2018-9

Begin Again

Holt Zaugg
Brigham Young University, holt_zaugg@byu.edu

Title: Begin Again

Abstract: One of the hallmarks of any assessment or evaluation is that it serves as an agent for improved change. However, not all changes are positive. In some cases, improvements in one area of library service delivery have negative effects in other areas of service delivery. In addition to this, no assessment is ever perfectly planned nor conducted. Each of these factors contributes to the need for library assessments to be periodically repeated.

This chapter begins with a description of an assessment planning guide and journal to chronicle how the assessment was planned and unfolded. From here it discusses factors of repeating assessment in terms of planning, conducting, and reporting repeat assessments. The chapter will focus on two repeat assessments as examples. One discusses the reshelving of checked-out books to determine if changed procedures following an employee change resulted in improved service delivery. The other discusses the examination of open-ended comments from several administrations of the LibQUAL+ survey. The chapter concludes with establishment of a reassessment schedule for library assessments.

Keywords: assessment planning, evaluation planning, repeated assessments, planning guide

Project focus: organizational practices (i.e., strategic planning); assessment concepts and/or management

Results made or will make case for: more funding, improvements in services, improvements in spaces, improvements in collections, proof of library impact and value, a strategic plan or process, how money or resources may be directed

Data needed: The data in the first of two examples was quantitative in that the assessment randomly removed books from library stacks and then tracked the time it took for each book to be reshelved. The second of two examples uses data collected from multiple administrations of the LibQUAL+ survey. This example focuses on the coding and tracking of positive and negative comments in six key categories. The tracking enables librarians to determine areas which that have improved over the years and the degree to which they have improved. It also highlights areas where continued emphasis is needed for improvement.

Methodology: quantitative, mixed method, evaluation or survey

Project duration: The reshelving assessment took place within 5 years. The the LibQUAL+ survey assessment is an ongoing assessment spanning 15 years.

Tool(s) utilized: The reshelving study used a great deal of manpower as books had to be pulled from stacks throughout the library and key information recorded so they could be tracked. Examination of book locations was tracked daily until all books were returned. No high tech was really needed, just a lot of record keeping.

The LibQUAL+ survey requires IRB approval, but there is very little adjustment as we have applied for virtually the same IRB over seven administrations of the survey. The survey requires complicated survey administration as participants are rerouted from the data collection survey to a survey to register for incentive prizes to protect anonymity. Identifying the initial categories took significant effort and was supported by a sociology class studying qualitative research methods. Since the protocols have been established for the categories, coding is fairly straightforward.

Cost estimate: $2,000–$5,000

Type of institution: college—private

Institution enrollment: 30,000+

Highest level of education: doctoral

Chapter 8

Begin Again

Holt Zaugg

Context

Successful assessments do not just happen. Each assessment needs careful planning at several levels that consider a variety of assessment elements. Some of the elements include the evaluators and their roles, rigor, institutional review board approval, methods, potentially a pilot study, the scope of the project, which people connect to the project, and dissemination of findings.

A key element often neglected in planning an assessment is when to repeat the assessment.[1] Reassessments enable those connected to the project or organization to determine how the organization changed following the initial assessment and subsequent changes.[2] Reassessments allow evaluators to re-examine program attributes of the initial assessment, to add methods to assess new program components or to subtract assessment procedures for discontinued or irrelevant program components. As the program evolves and changes, so do the subsequent assessments.

Using a dozen library assessments, including follow-up assessment, four components were identified to assist in the decision of if and when to conduct a reassessment. The four components are complexity, cost, interactions, and reporting. The components often interconnect with each other. For example, increasing or decreasing the complexity of the reassessment will influence the cost. Reporting overlaps with interactions as findings from one assessment may influence individuals to change practices. While each core component is connected, each is discussed independently here.

Complexity

The component of complexity considers anything that increases the difficulty of conducting the reassessment. It includes the number of methods used to conduct the

assessment as well as the complexity of data collection and analysis. Often evaluators will combine data collection methods to gain greater insights or for triangulation of findings. Each method used to collect the data may be rather simple, in and of itself, but combining several methods increases the complexity of an assessment.

