

# Study on Managing Strategy of Library Services

## The case of Zhejiang University Library

Qian jiaping, Lu dongming, Ma jindi and Ye hangqing

*Zhejiang University libraries, Zhejiang University (ZJU), Hangzhou, China*

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The study aims to identify strategies to affirm some new areas to develop library business with high return value on investment (in other words, to expansive library value), which are normally ignored, as well as to evaluate and demonstrate the true accomplishments and impacts of the libraries on education and research of the university.

**Design/methodology/approach** –Methodologies are based on a series of surveys of library service utilization and the users perception of the library services value to create and design service modes for different user communities in one specific case study library (Library of Zhejiang University, China ) in order to describe the Methodologies better.

**Findings** –Obtaining the data of the users' cognition on the library services and the perception of its effects applying contingent valuation method, as well as the feature information of the ideal library service, this paper revealed the library service value and discovered weakness to find out the clue for improvement. Positive outcomes included this project is one part of the strategy to build up and exhibit an active image of the library as well as one of the actions to setup a close relationship with various communities of the home university.

**Practical implications** –With the methods provided by the paper, we establish a library services management system including dual functions. Firstly, it can tap and stimulate our objective users' potential information services needs. Secondly, it will help to improve library resources usage (including human resources).

**Originality/value** – This case study offers an operational strategy in a convincing way to prove the impacts of library services. At the same time, the study also gives the chances to further enhance the effectiveness of library service.

**Keywords** Library services management, Contingent valuation method, Academic libraries, Communication

**Paper type** Case study

### Introduction

With the increasing concern of university management, it is of great significance to the development of university library to prove the accomplishments of library service and contribution as a supporting role in teaching, learning and research in a convincing way (Missingham, 2005). In the area, many foreign counterparts have made useful exploration from theories to practices. But in terms of successful management of library services, perhaps it is more important to “accelerate relevance (Wilson, 2008)” especially when library services met with a cold acceptance. Facing the different user communities, how does the university library comprehend their exact information

needs and their information-seeking behavior patterns? How could the library design and provide services with real value for users? Obviously, it is necessary to effectively detect whether the services library provided meet the needs of our target users communities, identify the gap between the provided services and our users' real needs, as well as analyzing the causes. They are extremely worthiness to improve the effectiveness of library service. Moreover, it will be of more positive significance for the library management if the value of library services can be affirmed based on users' perception at the same time.

From the summer of 2009, Zhejiang University Library carried out the interior reorganization with the guiding principle as improve service and integrate back into the mainstream. Reorganization aimed at strengthening the service capacity, planning and decision-making abilities. The library conducted a series of new explorations after the reorganization. Presented in this paper are the series activities in obtaining the images of the users utilizing academic resources as well as creating an effective services system and achievements until now.

### **Surveys: aim at the cognition and utilization of library services of the target user communities and their perception of the value of library services**

Understanding the users' requirements and integrate into the mainstream of teaching and research work, the first step we should take is to communicate and interact with the target user communities for deeper understanding:

- (1) the present situation of the objective users communities who utilize the library resources and services (including patterns of information-seeking behavior)
- (2) the users perception and effects of the library utilization. This can confirm the influence of library resources and services for teaching and research work.
- (3) Identifying the parts that users think are of value, which be ignored by the library and become the weak points in the library service. The main performance is the users' difficulties and the unmet demand (expectations) in the use of library resources.

To do this, Zhejiang University Library created a project group specially to collect the data and information focusing on these objectives by survey. After preliminary preparation, including many interviews with familiar teachers and students, learning from the overseas successful assessment cases, the project group finalized the contents with three sections above. The contents were further broken down into 10 aspects.

As follow, the 10 questions and the mode of enquiry are described in detail.

- (1) The status quo of the library resources and services: based on listing all the general services available in the library, the respondents were asked to confirm the services they had used before and had benefited from, also they was demanded to confirm which service they had never used but they thought it might be useful or would be used later.
- (2) The effect of the library services (qualitative option data)
- (3) User self-evaluation on the level of understanding of the library resources and services.
- (4) The evaluation on the library electronic resources collection and completeness and the quality of related services.
- (5) The evaluation on the Library Web site functionality and convenience of.
- (6) The experience investigation on using electronic resources including whether the difficulties encountered.
- (7) The choice of habits and preferences on ways to Consulting and advisory services.

