

CASE STUDY AT THE STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY LIBRARY (RUT)*)

By Tomas Lidman and Margareta Törngren

Abstract: The American manual Academic Library Performance - A practical approach appeared in the right moment for Stockholm University Library to start performance measurements in order to be able to answer the demands of the government and also much stronger than earlier get hold of figures and arguments to justify its activity in a much harder economic climate.

The manual presents fifteen different output measures for evaluating the effectiveness of library activities. It does not cover the library's internal operations. The measures, that have been tested, are divided into four main blocks: General User Satisfaction, Materials Availability and Use, Facilities and Library Use and Information Services.

For the library as whole the evaluation means that the knowledge of our library is much better now. The results and the figures have strengthened our arguments against the University.

During the last couple of years there have been radical changes in the economic conditions for the universities and the university colleges in Sweden. It all started in 1977 when a fiscal reform was introduced which aim was to loosen the ties between the government and the university sector. One very obvious result was that the research libraries ceased to be independent authorities and became a part of the university family.

At the end of the 80s a debate was started that the fundamental funding system of the universities should be changed in the line of the 1977 reform. Up to this date the university sector had applied for funds to the Government on quite wage conditions. Arguments for an increasing business was based upon the fact that the demands of the libraries had risen. More people asked for better and more effective services. Students have to have more lectures and more teachers, books are becoming more expensive, the information explosion must be tackled.

In spring '92 we performed the RUT-project at Stockholm university library. The acronym stands in Swedish for measuring of results and performance but the word

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RUT also has connection with such words as road and route. The results we got from the project and the great interest show for it have convinced us that we have been on the right measurement road. With this project our library has in a small way contributed to the joint efforts to find useful tools to measure performance in academic libraries. I will tell you about this American model of library performance, the way we performed the measuring and how we used the results.

Measuring library performance - the project is born

The American manual *Measuring Academic Library Performance - A practical approach* appeared in the end of 1990. It is published by the American Library Association and the main authors are Nancy van House, Beth Weil and Charles Mc Clure. We got enthusiastic at the library. This was exactly the tool we had looked for. We did not have to invent it ourselves. Besides it was very positively reviewed in the Swedish Library Magazin, *Biblioteksbladet*, in January 1991, by Jakob Harnesk. He has also been a cooperator and adviser all through the project and a representative for the funding authority, BIBSAM, The Royal Library's Office for National Planning and Co-operation. It was exactly at the right moment for us to start performance measurement for many different reasons. One very strong reason was a change in the funding system. New signals were introduced from the state in the beginning of the 90ties that the universities from 1994/95 will get their money, not in advance and on request as earlier, but according to what extend they have achieved their goals and could state results. That means the amount of new doctors and master degrees that the university intended to produce. If the universities succeed in fulfilling their goals they get the promised sum, if they don't the sum will be reduced. It also means that the universities and colleges will take up competition with each other to attract students.

This new way of channelling the money-streams has a big impact on the organization. All parts of the university must be aware of the importance of evaluation and how to secure quality of services and are forced to find means and methods to satisfy requests.

The university libraries in Sweden are in the forefront in this new situation with different projects, among which RUT is the most ambitious one.

An excellent tool

The management group at the library found that the manual could be an excellent tool to answer the demands of the government. By using the results of the surveys we could also much more effectively acquire figures and arguments to justify our activities in the much harder economic climate. We could learn from the

American libraries, who had a much longer tradition of fighting for their libraries in a harder commercial climate than their Swedish colleagues.

There were other criteria as well:

- The manual seemed trustworthy - a result from almost all American expertise in the field.
- The measures had been tested separately or together.
- The measures were service-oriented. They did not cover the library's internal operations, they addressed both quantity and quality of services delivered to users, and they were a mixture of objective and subjective measures.
- The manual seemed easy to use. The authors had tried to foresee every possible problem that could turn up etc.
- And a very important factor: a lot of people from the staff could be involved.

The arguments for going in to the project were many. So we applied for economic support from BIBSAM and the RUT-project was designed in 1991 and run during 1992. The conclusions and results are being spread in 1993.

The project-description

The project included many different parts, such as translation into Swedish of the manual, a critical examination of the measures, an adaption of the measures to the university library, testing of the measures and publishing of the results.

The manual consists of two main sections: 1. Measurement and 2. Measures. The first part describes measures in the evaluation process, outputs, previous approaches, evaluation perspective, types of measures etc. The second part addresses some general guidelines for measurement and gives specific advice of the implementation and reporting of the measures in the manual.