Similarly, a reassessment may use only one or two methods, but each method may be difficult to administer or to analyze. For example, in a wayfinding study in an academic library, participants were asked to find twelve people, places, or things. Each trip began at the library entrance, and participants found a pathway to the person, place, or thing. As participants moved through their library pathway, they were followed by two researchers who video recorded the participant. This single data collection method had considerable complexity in gaining needed approvals, ensuring cameras were working properly and had sufficient memory to record, and ensuring the safety of all involved—try following a participant running up stairs while recording!

Once collected, the analysis required researchers to view video recordings several times, with each viewing taking the full time of the actual pathway experience. This one data collection method had considerable complexity in both data collection and analysis.[3]

In reassessments, there is always the temptation to add new data collection methods or to increase the complexity of previous data collection methods. While the merits of doing so need to be considered with each reassessment project, evaluators need to ask what the gains and costs are of the increased complexity. It is always important to document all assessment procedures and any method changes made during the assessment. This documentation typically occurs in an assessment journal entry. It provides a context for why methods were used or changed and is helpful for reassessment decisions.

Cost

Costs are both tangible and intangible. There is a cost in terms of time and money associated with each assessment. Someone needs to conduct the study, whether that is full-time employees, students as a class assignment, or volunteers. While some costs may be lessened by using volunteers or student classes studying research methods, there is still a cost associated with finding and training the volunteers or teaching the research methods class.[4] Typically, these costs are covered in the form of employee salaries, but not all libraries have individuals hired to conduct assessments.

In addition, some assessments need specialized equipment. This equipment may range from cameras and recorders to rooms dedicated to conducting focus groups. It also includes data analysis software, such as transcription and statistical software. There may be travel costs associated with dissemination.

In addition to the monetary cost, there is also the cost of time. Each reassessment will take time. With each subsequent reassessment, the time needed to complete the assessment may diminish. For example, after the initial administration of the LibQUAL+ survey, subsequent IRB applications should need only minor adjustments instead of a total rewrite. With repeated administrations, best practices for data collection are

better known. Learning from past assessments enables researchers to avoid previous errors. However, the reverse may also happen as evaluators reuse a method with a new group of participants who respond in new or different ways from the first assessment participants. Adding new data collection methods may also influence previously used methods.

Evaluators should consider and respect participant time. There needs to be consideration of participant time in the assessment and their activities outside of the assessment. Nobody wants to participate in an assessment while writing a major paper or preparing for an exam. Matching the assessment time with participant activities outside of the assessment eases the strain of a reassessment. Each of these costs influences when a reassessment can occur, especially in a time of budget restrictions and emerging projects that need assessment.

Interactions

Interactions include both people and things. Every assessment includes some aspect of people interacting with other people, an object, the surrounding environment or some combination of these three interactions. The interplay of person-to-person or person-to-object interactions within a specified environment needs to be considered.[5] For example, in designing new independent study carrels, the object of the assessment was the new study carrel and its features. However, these features would be meaningless outside of the context of students actually studying in a prototype of the new carrels in a study location in the library.

Similarly, a study on communication patterns within a library involves very few physical things, and it has greater emphasis on library employee interactions. While several modalities of communication are considered (face-to-face, email, social media, phone, etc.), the communication modalities only facilitate the communication interaction and the environment (friendly or antagonistic) in which the communication occurs. The actual intensity of the communication is the focus and of primary importance. A reassessment would focus on key elements of interest identified in the initial assessment, namely, the type of interaction, the participants involved in the interaction, and the environment surrounding the interactions. It would also consider how interactions between employees have changed between administrations. It would seek to answer questions regarding new policy and procedure changes.

Personnel interactions also play a role in deciding when to repeat assessments. Employee personalities may influence how processes happen and where services are located within a library. As people retire or leave a position, changes will occur. The change of personnel provides an opportunity to assess just how changes, implemented by the new employee, will affect processes. A similar situation occurs for new technology introduced into the library. The new technology provides an opportunity to improve services in the library. Imagine how cataloging has changed, from typing out card catalogues to using computers to catalogue items for discovery.

Changes in interactions signal an opportunity to reassess, but, prior to the reassessment, baseline data needs to be collected. Having the baseline data allows the

library to determine if service delivery has improved; if changes have made things just different, but not necessarily better; or if changes made things worse. With a change in technology and personnel, there also needs to be a sufficient time following the change so those providing and using the services in new ways can adjust to the new processes. Either way, the change signals the opportunity for a reassessment.

