

Managing and optimizing the service processes with a set of quality indicators: case of University of Eastern Finland Library

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Abstract. The renovation of the Finnish University Act in the year 2009 formed the impetus for the creation of the University of Eastern Finland with the merger of two universities, i.e. the University of Joensuu and the University of Kuopio. This also led to the birth of a new University Library for the UEF. During this merger process the management of the new library used the ISO 9001 based quality management system as a tool. This paper examines how the quality management approach was utilized in renovating and managing the quality and unification of the service processes within the Library.

Keywords. Quality Management System, Indicators, Mergers; University Libraries; Finland

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1. Managing the change in the merger of university libraries

The Finnish University Act came into force in 2009 and as a result the University of Eastern Finland was created by merging the two existing universities, i.e. the University of Joensuu and the University of Kuopio, and consequently the birth of a new University Library for the UEF. Many activities with this merger were monitored by the ISO 9001 based quality management system which was utilized as a tool for the management of the new library (Saarti & al. 2012).

The first phase of the merger involved renewal of the management structure and the development of a functional documentation system to be used in the management of the library. This included the creation of a clear strategy and

different types of quality documentation (see Saarti & Juntunen 2011 and Muhonen & Nygrén & Saarti 2011).

The second phase has focused on defining the new services to be offered by the merged library that has premises on three campuses about 100 kilometers from each other. Here the quality indicator approach has been utilized in order to create well defined service products and to set standards and goals with which to evaluate the success in service production.

In the next section we shall discuss the redefinition of the library's role during the new University Act as well as how this has affected the new library's service production. One reason for this change has also been the fact that academic libraries now face increasing competition due to the change in the way that scientific information is disseminated. The move from printed journals to e-journals happened within a mere ten years.

At present, the same change is underway with monographs. Nowadays more and more book titles are available in digital form as a result of back-catalogue digitization and increasingly more and more new titles are being published in an electronic format. (See e.g. Thompson 2005.) It has been estimated that the change to a digital book-culture shall occur in about the same time as happened with the journals, i.e. a decade. This means that the whole paradigm of managing university libraries and scientific documents will have changed in only 20 years – i.e. one generation.

2. Defining library services for the new University

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the first phase of the merger was about building management structures for both the new University and its library (Juntunen & Saarti 2011). This included creating the documentation needed for the library management, i.e. the strategies and a quality manual. At the same time, the main services of the library were defined in addition to identifying the persons responsible for service production.

This renovation supported the basic concepts developed in the new university legislation in Finland as well as adapting to changes in the role of the academic libraries. On the other hand, the library became more independent from the state governance and its role became almost exclusively to support the research and teaching conducted in its own institution. At the legislative level, the change was that the national services were to be provided by the National Library and the role of the individual university libraries moved towards providing services for their own users (Hormia-Poutanen & al. 2011).

In the UEF library this meant that during the strategic work on one hand it had to focus its work to serve the strategic decisions of the University and its faculties; and on the other hand to redesign its services so they could be available to the entire academic community in UEF. The latter was even more challenging due to the fact that the actual merger process and the distance between the campuses were extra obstacles to be overcome. (Muhonen & Nygrén & Saarti 2011.)

The library management structure was renovated to so that it would guarantee the basic services that were formulated as follows:

- collection services
- customer services
- internal services
- online resource services
- teaching and information services

Each of the services mentioned is managed by a Head of service. (Saarti & Juntunen 2011.)

The aim of this decision was to start to build a team based organization within the library and at the same time start to rebuild the department and premises accreted organizational structures that were the remnants from the previous phases of the library and public administration organizational thinking and introduce a change towards a service based approach. As Gallagher states (2000, 30 – 31) the libraries will have to struggle with the fact that some of the tasks are and will be traditional but at the same time there is a need for innovation. Library's staff structures must support these both demands (traditional vs. innovation). Thus the library needs hybrid staff structures that combine both the stable matrix structures and the more flexible team structures.

It was known that simple structural changes in the management would not be enough. Thus it was decided that at the operational level there would be a need to develop self-directed teamwork. Thus, the library decided to utilize the indicator based approach of the quality management as presented e.g. in the ISO 9001 (Balague & Saarti 2009 and 2011).