(8) The confirmation on the value of the library including the value of information resources, value of the librarians and the value as a workplace.

(9) The authorization of the value of library existing services: if there is no school library, what kind of ways would the users be gotten the information they? And what kind of compensation could be taken to in order to make up for this inconvenience and loss?

(10) Proneness on the library value space and the expanding ways: asking the respondents to list the features and conditions that would attract them to utilize the library resources and services, the expectations and the most valuable services.

Finally, the project team designed two sets of questionnaires for the faculty and students separately. Each questionnaire only had 17 questions around these 10 areas in two A4 size paper. But, the amount of information it contains was obviously very rich.

From September to December 2009, the project team organized survey questionnaires for the teachers and students and, as well as interviewed with key users. Considering the representation, the project team used two kinds of methods: on site and online. The project team put out the questionnaires in students' dormitory, teachers' office and lab as well as in reading rooms and the circulation center of the library. The project team sent the questionnaires to teachers by email under Random Sampling the email addresses which were provided by the University Information Center.

Before the survey, all the surveyors, including the library training staff and assistant students, were given a short-term training in order to carry out the necessary communication and make the correct interpretation.

The survey also includes further interviews. The project team members contacted with some of the teachers who had given their own e-mail address and telephone number on the questionnaire for further feedback on library resources and services.

### **Statistics and Data Analysis of the Survey Results**

The project team developed an online survey respondents system with the help from IT librarians. The system had automatic statistical functions and could be able to process real-time monitoring survey and the Statistics. It could automatically generate, export the EXCEL statistical results and output statistical tables. The processing of on site questionnaire feedback was in the same platform. The system effectively relieved the workload of the data input, and therefore, data processing become relatively easily.

The on site questionnaires released starting in mid-November 2009. The project team had recovered 793 valid questionnaires including online respondents. In the returned valid questionnaires, all of the respondents had made their choice for the provision of 16 questions. No blank option for the entire question questionnaire respondents was found. The last question was an open-ended question. The surveyor was asked to describe the most important characteristics of their ideal library or list the most valuable information services. More than 42.86% of teachers' group and up to 48.85% of students' group provided their descriptions and expressed their views.

The survey results provide the exact data in 10 areas of the effect of library services which the library needed eagerly. We found a number of interesting phenomena in period of data analysis. The exact data returned from the user helped us to know well about these phenomena unprecedented though we knew the existence of this phenomenon more or less.

We have noted some disparity when we were analyzing the feedback data about the question

of “Zhejiang University Library General Service project and outcome evaluation”. For example, there is a gap between the return results from the students’ group about the library regular services and the results from the same group in the question about the services “I have participated in” and “I have benefited from”. Does this gap mean that this part of the reader's use of the service without receiving a satisfactory solution or maybe they think the process made themselves waste of time?

Similarly, for the same question which we designed in a slightly different from faculty and students, we note the answer statistics of "I have used services " are less than 20% on three questions including " Obtain the original full text files by Document Delivery Service ", " SDI or thematic documentation services "and "Attend weekly lectures on library resources in a database, retrieval of documents and how to use of management tools.” On the other hand, the statistics are more than 50% on "While it is not used, but it is useful or would be used later ". Does this mean that some of the readers had not used this service because of they didn’t know the library had these related services? At least they are aware of these kinds of library services by completing the questionnaires. We have the choice to do the tracking interviews according to contact information the teacher provide voluntarily when they return the questionnaire. The results confirmed our speculation. This prompts us to re-examine the library on the way to promote these service projects.

Another example, the survey results about the teachers’ and students’ behavior of seeking for help when they in problems of information searching:

(1) The majority (81.90%) of teachers need help;

(2) Whether you are a student or a teacher, when he or she got in trouble with searching the document or information in library, the most popular mode of requests for assistance is "to the classmates or colleagues for advice". The ratio of teachers-students is 45.71%, respectively, 40.55%. The second one is "to the Internet to find answers". The ratio of teachers-students is 38.1%, respectively, 36.19%. Select the mode of “to ask a librarian” rank 3rd. The ratio of teachers-students is 33.3%, respectively, 34.44%. Show that their behavior orientations are highly consistent when the teachers and the students have problems in library services. All of them are inclined to ask for help to the people nearby or familiar.

