Managing library processes – collecting data and providing tailored services to end-users

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Abstract

This paper describes the effects of the European higher education quality policy on the quality management of the Kuopio University Library, Finland. It describes how a small university library has to focus on providing tailored services for its patrons, and how these services have to be based on evidence gathered from the users or the usage of the Library's services. The paper also describes how auditing and documentation of the quality system was carried out in the Library.

Introduction

During the past decade the user environment of libraries and library materials has changed radically. The amount of publications has increased exponentially, and they are disseminated mainly in digital manner. In this era of personal computers and information networks, libraries are moving from their own physical premises directly to the customers' desks and workrooms. This change of the environment poses new challenges to the library service

providers (see e.g. Saarti 2005 and Parker & Nitse & Flowers 2005). It is essential to assess how to acquire the best possible resources for our patrons and support the development of their skills and knowledge of information literacy, as well as, providing resources of the best quality to support the health care professionals' daily work, and in that way to ensure the competitiveness of the research done on campus.

The University of Kuopio, Kuopio, Finland has an international reputation in the fields of health, environment and well-being, with particular strengths in biotechnology, life sciences and biomedicine.

Kuopio University Hospital is one of the five university hospitals in Finland, which all have regional responsibilities (see figure 1.) as providers of secondary health care. Altogether there are 20 hospital districts in Finland. The primary responsibility for local health services rests with the local authorities, as they maintain the community health services.
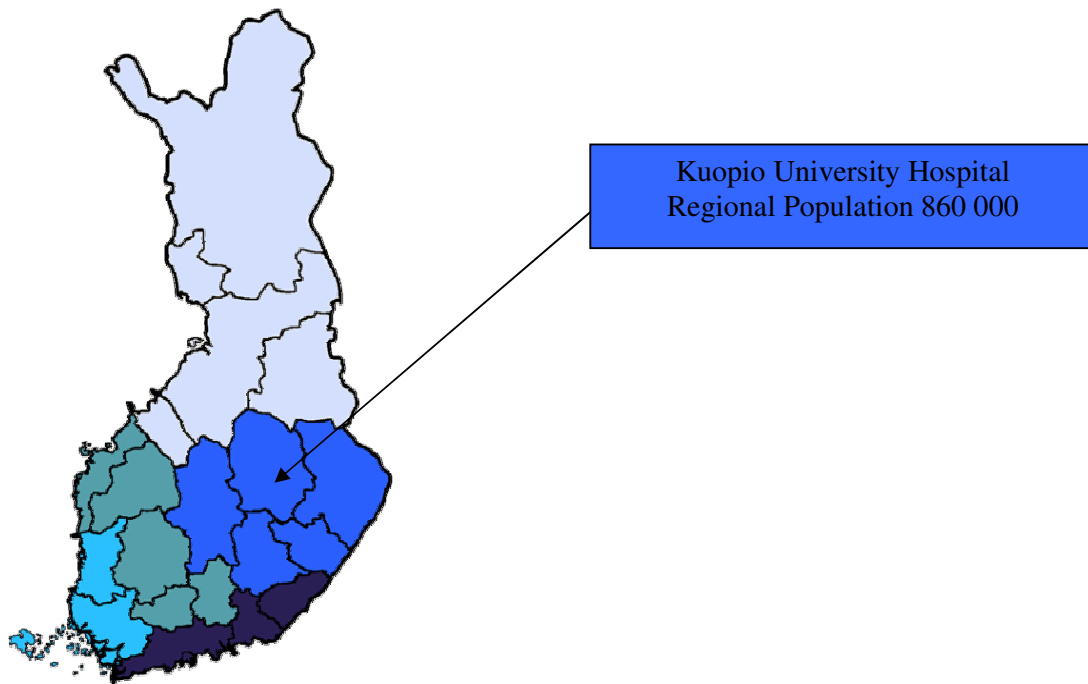
Kuopio University Hospital
Regional Population 860 000

Figure 1 : Hospital districts in Finland

Kuopio University Hospital has special responsibilities as a university hospital; it offers specialized services to the health care districts in the region and specialized nursing services to people in the local health care district. Nationally, it specializes in the treatment of severe burns, severe obesity, bone cancer and soft tissue sarcoma, pediatric glaucoma surgery, diagnostics and treatment of severe epilepsy. It is a teaching hospital for medical, nursing science and other health care students and also for students of chemistry, physics, pharmacy and nutrition, and it also provides training facilities for the health care districts within its area of special responsibility. The main areas of research are chronic diseases and their molecular background, prevention and cure, neurosciences, imaging, musculoskeletal disorders, and other clinical research. Kuopio University Hospital has a quality system based on SFS-EN ISO 9001:2000 standard.

Kuopio University Library is an academic library open to all. Its library collections and expertise are focused on health sciences, pharmacy, biosciences, environmental sciences, information technology, business, and social sciences. The annual budget of the Library is about 2,5 million euros. There are 37 staff members in the Library. The collections consist of approx. 160 000 monographs, 900 printed journals (subscriptions), 8000 electronic journals, 16000 electronic books, and 5500 audiovisual and other materials.

