



# Theory, research and practice in library management: new column for *Library Management*

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Management*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to introduce the new “Theory, research and practice in library management” column in *Library Management*.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The reasons for the introduction of the new column are outlined, and its aims and scope are detailed.

**Findings** – Given the move towards evidence-based management in practice, the column should assist the library manager to navigate through the contradictory and uncertain world within which library users and library managers function.

**Originality/value** – It is anticipated that the new column will be of particular interest to library professionals.

**Keywords** Libraries, Library management, Research, Working practices, Evidence-based practice

**Paper type** Viewpoint

The time would seem to be right for *Library Management* to publish a regular column exploring the inter-relationship between theory, research and practice. The world is becoming more complex, with major changes in most aspects of work and domestic life. Producing a complete listing of the causes for these changes would take many pages, but they include radically different economic models, globalisation, information and communication technology (ICT) developments, climate change, conflict, emphasis on the individual to take responsibility, and human migration. Libraries do not exist in a vacuum and they have to acknowledge and adapt to the outside environment. Indeed, as far back as 1997 one commentator observed that:

... libraries [...] are changing faster than their respective parent institutions. Essentially everything in and around the library is changing: services, technologies, organizational constructs, ownership and access policies, values and most of the rest (Riggs, 1997, p. 39).

This was reinforced in a recent book on library management which was based on the premise that library managers need to accept change and to work with staff to assist in the acceptance of change to transform the library within which they work (Massis, 2003).

Making correct decisions and identifying the appropriate strategic directions for library managers are not easy or straightforward. The purpose of the column will be to select a key management issue and examine it from theoretical, research and practice perspectives. Each column will commence by identifying practices and examples about how the chosen theme is currently being manifested in library management. This will be followed by an investigation of what broad management theories are saying to inform the issue. Wherever possible, relevant research will be used to provide direction and insight. The columns will conclude with an overview of the inter-relationship and messages from the “theory, research and practice” mix.



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The underpinning rationale for the column is the value to be gained from moving to the evidence-based practice management model. This model has emerged in the past couple of years as having major advantages. Pfeffer and Sutton (2006a, p. 35) state that evidence-based management is about:

... a perspective for travelling through organisational life, a way of thinking about what you and your company know and what you do not know, what is working and is not, and what to try next.

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The same commentators propose that evidence-based management is an antidote to their previous ways managers have solved problems using obsolete knowledge, unproven traditions, patterns gained from experience and methods that they happen by chance to be skilled in (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006b). The simple basis of evidence-based management is to make decisions that are informed by current theories and practices that work.

This move to evidence-based management has occurred at the same time as the emergence of evidence-based librarianship trend (Booth and Brice, 2004). International conferences, workshops and academic journals have all been produced to support evidence-based librarianship. The health sector is acknowledged in both management and librarianship as the originator of the concepts of evidence-based practice (EBP), where it became established in the 1990s. Sackett (1996) provided a definition that has stood the test of time well. It is:

... the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best practice in making decision [...] [it] means integrating individual expertise with the best available evidence.

The intention of the column is therefore to inform specific library management practices by illuminating them with relevant theoretical and research perspectives. Hopefully the column will assist the library manager navigate through the contradictory and uncertain world within which our library users and ourselves function.

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