### **Feedback Based on Service Decision and Management**

Analyzing the data obtained via questionnaires and tracing investigations, we are aware of the need, behavior trend and expectation about the ideal service from the user group (staff and students) information much more than before. Based on the cognition, particularly the understanding of the information searching behavior of the staff and students, we found that in current service there are much things needed to be improve or worthwhile to breakthrough. Fairly speaking, these data tell us the key points of the next step.

For instances, the questionnaire and the following tracing investigation showed that low rates of some services of staff and students are closely related to their lack of knowledge about those services so that the users have high expectation. We can presume that the improvement to raise users’ knowledge about these services will promote more users to utilize these services. Accordingly, what we are considering now is how to design the service marketing strategy of the service items mentioned above again, and enhance the intensity of the propagation and popularization. Seeking and realizing the resolve plan become one of the keys for the service plan and management.

When they meet problems or difficulties while searching or utilizing academic literature resources, their first choice is to ask for help from people nearby or familiar to for most staff. The corresponding countermeasure we make is to educate one or two information specialists for each academic team or student research group while the library appoints one experienced librarian from the consult department of the library as a tutor. When the members of the teams meet problem about the information search, they can ask the information specialists first. It will spread out from a point to a big area to extend the library services. This plan is now experimentally carried out by the academic library directors, and the responses form the colleges and departments are very positive.

### **Positive outcomes**

The Zhejiang University has explored the new service management model and our efforts yield initial results. Firstly, the result of the survey indicated that most of the users comprehend the virtual-reality-based enquiry, in which Contingent valuation method is applied. They estimated their own loss under the conditions of virtual existence (the library services are suspended) to fill up the form with the minimum compensating value as the willingness-to-accept, and some of them also put forward some additional comments. That is to say, we gained the specific facts and statistics relates to the current library service value from our users. Significantly, the facts and statistics are clearly different from previous simple calculation for export of service, such as the borrowings. The data (valuation) come from the users' own experience which can specify library's influence and effectiveness more directly. What's more, the return on investment for the library as the public organization can be calculated. We will reveal the data in internal and external library after systemizing the data carefully and we are proud of that.

Secondly, we gained the data through questionnaire investigation and interview way. Through surveying for behavior modes and habits of academic document information resources in users' utilization, we know them more clear and Comprehensive than before. Undoubtedly, that is what we need. Besides, it has been a breakthrough for us in dealing with the library service. The methods not only help us to have the right goals to achieve, but also inspire us more initiative in work. Some librarians expressed that "it made my frozen mind come alive."

Thirdly, applying the users feedback-based service management methods means library is actually regard the users as the cooperative partners. Thus, we can absorb the users' wisdom to improve the library service. In fact, the information specialist training program for the academic teams is the result of our librarians entering into the colleges or departments and communicating with the faculty. According to the users' attitude and respond in the process of survey, most of them are delighted to answer the questionnaire or accept the interviews, and lots of them think this as "the chance to express". Moreover, the results also proved that it is the effective way to setup a close relationship with various communities in the university that librarians take the proper way to get into communicating with the teachers and students at an appropriate time. During the interview and discuss with the teachers, we witness quite a few of them has moved from reject the library services and the librarians to show the surprise at the service quality the library offered then put forward his personalized service request. As the witnesses, we heard they expressed their feelings more than once: the library and its services are no longer the same in their impression in the past.

### **Conclusion**

This particular work is focused on the investigation and the data analysis of the library services usage condition of the target user communities, as well as their perception of the services value library offered. The main purpose is to identify strategies for the improvement of services and its outcome. The paper describes the methods of questionnaire designing, in which the contingent valuation method is applied, and the ways of investigating, useful data and information mining. Just as the American counterparts say, "Assessment is not a luxury, but a necessity for all academic libraries (Gibbons, 2008)". To carry out the assessment activities means to spend a lot of time and energy which exceed our expectation. However, the benefit we get from it is worth all the efforts we put in. The result of the case study turns out that the libraries can be evaluated and demonstrated its true accomplishments and impacts on education and research of the university based on the return on investment by investigating users' perception of library service value. Besides, this work provided an operational method to compare the usage condition of the library offered services and the users' perception for its effects, as well as their expectation, and so as to identify the space to expansive library value. The paper reveals this work will help the library management to planning and decision-making by providing the target user communities preference on information-seeking and consultation. All these work will contribute to the success of the library management.

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Corresponding author

Qian jiaping can be contacted at: [jpqian@lib.zju.edu.cn](mailto:jpqian@lib.zju.edu.cn)