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Library Administrators Knowledge Management Practices and Perceptions When Conducting Organizational Performance Assessment

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Knowledge Management and Statistics and Evaluation Section

Paper Abstract

Paper Title:

“Library Administrators Knowledge Management Practices and Perceptions When Conducting Organizational Performance Assessment”

Key Words or concepts:

Knowledge management, library leaders, information behaviors, organizational performance assessment, and communication strategies

Abstract:

Library administrator’s use and dissemination of organizational performance assessment (PA) data and their perceptions of the need and value of PAM data and information is the primary focus of this paper. A 2002 statewide study conducted in Florida public libraries to identify library administrators’ personal perceptions; actual practices of communicating and utilizing organizational PM data; and other performance assessment data/information.

The results of the study indicated that most library administrators perceived a marginal value in the communication and usage of performance assessment data and information in their libraries. The study also indicated that Florida public library administrators create critical orphaned PM data, information, and knowledge.

**Library Administrators Knowledge Management
Practices and Perceptions When Conducting
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Introduction

As libraries' roles, customers, services, and delivery methods are evolving, so must their methods of conducting performance assessment and the methods of communicating the results of performance assessment. The resulting question is how should performance assessment evolve?

The State of Florida is experiencing a series of changes that are altering the traditional delivery of public library service. One of the most dramatic changes is the statewide growth in population. The total population of the state of Florida grew at a rate of 23.5% from 1990-2000.¹ In FY 03-04, public library administrative units in Florida provided information access and services to approximately 17,500,475 residents through approximately 490 service outlets in five hundred eighteen library outlets, with an income of approximately \$476,548,877² to deliver information access and services.

Florida's population increase has created many social changes. Florida's public libraries are not insulated from these social changes. The dynamically changing nature of public library service (increased population, technology, and declining financial resources) is prompting many external stakeholders to pose critical inquiries to public library administrators. These critical inquiries focus on how to meet the increasingly diverse information needs while improving the accountability and performance of public libraries. The increases in stakeholder inquiries of accountability are part of a larger social development in Florida (and other states) in which the public stakeholder perception's of public service are being transformed from "community goodness" accountability in public service to a more business-based practices of accountability.

Due to the population dynamics and growing accountability inquiries, Florida's public libraries are facing new challenges in assessing and communicating their ability to provide quality information service to Florida

¹ U.S. Census Bureau.

² 2005 Florida Public Library Directory with Statistics, pg. 165.

residents in a cost effective manner. This in turn is generating a need for Florida's public library administrators to be more effective in communicating their performance assessment information. However, before Florida public library administrators can initiate performance assessment initiatives to better account and communicate performance assessment information, a baseline of current performance assessment behaviors and communications practices needed to be conducted.

The author designed a conceptual model of the performance assessment process and the ideal communication flows (portrayed as Figure 1 on the next page.) The model describes the performance assessment process components as they reside in and interact with the Internal Stakeholders and External Stakeholders of the library. Internal stakeholders are defined to be library administrators, professional and paraprofessional staff, volunteers, and interns. External stakeholders are defined to be advisory or governing boards or trustees, government officials, community leaders and partners, vendors, suppliers, and local citizens served by the library.

The Performance assessment process components consist of Planning and Acquisition, Resources, Activities, Outputs, Evaluation, and Information. "Planning and Acquisition" is the planning of library operations and strategic responses and activities through the acquisition of strategic information. "Resources" are those fiscal, staff, and materials resources used by the library to deliver service in activities. "Activities" are those operations and strategic responses that the library performs to deliver service to its customers. "Outputs" is the service results of the various activities performed by the library. "Evaluation" is the assessment of the planning and acquisition, resource usage, the effectiveness of the resources, activities, and outputs of the library to customers and stakeholders. Finally, "Information" is the resulting strategic data, information, and knowledge that results from the evaluation of the library's operations.

Theoretically, as an organization proceeds through the performance assessment process, using the results of each component's activities to initiate the next component's activities. When the "Information" component is completed, the resulting data and information is then used by library administrators to provide corrective feedback to each step of the process and to address accountability, service quality, or other stakeholder concerns. The

communication of the resulting performance assessment information by library administrators into the performance assessment process is then directed to each component of the process, including the performance assessment process itself, and all stakeholders in order to improve the overall effectiveness of the process. The performance assessment process is illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page.