From the very beginning of the merger process, the aim of harmonizing the library services was set: all library users must have access to similar library services in all of the campuses. For the library's services this has meant that a similar culture of service provision must be created in all the library premises on the different campuses. The implementation of the former best practices and totally new ones has required much negotiation and a willingness to make workable compromises from both the management and the staff. The management has also realized that the staff must have enough time to adapt to these changes. This has been especially important because at the same time it was essential to forget some of the old ways of the former universities and their libraries.

The challenges have been heightened by the fact that not only the size of the library but also the distances between library units increased at the same time. The number of the staff doubled which also meant that the old way of holding quick and cozy meetings changed to massed crowd scenes that had to be handled in a different manner. This posed enormous problems in trying to inform all the staff about the changes happening throughout the university and at the library in a language that would be understandable to all.

For the managers, this meant long discussions and meetings with their subordinates. There also was a need to define the service policies and practices. This has led to the fact that all the services have been forced to create their own systematic chain of command and ways to communicate and disseminate the decisions made.

It was decided that the minutes of the meetings would be available via the library's intranet. In addition a system of weekly briefings was established that are similar on all the main campuses. These also function as discussion forums with the staff and make it possible to revise decisions when necessary. The commitment and involvement in other working groups work has been enhanced by publishing the meeting agendas beforehand on the intranet. There also is a web-discussion tool on intranet platform that was utilized.

Working in the new, merged library has been challenging for all the library staff. Simply the amount of learning and adaptation to the new information published and disseminated within the merged university and its library would have been enough for each worker. The information overflow caused by this change could easily distract the staff from performing their basic duties. We have tried to manage this problem through quality management work, especially by introducing a set of indicators for each of the library's services that help in producing and monitoring the library's service products.

3. Managing the services via indicators

The quality management is based on the concept of evidence-based management with measurable tools to be used in monitoring and managing the organization (Saarti & Juntunen & Taskinen 2010). The concept of selecting the most important activities to be monitored as indicators can be used also in a library as a tool for the management on order to:

- a) to market or inform to the staff about the most important results that a library and its services must accomplish and
- b) to tell to the staff how the success in this task will be measured

The latter also helps when one tries to increase the self-direction of the staff and the service production teams.

The set of indicators must be concise, i.e. preferably less than five and never more than ten indicators at all the levels of operations. It also is important that both quantitative and qualitative indicators are used. This is especially relevant in an academic environment where qualitative facts are at least as important as the quantitative values. (Poll & Boekhorst & te Mundt 2008, 22 – 23). Naïve example: it is easy to increase the number of loans in an academic library e.g. by introducing popular fiction and light reading to the collections but this does not support the basic aims of the academic institution.

The first task to be tackled in introducing the indicator approach for the library's management in the UEF was to introduce the idea of managing the services via measurable tools (Poll 2009, 62 – 63). This needed both training about the idea of quality management and learning a new way of thinking: at the

same time the library started initiated the process of changing its strategic thinking from a collection based library ideology towards one that was service based.

After this work was done – it took about one year – the services started to develop their set of indicators quite rapidly. Here a shared tool (a table that guided the definition of the indicators) was created in order to ensure that similar approaches were being used for all the services. The documentation was available to all of the library staff via the library's intranet.

Within each of the services, the definition of the set of indicators was started from the point of view of the library's users and their needs and how the library's services should meet these needs. The indicators are linked to the service promises and the concept is to measure the success in fulfilling these goals, what we call service promises made by the library. The service promises and their indicators were devised and defined at joint staff seminars where the working groups debated the suggestions prepared beforehand. This process lasted about half a year and the intention was to commit all of the staff to this way of thinking.

The service promise and indicators of the library's customer services are as follows:

The aim of the process: to disseminate documented scientific information to students, academics and other users.

Most important sub-processes: dissemination of documents, guidance and marketing, provision of multi-purpose premises.

The quality aims of the process: customer service will be competent and friendly and it supports the self-directive use of the library. The document delivery is fast enough to support studying and research.

Service promises and indicators

1. All of the customers are treated in a friendly way; their needs are clarified and answered.

- The mean value in the customer survey for staff competence, availability and willingness to be of service is at least 4.5 on a scale from 1 to 5.

2. The customers know the library's basic services and can use them when needed. The customers are given basic guidance and consulting during the opening hours of the library.

- The turnout of the library start for the new and international students is 100 per cent.
- The mean value in the customer survey for informing and enabling self-directed information search is at least 4.5 on a scale from 1 to 5.
- The proportion of the self-service loans is 70 per cent.

