How would users prioritize library services in a Hierarchy of Library Needs?

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Background

The Hierarchy of Library User Needs is a theoretical model based on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. We hypothesized that library services and resources could be placed on this hierarchy according to how fundamental they are to other parts of the library, the degree to which users are affected by them, and the scope of users in the community who access them. This model was intended to help libraries dedicate resources to services in proportion with their placement in the hierarchy and thereby their importance to users.

To test this model, we piloted a study where we provided users with a selected list of library services and asked them how often they use the services and how important each service is to them.

Formula

We created a formula to obtain a numerical value which allowed us to place each of the items into the hierarchy.

Scopes

Survey Q1

Weighted average:
1. Never
2. Seldom
3. Sometimes
4. Often

Degree

Survey Q2

Average ranking with weighting applied in reverse (Rank 1/20 gets a weight of 20, 2/20 gets a weight of 19)

Fundamentality

Researcher expertise

1 when few other elements are dependent
2 when many other elements are dependent

Results

Surprises

Items marked with an asterisk * surprised us. We thought they would all appear lower in the hierarchy. The exception was engagement opportunities which we thought would belong in the Community as Library tier.

No Community as Library?

It makes sense that no items fall into the Community as Library tier since it is the least fundamental, has a narrow scope of participating users, and a low degree of direct impact on users’ lives.

How are items placed in the hierarchy?

Scope

What proportion of our user population accesses each element frequently?

Degree

How important is an element to those who use it? How much would they be affected if it were gone?

Fundamentality

Which elements depend on which? A computer lab requires a physical building to exist.

Methodology

31 respondents were recruited through a library user research listserv to complete an online questionnaire. They were asked about their use of the twenty library resources and services placed in the triangle on the right.

Survey questions

Q1 Scope: How often do you use each of the following? (Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often)
Q2 Degree: Rank the following in order of most to least important to you. (1-20)

Next Steps

• Incorporate user and expert feedback into model.
• Test with larger dataset.

The Hierarchy of Library User Needs

Community as Library

Library as Incubator

Library as Connector

Library as Convenience

Library as Minimum Viable Product

Community-led practices and projects that allow the boundary between community and library to become permeable.

The things libraries can do to help users achieve prestige and success in their chosen fields.

The ways libraries help users build relationships with each other and feel part of their peer group.

The simple things that make the library a convenient institution to rely on.

The building blocks of what makes a library a library.

Library as Minimum Viable Product

Systematic review services
Rare books and manuscripts
Family Study Space*
3D printers
Digital research services
Wellness spaces
Engagement opportunities*
Research help
Copiers and scanners*
Systematic review services
24-hour study space*
Workshops
Technology accessory loans*
Study space
Online books and articles
Cafe
Computers and printers
Print books
Wifi

Library as connector

The things libraries can do to help users achieve prestige and success in their chosen fields.

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The building blocks of what makes a library a library.

National library

Regional library

Community as library

Library as Incubator

Library as Connector

Library as Convenience

Library as Minimum Viable Product

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