Conceptual Knowledge Map of Performance Assessment

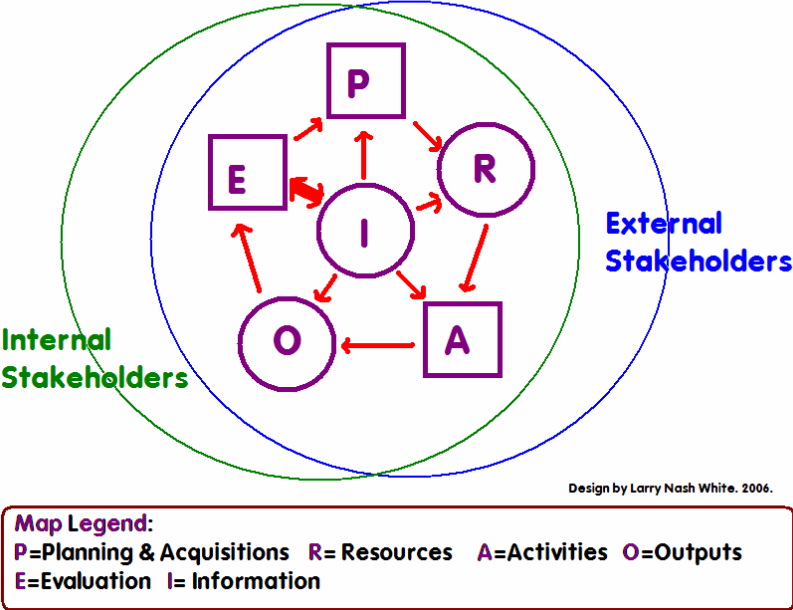


Figure 1: Conceptual Knowledge Map of the Performance Assessment Process.



Survey Parameters

The author designed the study to address the need to identify the baseline of public library director performance assessment practices and communications behaviors. The survey was designed as an evaluative mixed-methodology research design. The study participants were the head public library administrators (HLA) of the seventy-five (75) Florida public library administrative units. Eight other individuals, including four HLA were subsequently identified by their peers as being especially knowledgeable of performance assessment in public libraries in Florida. These four HLA also served as key informants (KI) for the survey and received additional survey questions.

The study was conducted in two phases in 2001-2002: Phase I of the study was a self-administered attitudinal-quantitative survey of the seventy-five (HLA) conducted by e-mail. Forty of the seventy-five respondents (53.3%) recorded current performance assessment practices, estimated resources expended to conduct performance assessment, identified performance assessment process participants and communications recipients/participants, and perceptions of the impact and effectiveness of performance assessment in Florida public libraries.

Phase II of the study consisted of a series of eight qualitative interviews conducted by e-mail and telephone with Key Informants (KI). KIs within and outside of the HLA population were interviewed to gather additional information on the current practices and future needs and developmental directions of performance assessment in Florida's public libraries. A copy of all of the survey questions for this study can be found at <http://lsit.coe.ecu.edu/white/presentations.htm> under "IFLA Presentations."



Survey Results

The over-arching findings of the study indicated that a majority of library administrators reported perceptions of a minimal positive value from conducting performance assessment in their libraries and a minimal negative value from communicating the results of performance assessment to their stakeholders. A vast majority of respondents indicated that conducting performance assessment does not hinder their ability to delivery quality service in their libraries; however, library administrators indicated they would not perform performance assessment if not required by funding agencies. Many respondents indicated they collected vast amounts of performance assessment information with no predetermined design or purpose for using or disseminating the information [i.e. orphaned data, information, and knowledge (OK)] Many respondents indicated that the performance assessment information they communicated to stakeholders contained either outdated or erroneous information. Finally, no significant correlation between respondent perceptions and the surveyed factors (experience, education, service population demographics, resources, staffing, etc.) on the benefits of conducting performance assessment were found in correlation analysis. This would seem to indicate that the surveyed factors did not have positive or negative effect on library administrator perceptions of performance assessment.

Other findings of the study are presented under the topics of: Demographic Related Findings, Metrics Used, Resources Allocated, and Knowledge Management Behavior Findings.

Demographic Related Findings

The completed, usable surveys yielded a 53.3% return rate from the survey population in Phase 1 of the study. In Phase 2 of the study, 100% of respondents completed the key informant survey. The respondents formed an equal distribution in all demographic considerations (i.e. geography, service population, administrative experience, and resource expenditures.) The major demographic findings included:

- The perceptions of performance assessment effectiveness declined 10% as library administrative experience increased.
- The perceptions of the scope of reporting the impact of the library on the community increased 24% as library administrative experience increased.
- The perceptions of the negative value of conducting performance assessment increased as administrative experience increased.
- Respondent perceptions of the frequency and uses of conducting performance assessment decreased as library administrative experience increased.

