Comparing the effectiveness of alternative investigation methods for library environmental evaluation

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What is the future for academic libraries?

- What are the user needs?
- How can we communicate with our users?
- How can we stay close to our users and let them know that we are there?
Marketing Backbone

Environmental scanning

Customers  Services  Environment

Strategic plan

Actions
Environmental scanning

- How to make that first step?
  - LibQUAL+ survey
    - Association of Research Libraries (ARL)
  - A toolkit for academic and research libraries
    - American Library Association (ALA)
    - Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
  - Focus groups
  - Semi-structured interviews
LibQUAL+ questionnaire

- 22 standardized questions
  - User perception of service quality
  - Access to information
  - "Library as place"
- 5 additional questions (local service)
- Comment box
LibQUAL+ strengths

- An easy way to begin environmental scanning
- The survey is conducted by others
- A standard tool allowing comparison between institutions
LibQUAL+ weaknesses

- Several questions might be ambiguous
- The analysis takes time
- A risk exists: those analysing the data might draw misleading conclusions
Assessment of user satisfaction by the staff

- Observations
  - A rather accurate opinion of user satisfaction
  - Staff more critical of themselves
  - Great opportunity to involve the staff in our marketing project
Marketing@your library (1)

- Strategic marketing for academic and research libraries
  - Guides, slides, examples
  - Several working options
    - Working alone
    - Working with a small leadership team
    - Working with the whole staff
  - U.S. procedure
    - Adapted to our own context
Marketing@your library (2)

- Several activities
  1. Preparing to develop a promotional plan
  2. Carrying out library user research
  3. Adjusting the library strategic plan
  4. Promoting the library
Carrying out library user research

- Who are our customers?
- Who has an influence over the future of our library?
- What do our customers want and need?
Ways to learn about your customers (1)

- Methods that we have already used
  - National or regional surveys (LibQUAL+)
  - Academic department surveys
  - Quick satisfaction questionnaires
  - Library-use analysis
  - Short informal interviews
  - Planned department discussions
  - Surveys completed while students take a particular class
  - Using the library ourselves
  - Observations
Ways to learn about your customers (2)

- Methods that we have never used
  - National survey on quality of libraries
  - Yearly surveys of each customer group
  - Focus groups of selected customer groups
  - Observation of interactions
  - Chat room discussion
  - Suggestion drop boxes or display walls
Achievements made due to ACRL method

- This procedure allowed us to:
  - Ask good questions in a structured way
  - List the different categories of users
  - Identify current needs (satisfied or not satisfied)
  - Consider future needs
  - Stimulate staff involvement and motivation
Validation of the results

Focus groups?
Semi-structured interviews?
Focus group : definition

  - « A carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment »
  - « A special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures »
Focus groups: several advantages

- More data, and faster than individual semi-structured interviews
- A wide range of topics
- Direct interactions between participants and researcher
- Non-verbal responses
- Synergistic interaction
- Participant agreement
Focus groups: several disadvantages

- Difficulty of gathering people together
- Difficulty of controlling the group (leader)
- Bias from the moderator if he/she influences the discussion according to his/her expectations
- Difficulty of drawing general conclusions
Advantages of semi-structured interviews

- Structure of an interview
  - Detailed guide
    - To consider all issues
    - To prevent the discussion from going astray
  - Comparison of answers
Conclusions (1)

- Environmental scanning
  - LibQUAL+
  - ALA and ACRL toolkit
    - Asking for staff opinion
Conclusions (2)

- Validation of data by users
  - Focus groups do not seem appropriate
    - Our objective is not to reach agreement between participants
    - The approach is time-consuming
    - It is necessary to be trained or to seek the collaboration of an expert
  - Semi-structured interviews
Thank you for your attention