Kuopio University Hospital Medical Library is one of the four units of Kuopio University Library. It is a library for both the hospital and the university offering medical and nursing resources to the clinicians and other hospital staff as well as to the researchers and students.

The Finnish national higher education policy has taken quality certification as one of the aims for higher education units and their quality assurance, accordingly to the so called Bologna process in building European Higher

Education Area (EHEA) (see Communiqué… 2003; Ministry of Education Finland 2003. A similar development has been going on also in other parts of the world, see e.g. Tam 2000). This paper is a case study on what implications the European policies and quality management approach will have on the development of the service processes in the Library. The paper emphasizes the bottom-up building procedure of a process management system, where patrons and officials represent a crucial component of the management and development process. The empirical part is based on a survey conducted in 2004.

User surveys and other information sources

We have used user surveys to gather data to improve the Library's services and intend to continue this on an annual basis. Another important source of information is the user statistics that are gathered not only from the library's own library system database but also from different databases. This has been important in the changing environment, where the end-users less and less frequently physically enter the Library's premises.

Both statistics and user surveys (see Ovaska & Saarti 2004) indicate that the library use is divided half and half to the traditional use of printed material and library premises and to the modern use of digital materials via web. The former is mainly the way that the students and hospital staff use the library and the latter can be viewed as the researchers' way of using library. Librarians and information specialists act in this as service providers and/or guides and tutors to the end-users.

In our survey (total n=439) we could note that for students, the Kuopio University Library represented the most important place to access information (72 %). Databases and other libraries were important to half of them, also the copying of the materials was common (important to 39 %). Departmental

libraries, other students and buying books were not popular among the students. (See figure 2.)

Figure 2 : Most used materials by user groups
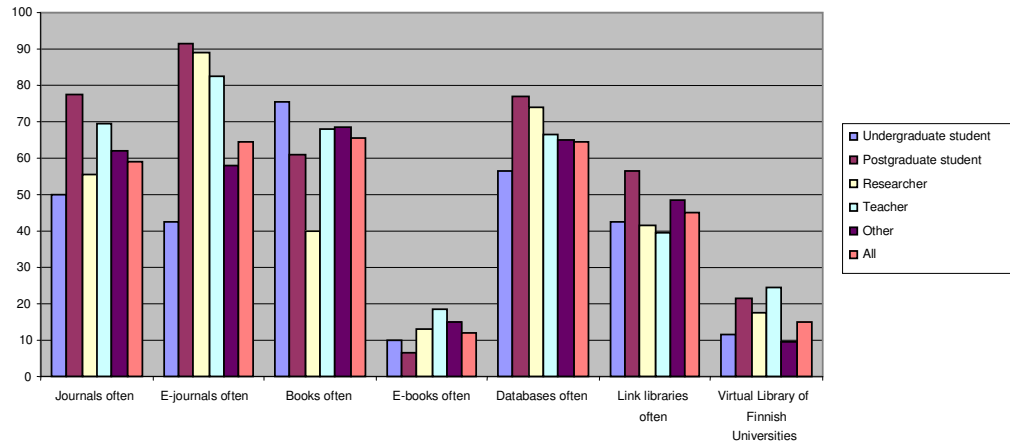
For researchers and postgraduate students the databases were the most important of all information resources (88 %). The University Library (60 %) and colleagues (48 %) were also important. Buying, department libraries and other libraries were not so important to them.

Almost all (89 %) answers from the staff of Kuopio University Hospital indicated that the University Library or the Hospital Library (89 %) was the most important source of information. Databases came close with 82 %.

Audition

Auditing is an important part of the process and quality management, especially in order to prepare for the possible certification of one's quality management system. The University of Kuopio has decided to certify its quality system within this decade. The Library has been involved in this process from its beginning within the Kuopio University and we have been

audited internally, in which members of the staff of the University's other departments were involved as auditors. The Library considers that it important to take part in these processes within the University, and in this we have two aims: to improve our own processes and to prove to our University's decision-makers that library and information services are core-processes within the University.

In order to ensure a successful auditing it is important that the staff does not see it as an inspection but as a possibility to improve the services. Inspection is usually based on jurisdiction and has strict sanctions. Auditing on the other hand is voluntary and focuses on the quality of services and products provided for the patrons.

Our library's quality team was responsible for the auditing. The key factor was that all persons involved were highly motivated for this job. We also focused on our daily, basic routines and functions. These have been analyzed as processes, documented with written instructions for central functions. Setting deadlines for the quality work, e.g. date for the auditing, made us focus our efforts: we knew that this system was also for our patrons and also outsiders were interested in it. This motivated us to upgrade our quality documentation.

The first auditing round and its results were satisfactory. Firstly, we enjoyed good feedback from the auditors who are also our patrons: it became quite evident that we must use the same language as our patrons when marketing our services. On the other hand we, the library staff, reached an important goal as our efforts and achievements in the quality management were both measured and discussed with the auditors. This led us to set new goals.

Digital environment for library staff and end-users

The foundation of our process management has been to provide a quality system that is useful for both the patrons and the staff. Too often the result of

a quality system is a quality manual, totally separate from the actual environment where the work is done, i.e. not put into action. We have tried to integrate our quality manual inside our web pages – both Internet and intranet – so that all quality documentation is a part of the actual service processes and their provision to our patrons. It has also been important that each member of the library's staff has been involved in the creation of this system.