Metrics Used

- The metrics used by a 56% responding library administrators were predominantly metrics that were implemented in the profession before 1990.
- A majority of respondents indicated they used quantitative performance assessment metrics, even when trying to assess and communicate qualitative performance.
- 37% of respondents indicated their governing body required qualitative performance information is communicated to them while 32% of respondents indicated their governing body required no performance

evidence is communicated to them. This indicates a gap between the governing bodies and public libraries in the type and need of performance assessment communication between them.

- Only 20% of respondents indicated they collect and communicate their governing body's required type of performance assessment information to their governing body.
- 63% of respondents indicated that library administrators perceive that library customers require no performance assessment information be communicated to them.
- 53% of respondents indicated they require no performance assessment information from partners or collaborators.
- 0% of respondents reported that they perceive that customers do not need performance assessment information communicated to them in order to demonstrate the service effectiveness of the library.
- A majority of respondents (65%) indicated they use electronic output measures to address either efficiency/effectiveness or service impact performance inquiries.
- A major component of respondents indicated they perceived no reason to change existing performance assessment practices within three years from the time of the survey.

Resources Allocated

- 95% of all respondents indicated they did not want funding agencies to distribute financial resources based on the findings of performance assessment in their libraries.
- 75% of respondents indicated that they allocate between 1-5% of total staff work time to conducting and communicating performance assessment.
- 90% of all respondents committed less than 5% of their annual operating budget to conducting and communicating performance assessment.
- 95% of all respondents indicated that less than 5% of all staff training is related to conducting and communicating performance assessment.

- Florida public library administrators reported \$8 - \$16 million dollars (the equivalent of 25% - 50% of the total state aid funding to public libraries in Florida, totaling \$32 million dollars) was used to conduct performance assessment in 2001-2002. This does not include the value of staff time used in the performance assessment and communication processes.

Knowledge Management Behavior Findings

- 87.5% of respondents did not strongly perceive that the precision of performance assessment provided library administrators with increased credibility with stakeholders.
- 85% of all respondents indicated that conducting or communicating the findings of performance assessment did not create a strong perception of the library to improve service quality.
- A majority of respondents indicated that performing and communicating the results of performance assessment need only be done annually.
- A majority of respondents indicated that conducting performance assessment for evaluating the use of technology need only be done annually or as required.
- 92% of respondents indicated that performance assessment data was communicated to local government officials.
- 76% of respondents indicated that performance assessment data was communicated with some elements of library staff.
- Only 33% of respondents indicated that performance assessment information was communicated to local community groups.
- Only 28% of respondents indicated that performance assessment information was communicated to either local media outlets or partners/collaborators.
- Only 12% of respondents indicated that performance assessment data was communicated to vendors and suppliers.

- A large percentage of respondents report that there is no consensus on the communication, knowledge, and interest of library administrators regarding performance assessment practices and communication behaviors. This perception increased with library administrative experience.
- 77.5% of all respondents reported they do not require annual performance assessment implementation or communication training.
- 83% of respondents indicated that only library internal stakeholders participated in their performance assessment process.
- Respondents indicated erratic use of the results of the performance assessment within the performance assessment process within their libraries and erratic communication of performance assessment information outside of their libraries.
- A vast majority of respondents perceived they created and communicated performance assessment information that was not effectively obtained, used or communicated (i.e. orphaned data, information, and knowledge) to library stakeholders.

Summary

There has been no additional research into library administrators' perceptions and practices of performance assessment and the resulting information communications since 2002. When considering the 2002 survey results, the survey's major findings indicate that Florida public library administrators in 2001-2002 perceived/reported:

- Performance assessment was of limited positive value to their organizations.
- Positive perceptions of performance assessment practices and communications generally decreased as library administrator experience increased.
- Library administrators generally use and value the most the performance assessment practices, metrics, and performance assessment communication styles they first learned as a library administrator more than newer practices, metrics, and communication styles. This seems to indicate that library administrators are

