempts have been observed to create a bridge or network to close this gap between theory and practice. Such attempts were seen, in the field of librarianship as not at all normal or ordinary; they were viewed as being contrary to the spirit and culture of librarianship (Booth, 2003). However, in order to succeed in this aim, the traditional method of operation underwent a radical transformation, and this radical transformation was called “evidence-based library management”.

Apart from this, it was observed that, although the science of librarianship is a practical science, the literature of librarianship was not largely based on research studies and that, due to a lack of financial support, publications based on research were very few in this field (Gemoni, Haddow and Ritchie, 2004).

#### **5. Result**

The idea of evidence-based management may appear quite difficult to librarians and their managers, who are faced with uncertainties and confusion. However, even if institutions have very little data to help them to make decisions or to

meet the needs and expectations of their users, or such data is very little there is always something that can be done.

First of all, it is important to carry out a field study, which will provide valuable data. For this, the users using the library physically, and those using distance learning, can be given a survey on the topic of user-satisfaction. This survey, which contains short but important questions, can be distributed to those coming to the library and sent to those using the library online by e-mail. This user-satisfaction survey will pinpoint the needs and expectations of the users and will enable a picture of the library in the eyes of the users to be drawn up.

A survey, similar to the survey of user-satisfaction given to the users, can be distributed to the librarians, who, as those in direct contact with the users, represent the library and can be called the internal users. In fact, the institution whose workers are satisfied also has happy customers. In other words, librarians who love their work and do their work with passion will have a user-satisfaction orientated relationship with the library users. Apart from this, the results of the satisfaction survey given to the librarians will also create a picture of the library as seen from the point of view of those who are working there.

After the satisfaction surveys have been completed, the gaps (deficiencies) which are revealed can be used as evidence. That is, the data obtained from the users and from the librarians will, at the first stage, give evidence about the library and how it is perceived; at the second stage, this can be used as evidence for the improvements that need to be made.

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