Reporting

Reporting findings has a historical and a personal side. Historically, reassessments considered the background of previous assessments and how they inform strategic planning and decision-making in the library. They consider economic changes when library funding moves from being flush with cash to having to deal with funding cutbacks.

On the personal side, reassessments consider the atmosphere of assessment within the library. There is a vast difference between libraries that encourage and foster an atmosphere of assessment for planning and decision-making and those that deride assessments as interfering with the way things are done. The level of interest in the study may also come from those initiating the study. Whether it be university leadership, library leadership, or a supervisor requesting the assessment, strong interest in the study propels the reassessment of services forward. It is obvious that the broader the base of support or the higher the level of administrative interest in the reassessment, the faster it will move forward. This level of interest in the findings will not only provide support for conducting the reassessment, but it will also help efforts to share the findings and implement recommendations. It is clear that those conducting the reassessment (as with all assessments) need to frame the findings in ways that the stakeholders can understand.[6]

While these four components will influence when reassessments should occur, they will not carry the same weight with each reassessment. While each reassessment considers and influences other assessments, ultimately each assessment stands on its own. The context in which each reassessment occurs guides the degree to which each of the components will influence when the reassessment should be done.

Two Reassessments

With this in mind, I examine two reassessments in our library to better understand how these components influence when reassessments occurred. The first assessment is a localized reassessment examining a specific library service. It examines how quickly books were put back on library shelves once patrons returned them to the library. The second reassessment examines the factors for repeated administrations of a large, multi-library assessment (LibQUAL+ survey). It examines how open-ended comments from the LibQUAL+ survey were used to inform library services. I briefly describe each study with emphasis on the factors that determined the reassessment. In subsequent sections, I discuss how the study results were used to inform strategic planning and service delivery decisions.

Book Reshelving

The stacks management department is responsible for reshelving all materials returned to the library. It has a two-tiered system. Employees bring books to a central area for sorting into defined areas within the library. From there, they place books on sorting shelves near the book's location in the library. Originally, once there were sufficient books on the sorting stacks, student employees reshelved the books in their proper location in the library stacks. An initial assessment, initiated by library leadership, determined the length of time it took from when a book was returned to the library until it was reshelved in its proper place.

After the stacks manager retired and a new stacks manager was in place for almost a year, we conducted a reassessment to determine if changes initiated by the new stacks manager improved reshelving efforts. For example, the new manager had books reshelved as soon as possible once they were put on the sorting shelves instead of waiting for a sufficient number of books to be put on the sorting shelves. In the second assessment, we repeated all methods used in the first but added an additional step. When we took the books off shelves, instead of checking all of them out and returning them, we took half of the books and put them on the Return Books Here shelving. This method simulated those patrons who take a book off of the shelf and use it within the library without checking it out. This additional method allowed us determine any differences in how long it took books to be reshelved whether they were checked out and returned or used within the library.

Key reassessment components included a strong interest by library leaders to know if the service had improved and by how much. The study used a single data collection method. While we used only one method, it was quite complex and time-consuming. We chose random books from the shelves, but the areas in the library where books were chosen were on a specific schedule to ensure each library area was covered. We also randomized the location of where we placed books on the Return Books Here shelving. When we took books off of the shelf, we recorded the title, author, and call number of each book along with the date and time (morning or afternoon) each book was taken and where in the library it was returned. Once we started taking the books, we also began checking both the sorting shelves and the book's appropriate location twice a day, typically in conjunction with taking new books from the shelf.

The initial study used only one person, but the reassessment involved two full-time non-student employees and two part-time student employees to take and track books daily over a three-week period. This collaboration allowed for a greater number of books to be pulled and tracked over a shorter period of time. It also lessened the impact on any one employee of doing all of the data collection. A key factor in the reassessment was the interest by a library administrator and the new stacks manager. Other considerations included the complexity of the data collection and analysis. Most issues were resolved in the first assessment, so procedures for the second assessment went much smoother. There was a significant time commitment as each book had to be tracked back to its original location, but we expected anomalies and were prepared to deal with them. For example, at times books became "lost" as, upon return, they were pulled for repairs

or other maintenance before being sent to stacks management. We needed additional tracking time to locate the path these books followed back to their shelf, but we were aware of where we could look so overall tracking time was lessened. There was a large time commitment, but with the extra staffing, the data collection and analysis went much smoother. Results from both studies were not broadly disseminated as the assessment focused on a specific library service. We informed all stakeholders of the results.