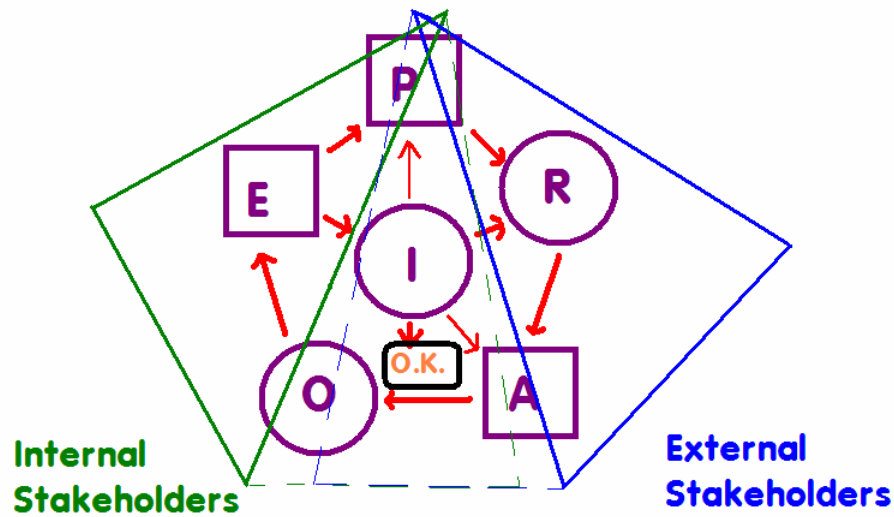
either not learning of new performance assessment methods or do not perceive a benefit from the use of new performance assessment methods.

- A lack of consensus amongst public library administrators regarding the needs, values, impact, and types of performance assessment practices and communication behaviors needed at the time of the survey and in the future.
- Limited use of performance assessment practices or communications to address stakeholder concerns regarding accountability and effectiveness of service.
- Mixed practices in using performance assessment practices or communications to build, maintain, or expand organizational knowledge or organizational learning in their libraries.
- The existing performance assessment and communications practices in 2001-2002 created information that was not effectively used or communicated, creating what the author describes as orphaned data, information and knowledge (i.e. O.K.).
- The performance assessment process and the communication resulting from performance assessment was itself never assessed by library administrators.

Based on the overall findings of the study, the author revised the “Conceptual Knowledge Management Map of Performance Assessment” (Figure 1) to account for the studies findings. The “Revised Conceptual Knowledge Management Map of Performance Assessment” is illustrated in Figure 2 on the next page.

Figure 2 illustrates the study’s findings of reduced and varied participation in the performance assessment practice and communication processes by external and internal stakeholders using the dotted lines to illustrate the degree of possible variation. The amount of performance assessment information utilized within the library has been adjusted to reflect the limited use and exchange of performance assessment information within the performance assessment process and between the library’s stakeholders with varying width, directional arrows. The final revision of the model included the creation of orphaned data, information, and knowledge (i.e. O.K.) and its possible communication to stakeholders.

Revised Conceptual KM Map of Performance Assessment



Design by Larry Nash White. 2006.

Map Legend:

P=Planning & Acquisitions R= Resources A=Activities O=Outputs
E=Evaluation I= Information OK= Orphaned Knowledge

Figure 2: Revised Conceptual Knowledge Management Map of Performance Assessment.



Conclusions and Implications

In short, the survey concluded a lack of a culture of assessment existed in Florida public libraries. Another major conclusion of the study was that while Florida public libraries' roles, customers, services, and delivery methods are evolving, the methods of conducting performance assessment and communicating the results of performance assessment are not evolving. The study yielded substantial evidence of a lack of strategic direction, development, and innovation within the performance assessment practices of Florida's public library administrators in 2001-2002. Finally, the study found a lack of consensus among respondents regarding:

- ✓ The future need, value, impact, or development of conducting performance assessment.
- ✓ The necessary participants and allocated resources to conduct performance assessment.
- ✓ The stakeholders who should receive performance assessment information.
- ✓ The need to change current performance assessment practices.

The major implication of the study is that performance assessment in Florida public libraries is not evolving with their service environments. As there seems to be very little consensus among library administrators regarding the need, value, and future developments within conducting performance assessment, there will be limited improvement, innovation, or evolution in Florida public libraries ability to conduct or communicate performance assessment in the near future.

Another implication is that libraries are utilizing resources to conduct performance assessment and communicate performance assessment information to stakeholders with little perceived impact on service delivery

and stakeholder concern's of effectiveness and accountability. Libraries are creating performance assessment information that frequently is outdated and under-utilized (i.e. orphaned data, information, and knowledge,) while expending valuable resources to maintain and communicate inaccurate and under-utilized information to stakeholders, further complicating the process of demonstrating library service value and effectiveness to stakeholders.

Lastly, the implications of the study are that public library administrators require additional information, education, and leadership on the necessity, options, and innovations available to them regarding effectively conducting and communicating performance assessment in their libraries.



Questions and contacting Dr. White

I would welcome your comments and questions. Additional information regarding the survey can be found at <http://lsit.coe.ecu.edu/white/presentations.htm>. If you need further information regarding the findings of this study, please contact Dr. White.

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