The manual was very easy to use, with instructions in detail. The authors think it could be used by almost anybody with good sense and some knowledge of mathematics. The number of choices are many. Every part of the manual contains references to other authors within the field, their opinions and conclusion. You get advice on how to proceed if you want to deepen your tests.

Some wise statements

The authors tell you very clearly that the measures offer a "snapshot" of performance at a particular point of time and that the results are limited, which is very

true. You don't know if the results are good or bad. To get a balanced view you have to repeat the measures. The problem is - and this is my point of view - that some of the measures cannot be repeated in the same way as you did the first time, because the result of the first performance measurement definitely caused some vital changes for improving the service.

The authors also tell you that the basis for comparison is very limited outside the library and must be made with care: among units in a library system, against "similar" libraries elsewhere, or against predetermined standards. The basis for comparison is above all internal: against the library's performance at an earlier time or against the library's objectives.

These last statements are very wise -but unrealistic - because we know that even if comparisons are impossible to do, they are impossible not to do.

Staff involvement

The manual divides the measures into four main parts: General User Satisfaction, Materials Availability and Use, Facilities and Library Use, Information Services, totally 15 measures. - I give you this detailed information, because these four chapters formed the base for building up the project. Four working groups were appointed, one for each of the four main parts, and people could announce if they were interested to chair it, to be the translator or to be a specialist in the field.

Staff announced interest and the four groups, 12 people, were appointed. Translation of the different parts turned out to be a very heavy task, although necessary. Words, expressions and American procedures had to be analyzed or taken away before the measures could be adapted to the reality at our library. This way of working could be characterized as both powerful and weak. It took an enormous lot of time. On the other hand we got a raised awareness, stronger inspiration and very motivated persons among the staff.

To construct this project, bring staff together and stimulate people for the task was a marvellous job for a project leader. It was easy to find response at our library, even if the enthusiasm was not shared by everybody, but those who took active part and those who were more or less involved, around 70 people, contributed wholeheartedly. Great interest was also shown by the Rectorate from the university, who had a representative in the project group.

We chose to test almost all measures although the manual recommends you to choose carefully, and to compare usefulness with efforts required. Some of them can be taken from the annual statistics, though. Another recommendation that is pointed out in the manual is to observe staff resistance. You are advised to begin

with measures that the staff do not find threatening and that they perceive as most useful.

The pre-test on the 28th of January gave us good information about how to improve survey procedures. It also showed that the measure Reference Satisfaction Survey could be delicate as librarians could feel themselves to be pointed out.

Quality audit of some of the results

In this short paper I will now concentrate upon some of the results and not plunge deeper into details of how we performed the testing, although I think that the construction of the project is a very important part.

It is necessary, though, to add that we did not do the tabulating of data and the first analysis ourselves, much due to the enormous number of forms answered. This work was done by statistically qualified persons at the Department on statistics at the university. In a smaller scale you are well advised by the manual on how to do it yourself. We distributed totally over 6100 formulas, where the manual recommends 1.300, and had over 50%, 3121 to summarize.

I will also mention that the interest from the students and researchers was enthusiastic and that they were so eager to answer that they teared the surveys out of our hands. About a thousand of them wrote notes on the backside of the sheets to tell us what they liked and not. That was also encouraging.

General User Satisfaction

3427 formulas were distributed during one week to every 10th person entering the library. We got 1745 answers i.e. 51%.

- Almost 63% represent the humanistic and social science faculties. The law faculty is the heaviest user in comparison to the amount of students, whilst the figures from the natural science faculty show the opposite. Those students mostly use the departmental libraries,
- 91.4% of the total are students, 6.8% doctorates, researchers, "master degrees" and others, 1,8%.
- 72.6% came to read courses, almost 11% write theses, for research and other purposes almost 4%, whilst teachers were very few. About 60% of the visitors declare that it is easy to use the library. Quite a lot, 10%, did not find it at all easy to use the library.
- Almost 55% are satisfied, while 18% are not satisfied.

Comments: It is evident that our library to a very high degree is a students library and for most of the people easy to use. More than 6000 persons entered the library each day at the time. The library is popular as a social meeting point and a place for studies not only for our own students but also for students from other universities as the Royal Institute of Technology. The problem is that it is too popular, which has a negative impact on the service. In the middle of the day none of the 1500 seats is free. 150 new seats will be offered to the students in a separate course-litterature-department, that opens now in November, partly as a result of these figures.

The low use of teachers could depend on the fact that tests were made in the middle of the term. This very autumn we have been going into another project with problemoriented learning, where we in a small scale are testing a closer cooperation between teachers and librarians in some subjects.

Materials Availability and Use

This block contains a number of measures e.g. in-library materials use, materials availability and requested materials delay.