LibQUAL+ Survey Open-Ended Comments

The LibQUAL+ survey is a large-scale service perception survey administered by the Association of Research Libraries upon request by each library. In the last fifteen years, more than 1,300 libraries in thirty-three countries have used the survey to gauge patron perception of user experience. Our library administers the LibQUAL+ survey every two years in either the winter semester (January–April) or the fall semester (September–December). While most of the survey is selected choice, there is an option for an open-ended comment section on the survey. The reassessment described here focuses only on the responses to the open-ended questions.

Following several administrations, we had a substantial number of open-ended responses for each year of administration, but we had not fully coded them. We partnered with a Sociology 404 class studying advanced qualitative assessment methods to code the comments from each year of the LibQUAL+ survey administration. Working in teams and using standardized coding practices, student researchers from the class developed six broad categories used to code each comment. The categories include staff, building, on-site resources, web-based resources, communications, and policies. An "other" category was used for unique comments that did not fit within a defined category. Once placed in a category, each comment was coded as being positive, negative, or both. Because of the length and content of comments, some comments were split and placed into more than one category.

As with the small-scale study, many of the assessment issues were resolved within the first sorting of open-ended comments, so coding subsequent comments went both more smoothly and faster. The survey is well known and used by all in the library, so there was full support, from administration to front-line employees, for repeating the study. The survey's administration was straightforward, as administration practices (e.g., IRB application, sampling) were more consistent and standardized with each administration. Following the development of categories and the initial coding, two student employees coded each comment. When there was as a disagreement, they discussed the difference to reach consensus on where each comment should be placed. Non-student Assessment Office employees verified all codings. While this took a bit of time, the initial coding guide and examples lessened the time needed. The library administration paid the cost for the right to use the survey and for employee wages to administer, analyze, and report results.

There was broad support for the findings. The two-year time frame between administrations allowed the library time to identify needed changes and to implement new policies, practices, or services to improve patron comments. The time between

reassessments was sufficient to determine if a change was meaningful. We reported results library-wide at the library town meeting and in the faculty meeting. We also put a final report on a wiki available to all library employees.

Communicating Results and Impact

The results of each assessment were communicated quite differently. It is standard practice to post all final reports of any assessment on the library's private wiki page (available to anyone within the library, but shared only upon request with those outside the library). Such was the case with both of these assessments, but initial dissemination efforts were quite different.

The reshelving study was very localized and specific to one department in the library. We shared the reassessment findings only with the stacks manager and the senior library administrator. In both cases, the stakeholders had a direct interest and responsibility to account for the efficacy of the service. The findings were largely positive, but identified key areas within the library and with overall practices that had and could make a difference. For example, the previous stacks manager had waited until there were a substantial number of books on the sorting shelves before putting each book back in its proper place. The new stacks manager did not wait for a sufficient number of books to be on the sorting shelves and restacked them at a much faster rate. The reassessment indicated that the reshelving change saved time. The reassessment also indicated areas within the library where reshelving times were still substantially slower than other areas for reshelving. This information helped the stacks manager target specific training to help student employees.

We took a more open approach to discussing the coding of open-ended responses from the LibQUAL+ survey. Using the trends and patterns discovered in the initial analysis, we openly presented on our findings from the reassessment and how they added to the trends and patterns in each category. Figures 8.1–8.3 show examples of three category trends from the initial and subsequent reassessments. The staff category trends (see figure 8.1) indicate mostly positive trends in patron comments but also show that the gap between positive and negative comments increased. The site resource category trends (see figure 8.2) indicates a pattern where most patron comments were initially negative and fewer positive, but, due to changes in services and materials, the gap was closed and now is exhibiting a similar pattern to the staff category where the gap between positive and negative comments is widening in a good way. Finally, the communication category trends (figure 8.3), indicates that, initially, virtually all patron comments were negative and any efforts to improve communication between the library and its patrons were largely ineffective. In each case, the initial assessment (2003 to 2011) provided strong trend data. The subsequent readministrations (2013 and 2015) continued the trends initially identified by the student researchers from the Sociology 404 Qualitative Methods class.