Initially, a decision was made that the documents concerning the Library's internal decisions and manuals/guidelines for the staff should be published in the Library's intranet. All manuals, guidelines and documents intented for our patrons are published in the Library's Internet pages. Together they form the Library's quality manual.

The library's core processes were incorporated into the main quality scheme that includes hyperlinks to different services in order to give one concise view to library's core functions. Each of the library's core processes was analyzed with this logic. The main quality scheme (see figure 3) is an effort to include all the library's core processes within one diagram. The main quality scheme is based on the hypothesis that a patron's basic demand is fulfilled when he/she obtains the document required to fulfil her/his current information need.

The green dot in the diagram leads the patron to the internet resources provided by the Library (e.g. manuals, databases, digital documents) and red dot links to the Library's intranet where members of the staff can find documentation that is only for internal use (e.g. minutes of meetings, manuals, check-lists). The same procedure was used in the renovation of the Library's internet-pages (http://www.uku.fi/kirjasto/english/) where main processes create the threads to be followed by the patron when searching for appropriate library resources.
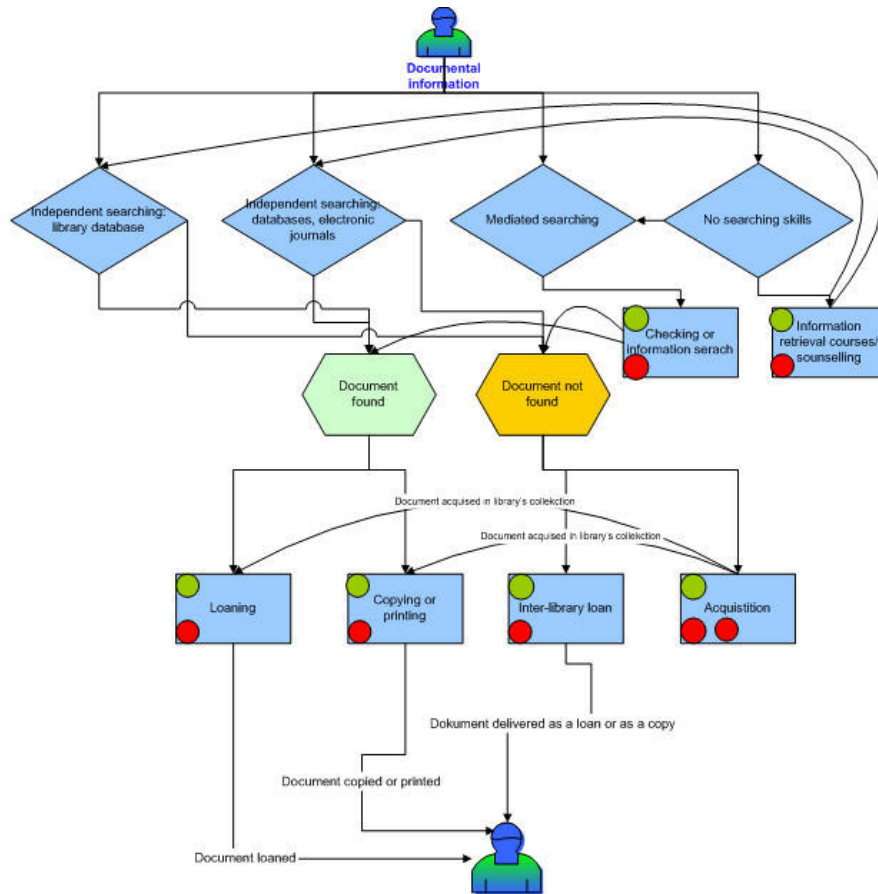
Figure 3: The Main Quality Scheme of Kuopio University Library

Conclusions

The creation of a web-based system for providing our library and information services as well as managing processes behind these services has worked quite well in our environment where provision of digital documents is important for our patrons and our University's fields of expertise. On the other hand it has provided the Library's staff with a tool to discuss and develop our Library's services. It has also taught us to base our services and actions on realities,

not on assumptions: a fact that will become more and more important in the future, when the ever-growing needs of our demanding patrons must be met with limited resources.

The change from considering quality systems as being somehow distinct from the actual work done in an organization is crucial for the successful creation of a quality system. Therefore it is important, that the library's processes quality are kept focused. It helps staff members to appreciate the usefulness of the documentation done in the quality management system. It also assists in the development of those processes at the level of the whole organization.

We also noted that this emphasis on the whole organizations level brought us closer to the University's and University Hospital's core activities. It was easier to strategically and tactically redefine the Library's mission within the structures of learning and research being conducted on campus. Thus there also is a significant role for advertising and publicizing one's services in the quality work. This is especially important for the Library which constantly needs to justify its allocation of financial resources.

There is still much to be done. Our quality system needs continuous updating and maintenance. We would also benefit from benchmarking at the national as well as at the international level. We believe that as long as quality management helps us to do our work better, we can and should be committed to this process.

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