CHAPTER 5

OPINION SURVEY
1. OBJECTIVE
TO APPLY SYSTEMS APPROACH TO THE DESIGN AND ANALYSIS OF AN INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR LIBRARY MANAGERS - DEVELOPMENT OF MODELS AND TESTING

2. LITERATURE SEARCH
MEASURE OF EFFECTIVENESS, I.S. WITH O.R. APPLICATION

3. GENESIS OF GROUPING ITEMS PARAMETER

4. CONCEPT OF EFFECTIVENESS
BEHAVIOURAL EQUATION

5. OPINION SURVEY AMONG LIBRARY MANAGERS AND ACADEMICIANS

SYSTEM-FLOW MODULAR CHART (CHAPTERS 1 TO 5)
§ 1. ADJUDICATION OF THE BEHAVIOURAL EQUATION.

The behavioural form, which is the basis for the envisaged information system, is the offshoot of the systems-approach to the design analysis of the information system and the various thought processes reported in the literature. Despite the academic importance of this behavioural equation, it is necessary to adjudicate its efficacy in terms of implementation on real system by eliciting the opinions of library scientists (managers as well as academicians) on the parameters of library effectiveness. This kind of 'discussion with professionals' is a good aid to design process (Section 1.2) since the profound contributions of the professionals by way of intuition and experience are not available in any recorded form. A system, that has back-up by academic as well as practical aspects, would be a salutary system for implementation.

The best way of discussing with several professionals is through objective questionnaires which will fetch unambiguous and direct answers. Hence a list of parameters were sent, in the form of a questionnaire to several library professionals, with a request to identify or recognise the possible indicators of effectiveness. It was also requested to rank those parameters that
had been so recognised. To avoid the bandwagon effect, the modality of answering the questionnaire was suggested to them that they could express their viewpoints candidly and that their anonymity would be preserved. The questionnaire has been so improvised in a way that boolean type of answers (YES/NO) are expected. This would ensure higher response rate so that the analysis would become more meaningful. A copy of the questionnaire has been provided in APPENDIX: 5A.

Since the major impetus stems from the identity crisis of proper parameters of effectiveness which could be amenable to quantification, eighteen items were included in the questionnaire. They are described subsequently.

5.1.1. PLAUSIBILITY OF CHOICE OF PARAMETERS.

1. Library Mission: Library mission (or objective or goal) plays a vital role in the effectiveness analysis since the overall goals of a library are usually defined in terms of the organization’s purpose and the major tasks it is expected to perform. The various levels of service and the resulting functions are also affected by the mission (10). Because of these directives this item has been included in the list of (possible) effecti-
veness parameters. So far, however, no criteria have been devised which can satisfactorily measure how effectively a library is carrying out its mission. Probably, this is because of the high subjectivity and relativity involved which will not facilitate any quantified form.

2. Physical Location:- The geographic location of the library in relation to users is known to affect the amount of use made of a library since the users will be tempted to use the library if it is located nearer to their dwelling places (or places of work), more often than if it is situated far away. In fact, Metcalf (7) has advocated that a library should be in a location that can attract and serve the greatest possible number of people. But, while this can be considered as a possibility, it does not mean that people are using the library only because it is in a commutable distance.

3. Budget Allocated :- Budget is the bedrock on which the edifice of a library service is built. But budget determination has long been a problem. The budget can be based on the type and extent of services provided. Program budgeting or performance budgeting (6) analyses the costs of a service. This provides the management an insight as to where funds are going. The effectiveness of the budgets and the manner of their evaluation have
been investigated by research divisions and by libraries which conduct surveys or make comparisons with other libraries (5). Could, then, the budget be considered as a parameter of effectiveness is a point to be evaluated.

4. Size of library Staff: The size of the library staff may have a say in the 'contributions to the effectiveness' since more services can be offered to users if enough personnel is employed. Ashworth (2) comments with data from ASLIB survey, that the size of the staff should bear some relationship to the types of functions performed, the number of users served and extent of services. However, the performance of library staff cannot easily be evaluated and hence this item has been included for judging its importance as a parameter of effectiveness.

5. Size of Potential users: The size of potential users (i.e., those who have registered as members) of a library might indicate its popularity among the users community. But, it may not be true that all registered as members are regularly using the library. How many are using the library will be more indicative of a library's effectiveness than how many are enrolled. However, this item is included to elicit the opinions of professionals.
6. **Type of Equipment:** The type of equipment needed, such as shelves, working tables, typewriters, etc., is usually selected in accordance with the needs of the library at the time. Other equipment, such as microfilm readers, audio-visual aids, copying machines, computers, etc., are also widely used in libraries as they save space and time in running a library operation. They may as well attract users to use the library frequently. But how far these equipment influence the effectiveness of the library, is a moot point and no **evaluative** criteria have yet been devised to measure their overall effectiveness and efficiency.

7. **Library Content:** The composition and extent of library collections should be determined by the mission of the organization and the type of clientele served. Library collections have been evaluated chiefly by:

   i) Judgements by scholars and subject specialists.
   
   ii) Measuring expenditures on collections over a period of time.
   
   iii) Analysing the basis of use.
   
   iv) Studying circulation figures etc.,

   However, there is no single method by which the effectiveness of the collection and hence the library, has
been devised. Because of the fact that each library's needs and objectives are different, it is, generally, very difficult to assess the book and periodical collections (3).

