Self-Assessment in Librarianship: An Exploratory Study of Current Practices and Future Possibilities

Ania Dymarz

Assistant Head, Fraser Library & Liaison Librarian for Criminology and Business

Simon Fraser University

adymarz@sfu.ca

Andrea Cameron

Teaching & Learning Librarian

Concordia University

andrea.cameron@concordia.ca

Abstract

The authors of this qualitative study set out to investigate self-assessment practices within the library profession. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of nine librarians coming from a range of library settings and possessing a diversity of library experience. Interviews were then transcribed and coded in NVIVO to identify emergent themes. This paper details some of the results of that study, highlighting motivations, limitations, and strategies with regard to self-assessment. The findings present a summary of a range of approaches to the practice of assessment as reported by the interviewees. One area of possible growth for our profession, as highlighted by the findings, is in the development of peer networks as a support for the individual practice of self-assessment. While the results of this small case study cannot be generalized, the authors hope these preliminary findings can open up the conversation around self-assessment both for individual librarians and for those librarians and managers working to shape their workplace culture.

Keywords

self-assessment, reflective practice, qualitative interviews, professional practice

Background

In investigating the personal self-assessment practices of librarians, this research sets out to open the discussion around how we as librarians define, realize, and reflect on our work within the library profession. As a preliminary step in that discussion, our paper examines existing practices and asks librarians with various roles and in various settings what practices and support they believe might be helpful to them with regard to self-assessment. While this research does not set out to provide a set of guidelines or best practices relevant to all institutions, we highlight some key findings that may help individual librarians to reflect on their own self-assessment practices, and library administrators to consider how to support a culture of self-assessment at their own institutions.

For this paper we considered self-assessment broadly, as a cyclic and iterative practice of assessing one's own work through a range of strategies both formal and informal, private and shared. The definition used in our interviews is included in our Literature Review and in Appendix A. Strongly linked to self-assessment is the concept of reflective practice, the activity of exploring a completed project or experience through writing, and considering how to apply what was learned to future practice. For the purpose of this paper, we consider reflective practice to be one of the most valuable frameworks for self-assessment, but recognize that self-assessment can involve a range of additional individual and group activities. We chose a relatively broad definition of self-assessment so that we could recognize the diversity of practices taking place across our profession.

Literature Review

By and large the literature relevant to the topic of self-assessment within libraries comes from the education domain within our field, that is, from teacher-librarians. Self-assessment in teacher-librarianship is championed as a learning tool for students to improve their research skills, and for librarians to develop effective and innovative programs. Donham writes about how teacher-librarians can support the development of self-assessment practices for lifelong learners. While she stops short of talking about self-assessment for the teacher-librarians themselves, inherent to her discussion about lifelong learning is the assumption that these practices learned in student life need to continue on in professional life. We borrowed Donham's definition of self-assessment for the purposes of this study: "self-assessment is a means of developing internal standards and comparing performance to those standards [...] It requires looking in three directions: back at completed work, down at present work to determine next steps, and forward to the future to apply to the next learning opportunity what has been learned" (15).

In Weber we see an example of a school librarian actively using NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) Guidelines of Professional Practice for Librarians, to assess her own work. Weber worked with the Guidelines to develop a self-assessment form that acknowledged the diverse responsibilities of a professional librarian, and then worked with her supervisor to incorporate the form into her annual review process (56). She explains that the new form transformed the "routine inconvenience" of previous annual assessments into a "thought-provoking" and "refreshing process" (57).

Fredrick offers us an example of a school librarian using the idea of self-assessment towards the practice of program assessment in school libraries. For Fredrick assessment is not limited to the domain of students, but is also the job of librarians. Self-assessment for librarians means not just the assessment of one's instruction or management style, but also assessment of how this work relates to library programs more generally. Fredrick offers a step-by-step process "for assisting school librarians as they undertake the process of self-assessment in tandem with program assessment" (23). Nassar and Kalmon have gone even further by providing a detailed self-assessment guide for schools, libraries, and individual librarians, supplying assessment

rubrics for evaluating a number of areas spanning from knowledge and skills to instructional and professional leadership (15-20).