We reported findings from each category to senior library administration and related library committees. Following these presentations, we made a summary report to all library employees. This practice differed because of the history, familiarity, and

respect the survey carried within the library. The library had already had multiple administrations of the survey. In addition to the quantitative analyses of the selected response questions, we had made other attempts at analyzing the open-ended responses. The student researchers' process was a simpler and a clearer method for coding. It was also easier for librarians to understand. As librarians were already familiar with other reports from the LibQUAL+ survey, the addition of a new report was easier to accept. The respect for previous findings transferred to the new findings.
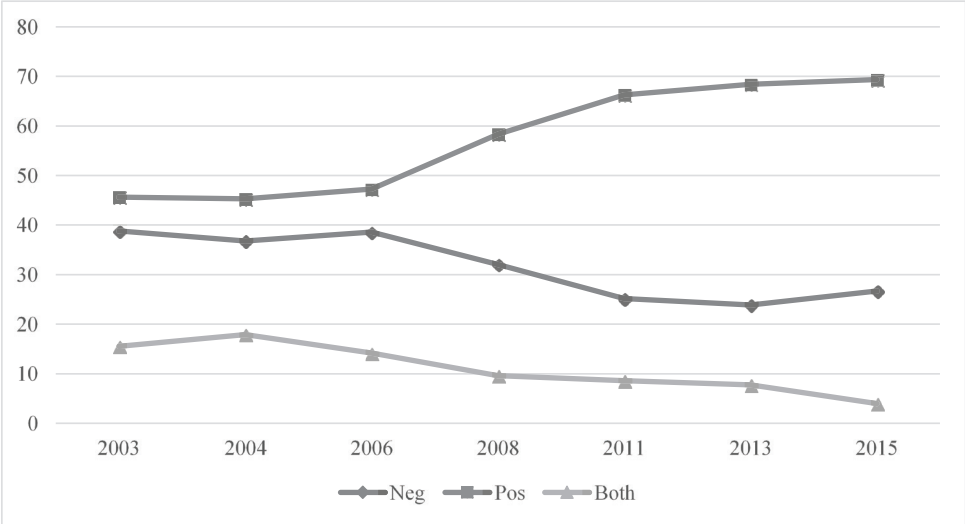
Figure 8.1
Positive and negative open-ended comment trends in the staff category from subsequent readministrations of the LibQUAL+ survey.
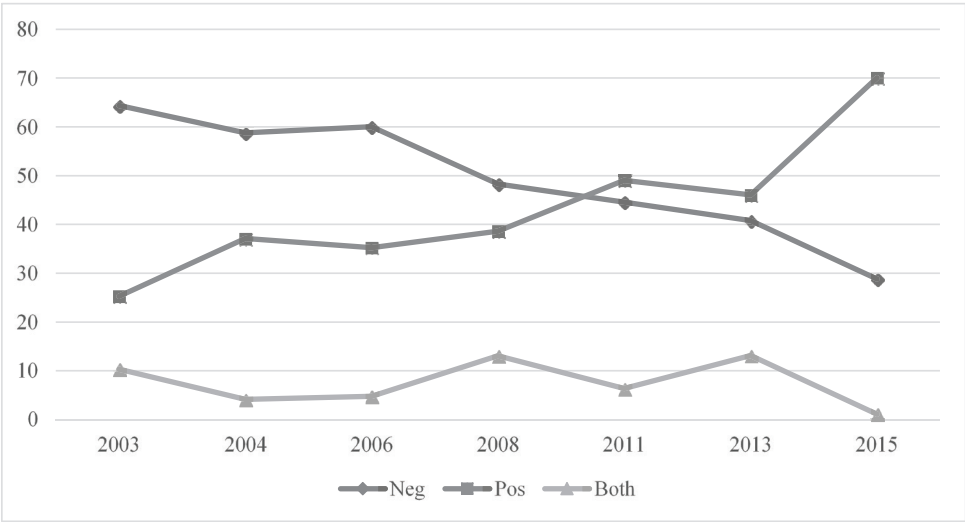
Figure 8.2
Positive and negative open-ended comment trends in the site resource category from subsequent readministrations of the LibQUAL+ survey.
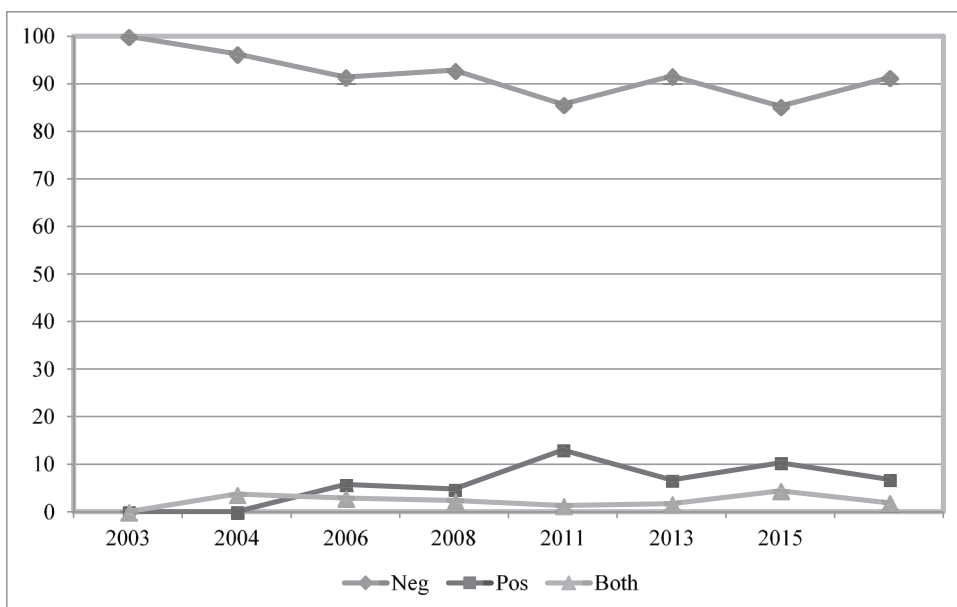
Figure 8.3
Positive and negative open-ended comment trends in the communications category from subsequent re-administrations of the LibQUAL+ survey.