In-house use counted in three days showed roughly that the amount of material that was used was about half of the figure for usual loans. We could add slightly more than 30% to this figure to have the total use. The figures for in-house use shows the quality of browsing, although we know that the figures are too low. Library staff in particular was seen not following orders.

The figures show also that 53% found the title they looked for. 47% did not find what they looked for. This survey does not give the answer but the authors tell you how to proceed for further investigation and refers to Kantor. The figure from the library had to be analyzed immediately and we now know that 42% of the books searched for were out on loan.

Another interesting measurement was Requested Materials Delay. 200 distance requests, interlibrary loans, were followed up. Within a fortnight 52,5% of them were responded to in one way or the other. After 5 weeks as many as 16% had no response at all from the libraries. This figures were unacceptable and gave the head of the loan department and the staff reason to discuss the procedures. After a re-organization of the department, education of staff, a new system for interlibrary loans, the department has succeeded in showing a clear improvement of the figures in a test one year later.

If you look at the total use and connect the figure with number of people entering the library you could roughly state that every second person used some material in

the library. This is a good result showing that the purpose of the visit is not only to read books that are brought to the library.

Information Services

Performance such as reference transaction, reference satisfaction survey and online search evaluation are measured in this part.

In one investigation the staff counted the number of questions at the reference desks. We broadened the original survey to be able to separate reference questions from non-reference questions and also to distinguish if they were taken place by telephone or at the reference desk. The staff had a very healthy discussion to establish the meaning of a reference question. The answers were not totally reliable though. Staff did not have time to fill in the formulas, when they were stressed with a long queue.

We can however look at the trends. Every fourth question was of non-reference character. At the moment we are discussing if the library needs a non-reference information desk, that takes care of all the general questions. The number of questions clearly showed that more staff was needed at the joint reference desk for humanities and social sciences and for information retrieval.

One of the surveys within this block asks people to evaluate the reference service that they receive by circling one number of the scale from 1-5, according to relevance, satisfaction, completeness of the answers, helpfulness of the staff etc.

Almost 1200 forms were distributed to those who got helped at the reference desks. About 50% answered. The answers tell us that those writing theses are those who ask the most questions at the reference desks, 40%, for research 18% and for teaching 4%.

Comments: 68,4% answered that the information was relevant. 62,6% was very satisfied to satisfied. 76,2% thought that the staff had been very helpful to helpful. What do these figures tell us? Satisfaction is a very subjective word and we know from other investigations that people sometimes are satisfied even if they do not get what they looked for but a nice reception. We also had trouble interpreting the word relevance and the problem for the user to observe the relevance. Perhaps he/she could not see that until the material was thoroughly looked over. Anyhow too many of the users were not satisfied. There is a need for a stronger competence development of staff and user-education.

To give librarians better time for competence development we have started a new project in 93/94 with a special servicedepartement. Students employed in this department take over fetching books from the closed stacks and putting books back in the shelves. This work has been done by librarians. It is perhaps necessary

to explain that this situation earlier was partly due to ideological reasons, based on the Swedish idea of equality.

The change is necessary in our time, not only because of cost-benefit thinking but also because of the enormous increase of use in the past year, 58% more loans, to a total of 460 000, and 40% more books fetched from the closed stacks for example to a total 32 000.

Results in general

The project was very successful. Although some of the surveys had to be changed and although some of the results were not totally reliable the manual was an excellent help to carry through the first broad performance measurement in our library. We found that there is a great quality in the pedagogical model from the American manual. It could be used to measure performance in a small unit as well as in a big library.

For the library as a whole it is important how we use the knowledge gained from the surveys. Many changes have already taken place that have improved the quality in our services. Opening hours have increased. Desks have been rebuilt. Better service for database searches has been arranged. The results and the figures have indeed strengthened our powers of arguments against the managers of the University. We could prove that the use of the library is enormous and they have listened and given us extra financial and administrative support. In November, as I mentioned, we will now open a separate library for textbooks with 150 new seats. The entrance of the library has been rebuilt. Most of the students could not earlier see the difference between the library and the cafeteria, which could be heard when they entered the library.

There is a greater understanding for our economic problems and a wider spread knowledge of activities, inside and outside the library. It is necessary for us to continue with our evaluation work and develop different methods. RUT was a starting point for performance measurement in a broad scale but also a stimulating factor for the development of new projects and for intensifying the ongoing discussion of mission, goal and objectives of the library.

Tomas Lidman
Margareta Törngren
Stockholm Universitetsbibliotek
Universitetsvägen 10
S-10691 Stockholm
Sweden