In addition to the evidence we see from teacher-librarianship, there is some literature exploring self-assessment in librarianship more generally. Dority devotes an entire chapter of her book *Rethinking Information Work: A Career Guide for Librarians & Other Information Professionals*, to the idea of self-knowledge, championing self-assessment as a tool for career decisions, providing a checklist guide for professionals, and highlighting a range of assessment resources including a short list of books, articles, and assessment tools such as Myers-Briggs & Keirsey.com (19-37).

On the related topic of reflective practice, some uptake can be seen in the library literature. While in some parts of the world reflective practice is actively entering the discourse in librarianship¹, in North America, the conversation around reflective practice seems to be fairly limited. In her systematic review of reflective practice in the library literature, Grant identified that there is a dearth of published literature on the topic; her systematic review identifies only 13 instances from 1969-2003 (157). While the above summary highlights some more recent instances where self-assessment and reflection have entered the professional discourse, the examples tend to be fairly few and far between.

Other professions tend to have a more developed discourse on the topic of self-assessment, with the field of education leading the way. Fastre et al. speak to the importance of self-assessment in supporting lifelong learning of higher education students. They explain that to thrive in a rapidly changing professional context, students need to learn how to recognize when aspects of their performance need improvement, and to identify opportunities for skill development (611-612). They propose that self-assessment and peer-assessment are superior to other formative assessment activities in helping students develop a lifelong ability to recognize their own learning gaps (613).

Self-assessment is not limited to students, but is also championed for educators in higher education with publications focusing on, for example, reflective practice (Zwozdiak-Myers), teaching portfolios as possible tools for the practice (Trujillo), and peer coaching (Huston and Weaver).

Another field that is leading the conversation in this area is the health field, including medicine and the allied health professions. The role of self-assessment practices is examined both for students (see Stupans) and for professionals in these fields, with a critical body of research now able to examine the outcome of established practices (see Eva and Regehr, Mann, Silver et al.; and Sargeant et al.). Often times the need for self-assessment is more visible in the health field as self-assessment practices may be linked to acquiring and maintaining competencies both in clinical placements and continuing professional development programs (Silver et al.). While there may be varied reasons as to why self-assessment is more or less prevalent in certain professions,

¹ Both CILIP in the UK and ALIA in Australia show evidence of engaging with the idea of reflective practice through, for example, workshops and programs (Grant 164). See as an example, Hampe's *Reflective Practice and Writing Guide* from ALIA.

there is general recognition of the value of self-assessment at work (see Hetzner et al.; or Tarrant).

Within the field of librarianship, there is a growing body of literature on topics related to self-assessment such as mentoring in academic libraries (Harrington and Marshall), employee onboarding (Graybill et al.), and peer-coaching (Sinkinson). Each of these practices contributes to self-assessment by enabling discussion and reflection. They are also of interest to this study because they involve peers in the professional development process, a theme which emerged in our own findings. Broadly speaking, there is extensive literature that details the value of connecting with others as part of professional development and professional practice. Supervisors, mentors (Bosch et al.) and peers (Fyn and Huston) are all highlighted in turn as possible figures that may help with self-assessment. Situating the discussion on self-assessment in the context of this related research, we see an opportunity for contributing to a broader conversation on the topic of professional development and professional practice within our field.

These related studies also go a step further by examining institutional support for existing programs. Recent studies exploring mentorship programs note that few academic library institutions provide release time or other incentives for such programs (Lorenzetti and Powelson 194). In Canada, though a majority of college and university library administrators agree that mentorship plays an important role in succession planning, only 30% report having formal or informal mentorship programs at their institutions (Harrington and Marshall 778). In the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) member libraries where Graybill et al. asked about onboarding practices, programs ranged from one week to six months with significant differences in topics covered (207). This literature highlights how institutional support, whether through mentorship, onboarding or other programs, can be an important component of the development of professional practices.

These studies also provide best practice recommendations that could be applied to supporting self-assessment practices. In their examination of peer-coaching, Huston and Weaver recommend that programs be voluntary and confidential; that goals be set by individual participants; that there be a program evaluation component; and that there be institutional support through, for example, publicity, acknowledgment of participants, or funding (14-17). With regard to onboarding, Graybill et al. recommend that programs be of significant length, include a checklist for all levels, and employ a mentor/buddy component (212). This literature highlights for us the value of thinking of self-assessment in the context of a larger ecosystem of professional practices and professional development opportunities. Borrowing best practices from research on, for example, peer coaching, can help contextualize the possibilities of self-assessment in the institutional setting.