Leveraging the Findings

Regardless of the size of the various assessments, the stakeholders connected to each assessment continue to use the reassessment data to improve service delivery. The stacks manager used the findings to refine service delivery and to adjust her training practices to meet the specific needs of student employees. In areas of the library that were lagging behind in reshelving time, she has examined the area for unique features of the collections that may slow reshelving. She also used the data to modify student employee training. She uses the reassessment to focus in on and hone her management practices.

In this case, the change in personnel resulted in the change of how books were reshelved, thus triggering the need to repeat the assessment. The stacks manager was greatly interested in examining her services and process, which lent support to the study. She has since submitted a proposal to alter the way returned books are processed. If the library accepts this proposal, then, after implementation, another reassessment would be triggered. If the proposal is not accepted, then we will conduct another reassessment about four years after the last one so all current student employees have left the university. The assessment will examine how well the new student employees are working on the process. If the manager leaves her position for another before this time, we will conduct a reassessment.

In the case of the LibQUAL+ survey, the trends and patterns substantiate changes to library policy and service delivery meant to address specific issues. The results in

figures 8.1 and 8.2 help to substantiate that these efforts were successful. They offer encouragement to continue with improvement practices to continue these trends.

The communication category trends shown in figure 8.3 indicate that efforts to improve communication between the library and its patrons have been largely ineffective. While disappointing, the patterns provide evidence that what we were doing needs to change. As a result, new advertising and promotion initiatives are underway to increase the communication between the library and its patrons. The LibQUAL+ survey is also unique as its repetition every two years is part of expected library assessment practices.

Leveraging the findings of a reassessment, whether large or small, rests on the willingness of others (employees and library leaders) to act on assessment findings. Those who seek out the findings from initial and repeated assessments foster a culture of assessment that is enabling and empowering to initiate good change.

Reflection

Each of the components discussed helps to determine when an assessment should be repeated. While evaluators may understand the need to plan for repeated assessments, not everyone associated with the initial assessment does. Timing and presentation of this need become critical features in working with others to determine when a reassessment should happen. Those individuals who embrace and use assessment typically have no problem determining a reassessment at the outset of the initial assessment. Others who are more skeptical of assessments may need to be approached about a reassessment after the initial assessment is reported. The reporting allows evaluators to indicate what was and was not working well, but it also provides an opportunity to indicate what needs further study or repeated study. As skeptical users come to understand and use findings and see improvement in their service delivery, they become stronger supporters of initial and repeated assessments.