The measures (1) to (v) listed above are included in the questionnaire to evaluate their importance.

7 (i). Library contents Judged by Subject specialists:

This is concerned with the quality of the library book collection. A special library could be deeply influenced by this factor but, generally, this has unpredictable effect on library effectiveness since the collection accrued depends on the changing interests of the patrons. It is not uncommon in libraries that the books-in-demand at one time would not at all be used at a different period of time. Evaluation of the collection of a library by subject specialists has very well been termed as 'impressionistic' by Hirsch (4). Though he recommends this as one of the effectiveness measures, the fact remains that any analysis based on the quality of collection would be highly subjective and time bound.

7 (ii). Library Contents as Measured by The Expenditure Over Them:- This item has also been recommended as one of the measures by Hirsch (4). He has suggested this measure as an useful secondary method to find under-and
over-allocations relating the expenditures to the size of collection. Unlike the budget (overall), this expenditure concerns with the fundamental resources of the library which are of direct interest to users. In this context, it is worthwhile to recall that the 'price' of a book is considered as some kind of indicator of the quality of the book. The expenditure on publications is the sum total of the 'prices'. So, it might be considered as a possible parameter of effectiveness.

7(iii). Library Contents By use (i.e., Resources Utilization): To what extent the contents (collections) of a library are utilized could be a better indicator of the quality of the collections. Greater the use of publications, larger will be the use of the library by the patrons. This provides objective measurement but could only be interpreted qualitatively considering the library objectives and the value of circulation of titles in view of objectives.

7(iv). Book/Membership Ratio :- Several standards and recommendations exist suggesting the number of books per member. But, this index would reflect the theoretical possibility of how optimally an user can utilize the books on an average. How far this could serve as a parameter of effectiveness is to be evaluated from the responses of the professionals.
7(v): **Number of Items (Publications) Circulated**:

Circulation phenomena is the result of several other activities of a library and could be visualised as one of the outputs (end product) of a library. Study of circulation figures would indicate the usefulness of the book collection, service level etc., and could turn out to be an important parameter of 'self-evaluation'.

The quantitative aspects of a library are, normally, measured by circulation, acquisition and cataloging statistics and the information about these items might be utilised in planning further expansion of the library, its services and acquisitions (8). ALA's handbook on statistics (1) also stresses more or less the same idea.

On the same lines, inter-library loans could also be considered as part of the vital statistics since by inter-library loan we only extend the users' domain.

8. **Size of Library Collection** :- A good and responsive collection of publications certainly attracts more users to the library and thereby increases its effectiveness. Larger the responsive collection, greater is the use of the library.
9. **Number of Reference Services Made**: Reference service is one of the effective user services. As discussed in an earlier chapter (Sec. 3.2) reference service can be considered as part of the circulation activity since reference might lead to borrowing ultimately.

10. **Amenities in the Library like Seating, Lighting Arrangements, Ventilation etc.**: The amenities provided in the library for the convenience of the patrons might contribute to the phenomena of attracting users to a particular library in preference to others.

11. **Library Standards/Handbooks**: Library standards are useful in aiding the management to analyse the costs of services and to plan for future needs (9). The standards/handbooks provide measures to evaluate certain aspects of a library quantitatively, but the main difficulty is that libraries vary in their objectives and hence no single standard can be universally accepted or applied. Moreover these standards are basically deficient because they do not measure how efficiently library operations are performed and fail to provide a basis for meaningful evaluation of library performance. In view of the above it has become necessary to clarify with the library scientists through the questionnaire about the inclusion of standards/handbooks in the analysis of 'measures of effectiveness'.
12. **Exposure Hours**: The hours during which patrons are allowed to use the library (i.e., working hours of Library) might have some effect on the total effectiveness since users may conveniently choose their time of visit if the duration of working hours is long enough. On the other hand, if the duration and the timings are such that they clash with the patrons' office-hours or class-room hours, the patrons postpone their visits to some convenient time. Whether the increase in the effectiveness and the increase in the working hours are proportionate substantially or not is a moot point to be decided.

13. **Frequency of the users' visits to the library**: The patrons will be visiting the library quite often to use its resources, only, if there is complete gratification. So the frequency of users visits to the library could be an indicator of the degree of effectiveness of the library. The visits could also be for purposes other than using the publications, and such number of visits would normally be very small comparatively, which could hence, be considered as insignificant.

### 5.2. THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND THE RESPONSES

In thisendeavour (designing the questionnaire), it has been attempted to be more comprehensive in listing
the possible parameters of effectiveness so that the answers would be straight and unambiguous. The copies of questionnaire were sent along with reply-paid envelopes to ensure a good response. One hundred and twenty questionnaires were sent to various managers and academicians in the library field; of which seventy two opinions, resulting in a high percentage of returns were received. All the responses have been tabulated and the analysis is presented, in the ensuing chapter.

5.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY.

Despite the theoretical or academic importance of the behavioural equation, it is necessary to adjudicate its efficacy in terms of implementation on real systems by eliciting the opinions of the practicing library managers and academicians on the parameters of library effectiveness. Hence, an objective type of questionnaire, incorporating the items based on literature abstraction and on the items included in the behavioural equation proposed, has been circulated to various library managers and academicians in India. The response has been quite encouraging and very informative.
REFERENCES