Rationale for Study

As evidenced by the literature review above, self-assessment is a common practice across a number of professions including librarianship, however, details on self-assessment practices of librarians tend to be scarce in the literature. In her systematic

review, Grant posits some possibilities as to why literature on the topic of reflective practice remains scarce: “the limited number of published reflective accounts may suggest limited reflective activity within the profession, although other possible explanations also exist. For example, that reflection is a private activity which naturally goes unpublished” (163). We believe we can borrow her speculations for the topic of self-assessment more generally. The aim of this study is to advance the conversation around self-assessment within the library profession. Institutional and team-based assessments are common enough, however, individual practices tend to be left up to the individual. We believe that there is value in sharing these individual practices, not with the goal of being prescriptive, but rather with the aim of acknowledging and sharing worthwhile tools and tips from current practitioners.

The question of self-assessment practices is particularly relevant to any librarian working in an environment where there is a lot of autonomy to shape one’s professional practice; this may be a liaison librarian working in an academic environment or a solo librarian working in a special library. New librarians specifically may benefit from learning about how these personal practices can support them in their new roles. However, any librarian experiencing shifting roles and responsibilities can benefit from self-assessment as a means of defining and successfully engaging in their new responsibilities. In furthering the conversation around self-assessment as an area of inquiry within the profession, we aim to shed light on existing practices and possibly identify gaps and strategies regarding these practices.

Methodology

This study was designed to investigate the following three questions: What are the current self-assessment practices of librarians? What do librarians see as the value of self-assessment practices to their work? Are there any gaps or possible areas of growth with regard to supporting these practices?

Sample

We conducted a case study completing semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of librarians. We recruited participants by email through a listserv of librarians in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland, in February 2014. Listserv members were also invited to share the research team’s contact information with interested colleagues. While the initial call was intended to target local librarians to facilitate face-to-face discussion, at least one of our interviewees was from out of province. We ended up interviewing all respondents as each brought a different perspective to the study. Of the nine librarians we interviewed in March 2014, four worked in the academic setting, three worked in special libraries, and two worked in the public library domain. Two of those librarians had less than two years of experience, four had between five to ten years of experience, and three had over ten years of experience. While our sample size was small, we aimed for a diversity of perspectives to get a broad snapshot of possible self-assessment practices.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed for an exploratory approach to the topic. While some questions targeted specific aspects of self-assessment, we aimed to keep the discussion as neutral as possible in order to leave the discussion open. Interview questions were designed to solicit information on the following three areas:

- What do you self-assess and how?
- Why do you self-assess and what is the value of self-assessment?
- How does self-assessment happen in your workplace, and are there additional ways you would like for your workplace to support self-assessment?

The first area mapped out possible tools and approaches to self-assessment and the second area drew out some of the perceived benefits of self-assessment. Lastly, we were interested in seeing if self-assessment was a truly private practice or if it could be supported implicitly or explicitly by the institution. This third area provided us with information about how self-assessment practices unfolded in the workplace. Please see Appendix A for the preamble that was read out to each interviewee ahead of each interview along with the set of questions that were used to guide our interviews.

Permission was received from the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University to perform this research, which conformed to institutional ethical standards. Based on these protocols we recorded the audio of the interviews and then transcribed them verbatim. In one case the interviewee chose not to have the interview recorded and detailed notes were taken instead. Transcripts were coded in NVIVO, by question and also by emerging concepts (for example, we established codes for different self-assessment tools such as workshops or literature, and themes such as interpersonal dynamics or peer support) with each researcher reviewing the other's coding for inter-rater reliability. This process allowed us to re-group and examine responses from different perspectives, and to ensure the balanced consideration of different voices. Although extra attention was paid to concepts or ideas that emerged repeatedly, findings from this case study cannot be generalized. We hope instead that readers will recognize themselves in some of the quotations we have included, or be surprised to hear perspectives they had not previously considered. In this way we hope to invite further discussion and research.