However, people are people! Not all library employees are able or willing to accept findings that indicate that change needs to occur, especially when the change involves them doing something in a different way. In these cases, it is critical to determine exactly what type of information or questions they want answered. Using their input and questions to cater the reassessment specifically to their needs makes the assessment findings more palatable. It also promotes the need for reassessment. Helping them to understand the thinking and processes used to design an assessment and determine when a reassessment should occur engages them in the process and encourages support of the evaluation process.

Notes

1. Larry Nash White, *Library Performance and Service Competition* (Oxford: Chandros, 2008), 99–106.
2. Martin Fojt, ed., "Strategies for Service Quality II," special issue, *Library Review* 44, no. 5 (1995): 13–15; Martin Fojt, "Capturing the Customer's Voice," in "Strategies for Service Quality II," special issue, ed. Martin Fojt, *Library Review* 44, no. 5 (1995): 22–23; Jeremy Garskof, Jill Morris, Tracie

Ballock, and Scott Anderson, "Towards the Collective Collection: Lessons Learned from PALCI's DDA Pilot Projects and Next Steps," Collaborative Librarianship 8, no. 2 (2016): 84–98.

3. Holt Zaugg, Curtis Child, Dalton Bennett, Jace Brown, Melissa Alcaraz, Alexander Allred, Nathaniel Andrus, et al., "Comparing Library Wayfinding among Novices and Experts," *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 17, no. 1 (2016): 70–82.

4. Liesbeth Baartman, Judith Gulikers, and Asha Dijkstra, "Factors Influencing Assessment Quality in Higher Vocational Education," Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 38, no. 8 (2013): 978–97; Holt Zaugg and Curtis Child, "Collaborating with Nonlibrary Faculty for Assessment and Improved Instruction," *Journal of Library Administration* 56, no. 7 (2016): 823–44.

5. Martin Fojt, "Can a Company Be Both Low-Cost and Service-Oriented?" in "Strategies for Service Quality II," special issue, ed. Martin Fojt, *Library Review* 44, no. 5 (1995): 18-19; Diana Pereira, Maria Assunção Flores, and Laila Niklasson, "Assessment Revisited: A Review of Research in Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education," *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 41, no. 7 (2016): 1008–32.

6. Martin Fort, "The Kingdom of the Customer," in "Strategies for Service Quality II," special issue, ed. Martin Fojt, *Library Review* 44, no. 5 (1995): 41–42; Joseph R Matthews, Library Assessment in Higher Education (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007), 119–140.

Bibliography

Baartman, Liesbeth, Judith Gulikers, and Asha Dijkstra. "Factors Influencing Assessment Quality in Higher Vocational Education." *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 38, no. 8 (2013): 978–97.

Fojt, Martin. "Can a Company Be Both Low-Cost and Service-Oriented?" In "Strategies for Service Quality II," edited by Martin Fojt, (1995): 18–19.

———. "Capturing the Customer's Voice." In "Strategies for Service Quality II," edited by Martin Fojt, (1995): 22–23.

———. "The Kingdom of the Customer." In "Strategies for Service Quality II," edited by Martin Fojt, (1995): 41–42.

Fojt, Martin, ed. "Strategies for Service Quality II," special issue. *Library Review* 44, no. 5 (1995).

Garskof, Jeremy, Jill Morris, Tracie Ballock, and Scott Anderson. "Towards the Collective Collection: Lessons Learned from PALCI's DDA Pilot Projects and Next Steps." *Collaborative Librarianship* 8, no. 2 (2016): 84–98.

Matthews, Joseph R. *Library Assessment in Higher Education.* Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007.

Pereira, Diana, Maria Assunção Flores, and Laila Niklasson. "Assessment Revisited: A Review of Research in Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education." *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 41, no. 7 (2016): 1008–32.

White, Larry Nash. *Library Performance and Service Competition: Developing Strategic Responses.* Oxford: Chandros, 2008.

Zaugg, Holt, and Curtis Child. "Collaborating with Nonlibrary Faculty for Assessment and Improved Instruction." *Journal of Library Administration* 56, no. 7 (2016): 823–44.

Zaugg, Holt, Curtis Child, Dalton Bennett, Jace Brown, Melissa Alcaraz, Alexander Allred, Nathaniel Andrus, et al. "Comparing Library Wayfinding among Novices and Experts." *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 17, no. 1 (2016): 70–82.

Section 1