3. The customers will receive at least 98 per cent of the documents requested from the library's own collections (including reading room titles and e-resources) within at least a month.

4. Of all the resources disseminated via the inter-library loans at least 80 per cent will be available within two weeks; if the document requested via ILL is not available, this will be notified to the customer within at least one month.

5. The library offers practical working spaces for the library users: the premises are open as designated and the devices and computers function with a 99 per cent certainty. The mean value in the customer survey for opening hours, functionality and tranquility of the premises as well as about the sufficiency of working spaces and computers will be at least 4.5 on a scale from 1 to 5.

The same set of promises and indicators have been designated for all of the library's services. These help in prioritization of the most important aims and tasks within each of the library's main service processes. These are also tools for the strategic work and the development of the services as well as for collecting feedback from our users.

If the indicators show that the targets and aims are not being met, then the staff strives to determine whether the aims have been set at too high a level or whether the library can improve its activities. This helps also in moving the discussion from individuals towards the improvement of the processes and services. At the personal management level, this also helps in defining the most urgent areas requiring staff training and recruiting.

4. Conclusions

The merger of two or several organizations is always a crisis which needs to be handled by the acting managers and heads of departments. One of the cornerstones in a successful merger is the creation of a new organizational culture (Muhonen & Nygrén & Saarti 2011). A sound planning from the management side helps in mastering the crisis type of symptoms that the management faces in a merger situation (Hargis & DeWatt 2010). It also is important to recognize the different types of stress that the members of the staff and their teams are facing. Otherwise there will be a major risk for experiencing severe burn-outs at all the levels of the organization.

In addition it is important to identify what must be preserved and what is to be obliterated in the previous organizations' management teams and their ways of conducting the library (Carey & Ogden 2004, 17 – 18.) Here one must give even some time for bereavement and mourning for the loss of the old organizations and the way that the work was conducted. But if this phase lasts too long, the merged organization can become set into a rut, looking back and remembering "how the good old days were better in all the respects".

Based on our experiences, one good way of tackling this phenomenon is to introduce an evidence based approach to managing of the library and its service processes. This approach helps the management to focus on what is being done in the library to the services and service products instead of being obsessed with the personalities and habits of the personnel. This then should make it easier for the staff to focus on managing the basic services and improving their quality.

This is also a way of introducing a self-directive approach both to the teams and individual staff members at the library. When the size of the library – and as in our case also the distances between campuses and their libraries – grows, this helps the time management: on the one hand the top management does not need to make all the decisions, on the other hand the teams can act rapidly when they know where and when they can make their own decisions with regard to the work they are doing within the library.

This entails the setting of sufficiently clear indicators and measures for the services, i.e. both the service teams and the management can evaluate the success or the need to develop the work done in the library. These can help also the library to focus on the basic tasks defined in both the library's and university's strategy. In the long run, this will support the University in fulfilling its mission in teaching and conducting academic research.

The results of this type of assessment must be analyzed together with the staff at least yearly e.g. in the annual management reviews. We have combined this with annual team reporting and planning, which made it possible to utilize the indicator type of approach in the total management and assessment. Evaluating the success has started to become an organizational way of thinking.

When one combines this setting and monitoring of performance indicators with the creation of the service promises, this can be utilized in marketing the services that the library offers to its users. The modern information dissemination has meant that library is now in a situation where it has to compete with other providers. Our users are accustomed to receive their book orders from the internet vendors on a set time-scale. If the library is not able to offer the same kind of service promises, it is most likely that our customers start to vote with their feet and prefer those services that appear more competitive.

We have observed that one is able to make meaningful service promises only if the library has collected statistical and other data about its services for at least a period of about ten years. Otherwise one is forced to make estimates that are not based on facts and actual trends. If one is basing a strategy on guesses and estimates then it is most likely that trust and consumer confidence will not be built on a sound basis.

Finally: although we have placed a major emphasis on basing the management of the library and its services on evidence, one must always strive to do this in a civilized and humane manner. The introduction of indicators and other measures does not mean that the humane side of managing people can be set aside. The concept here is to shift the focus to the quality of one's endeavours and services and to encourage that discussion should be made as objectively as possible. This needs tools for the dialogic and dialectical way of managing people and organizations.

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