Limitations

Inherent in the design of this study is an explicit bias towards self-assessment practices. Interviewees were self-selecting, therefore, participants who responded to the recruitment email tended to have an interest in self-assessment. Another limitation to our study was its relatively limited size; the sample size was necessarily small to fit within our resource and time parameters. However, nine interviews was suitable for providing a snapshot of the self-assessment practices of a range of librarians across the field. Further studies of a different nature would need to be done to validate the real

efficacy of any self-assessment practices or to make generalized statements on the overall practices of librarians. Finally, the results of this study are librarians' self-reported self-assessment practices and as such there may be differences between practice and individuals' perceptions of their practice.

Findings

With regard to our three central research questions a number of key concepts emerged as a result of coding. The following section details highlights for the three components of our research question.

What Do You Self-Assess and How?

We reviewed interview transcripts in detail and identified a variety of components of work that were assessed. While interviewees self-assessed about a number of different aspects of their work, three main areas of focus were project management, career management, and interpersonal skills. These areas varied in the value attached to them by each interviewee, and while additional areas of assessment were also identified, these three stood out as common areas of interest for most interviewees.

Of the three main concepts identified above, project management, career management, and interpersonal skills, interpersonal skills development in the workplace stood out as a common interest. Interviewees tended to be concerned mainly with managing individual conflicts and difficult interactions, however, group dynamics such as those emerging within teamwork and meetings also surfaced as areas of development. Specific comments included:

I think that people should not be afraid to find out who they are - in the workplace at least. It's an important part of how we function. What happens if you don't self-assess is [that] you look for external factors to explain conflict and to explain failure instead of looking inside. - Interviewee B

Even if you don't always behave the way you should, I think if you understand yourself you can perhaps protect yourself a bit in your interactions with others, because if you have no idea how you appear to other then it's difficult. Then you may be giving an impression that you don't want to be giving. - Interviewee I

As suggested by these quotations, interviewees identified interpersonal skills development as an important area of workplace learning, and suggested that they would welcome self-assessment strategies that could be applied to this aspect of work.

Strategies

There were many commonalities among self-assessment strategies used or encountered by interviewees over the course of their careers. Interviewees had developed their personal toolkit, whether it be extensive or limited, through a combination of workplace training, leadership training, self-help literature, professional

coaching, and mentoring. What follows is a summary of the tools or strategies mentioned during interviews.

Psychometric Tools

Psychometric tools encountered by interviewees included the Meyer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Enneagram, DiSC profiles, Parker Survey, and Strengths Finder. The list and scope of these tools is too extensive to do justice to here; suffice it to say, they ran the gamut of areas of focus for assessment including personality, leadership styles, team dynamics, skills, and more.

Interviewees who were familiar with a broad range of self-assessment tools often gained that knowledge through leadership training. Training may have taken place within the interviewee's own institution, or it might have been accessed through leadership programs such as the Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians sponsored by ACRL, or the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA) Leadership Institute.

Some interviewees felt that these tools provided invaluable insight into their own work and interpersonal style, which had an impact on their performance. While such training and testing provided a good starting point for self-assessment, following through with a regular practice was found to be more challenging. This is exemplified by the following quotations:

I find it really useful to get away from the worksite, to do these, any sort of training program or whatever it may be. But the problem is when you get back to the workplace, and then suddenly you're met with a week's worth of email or something, like it's really hard to maintain whatever it is you've said that you're going to do during that period. - Interviewee I

Those tools are a way for us to speak objectively to our colleagues and their quirks in a funny way 'I can't believe the way you do that,' you know? So I've done a few of those... I enjoy them but... they don't come up day to day. - Interviewee A

This last quote also highlights the use of these kinds of tools to enable a workplace conversation that might not otherwise happen. By providing a context for discussion, psychometric tools and leadership training may facilitate not just personal understanding but also interpersonal communication.

Reflective Practice

As was highlighted in our literature review, self-assessment is closely linked to the concept of reflective practice. While some interviewees named reflective practice specifically as a tool they use to self-assess, others named tools and practices that fit under the umbrella of reflective practice generally without using the term specifically. While no participants indicated keeping a reflection portfolio, a practice that, judging from the volume of related literature (for example see Oakley et al.), seems to be fairly

common for training in education and health professions, a number of interviewees indicated that they journaled on a range of topics related to their careers, from writing through interpersonal conflict, to keeping track of goals, to freestyle review of their work week through writing. Others did not keep a journal, but rather used calendars, charts and sticky notes, both print and virtual, to keep track of goals and progress.

One interviewee, Interviewee H, had a particularly active practice, paraphrased as follows: looking back on the week each Friday to see what could have been done differently, using a daily planner as a journal, taking 30 minutes to ask questions like: Where did I feel most energized? Where was I most helpful? What am I grateful for? And also looking back on activities and asking: Did I lead a meeting well? What did participants get out of it? If students in class were not engaged, why or why not? What could have been done differently in these situations?

For those interviewees that did not have a practice as active as this, they expressed a desire to engage more intentionally in reflection in some way, in order to ensure that they were maintaining their practice.

Why Do You Self-Assess?

Generally speaking, self-assessment practices were motivated by a personal desire for growth and improvement as opposed to being motivated by external factors within the workplace. This intrinsic motivation was given expression in a variety of statements by interviewees, showing that they valued self-assessment independently of institutional practices or culture:

So that is kind of why I do it. It's so that I'm staying invested, so that I'm reflecting on my practice, so that I'm doing a good job for the people that I feel I should be doing a good job for. And yes, that is students and faculty, I agree with that, but it's also my colleagues to a great extent. I should be doing a good job for them. - Interviewee D

It's absolutely critical that I keep being critical of myself and learning, because otherwise you're just kind of putting in time until the end bell rings. - Interviewee G

I think it's kind of your duty to think about how you're doing your job... to celebrate what you are doing well and to think about where you might want to do better. And I think it's hard to do both those things without self-assessing. - Interviewee C

In addition to this self-reporting, it was evident that interviewees were intrinsically motivated through their mention of books, coaches, or mentors they had sought out to better their practice.

Alongside of this expressed enthusiasm for self-assessment, interviewees also discussed its limits and the importance of a balanced approach. That is, in addition to

considering why one self-assesses, it is equally important to consider why or when not to self-assess.

I've been in the field for over 30 years, and so I'm sort of at a point of knowing myself well enough and knowing also the field well enough that I don't feel the need to overlay a tool on myself for assessment. - Interviewee G

But I think to some extent all of us have to realize that nobody is perfect, none of the people you work with are perfect, you're not perfect, and it's about finding a way to work with people. And no, I mean assessment, in and of itself, is not going to solve anything. So you need to think about how much time should be spent on it. - Interviewee E

One of the concerns we had about our sample, as expressed in the Limitations section, was that our self-selected participants would have an implicit bias towards self-assessment. As a result we were interested to hear that some interviewees were willing to be openly critical about different aspects of the practice, as with Interviewee E above. The statement from Interviewee G suggests that different tools or approaches may be needed at different points throughout one's career.

An additional factor determining why librarians engaged or did not engage in self-assessment practices was time. In the words of one interviewee:

The part that I think is missing for me is being a little bit more deliberate about carrying [self-assessment] out day to day in terms of having an actual plan... for whatever reason, and whatever reason usually being: there are more pressing things that are always coming up, I don't set aside the time for it. - Interviewee C

Librarians may feel that self-assessment is not as important a part of their work as other duties, so may push these practices to the side as more pressing and more visible work tasks surface.

What Kind of Support Would You Like for Self-Assessment?

Interviewees had a range of ideas regarding how self-assessment could be or should be supported in the workplace. While some interviewees did call for more involvement from their managers in the process, others explicitly stated that they would prefer to keep the practice separate from their workplace. While the perspectives varied across interviewees, the acknowledged relationship between institutional assessment and self-assessment showed up as a strong theme. The second theme regarding support for self-assessment came through in comments relating to the value of peer networks. Both of these themes are detailed below.

Formal Workplace Assessment

A number of interviewees flagged that their institutions require monthly or annual written reports on goals and accomplishments. To some extent, these formal assessments also provide an opportunity for reflection, however, these practices were not seen by

interviewees to be particularly effective in supporting self-assessment per se. One interviewee shared the following:

I don't think formal evaluations have done much for me... I don't respect our process here a whole lot, so I don't put a lot of faith into that. It feels more like a formality rather than a way to actually help me. - Interviewee C

At the same time, other interviewees expressed a desire for increased guidance or feedback from supervisors. The following quotation from one of the interviewees well illustrates this:

I love my manager, but I wish she gave me more feedback sometimes. It's hard because librarians tend to be passive people... we're non-confrontational... every manager I've had that was a librarian was not great at giving me that 'what should I be doing, what can I work on?' - Interviewee E

Supervisor feedback, formal employee assessment procedures, and self-assessment practices are related but distinct. While this study did not investigate formal workplace assessments in any detail, we will discuss the tension that exists between formal workplace assessments and self-assessment in the Discussion section below.

Peer Networks

While self-assessment tended to be a highly individual process, there was also a strong common desire for peer networks as a support for self-assessment. Interviewees did not necessarily want peers to help them with the detailed work of self-assessment, but rather sought some kind of informal network to keep them accountable to the practice of self-assessment itself. In their words:

I wish I could do self-assessment with someone else. I know that sounds a bit silly, but in fact, if it was a commitment with somebody else for quarterly reviews... a tool like that would make sure I didn't procrastinate. - Interviewee F

I really kind of like the idea of peer-to-peer. You know we all work really closely together, we're all very interdependent on each other, so it's good to have kind of that honest relationship with your peers and that they feel they can tell you if you've really put your foot in your mouth. - Interviewee I

Contrary to our initial expectations that self-assessment may be a private activity, the prevalence of this call for peers with which to self-assess was a surprising finding. While a number of interviewees mentioned a desire for some kind of peer relationship in the support of self-assessment, only one explicitly shared having regularly maintained that kind of relationship in the past. In most cases the call for making that kind of relationship explicit came out of a belief in the value that it could bring, as opposed to direct experience.

Discussion

Through listening to our interviewees describe what and how they self-assess, why they self-assess, and what kind of support they would like for self-assessment, we discovered some common themes. Our interviewees were interested in self-assessment practices to help them grow in several areas such as project management, career management, and interpersonal skills. They found the self-assessment tools that they encountered through leadership training and coaching to be informative, but sometimes difficult to integrate into their professional practice. They sought strategies for self-assessment because of an intrinsic motivation to grow professionally, and were interested in peer networks to support their self-assessment practice. They also saw value in a self-assessment program or practice that was separate from existing institutional reporting mechanisms.

Based on these findings, two additional dynamics emerged that are worth further consideration. The first is the relationship between personal and institutional practices. All interviewees highlighted that self-assessment is a highly personal and private process. However, interviewees also acknowledged that external factors such as institutional practices of formal assessment, and relationships with peers, bosses, and mentors, also influence self-assessment practices. While none of the interviewees expressed a desire for self-assessment practices to become highly formalized or obligatory in their institutions, many of them noted a desire for peer networks, as noted above, not to direct self-assessment but to ensure the presence of the practice. Facilitating these relationships may be a way for institutions to provide support for this personal work.

Regarding the tension between personal self-assessment and formal workplace assessments noted above, it may be useful to think about the different purposes of these two kinds of practices. Tarrant, in his discussion of reflective practice, reminds us that reflective practice is a formative assessment tool, used in the context of work to reflect and improve. Annual and monthly reports are summative assessments, used to assess whether employees are meeting institutional expectations (24). A number of interviewees echoed Tarrant's view that formative assessment and summative assessment should not be conflated, as they have different goals. Formative assessment requires a low-stakes context, where employees can reflect on weaknesses as well as strengths, without the impulse to massage experiences to convey a favourable impression to a report's reader (Tarrant 25). Reflective practice, instead of summarizing, parses out and turns over the details of a project or event, with the goal of identifying new goals or means of improvement.

Beyond formal assessment practices, there were many other institutional practices that also played a role when it came to the individual practice of self-assessment. Connecting with colleagues emerged as one of the most valued means to assess and reflect, with many interviewees expressing a desire for a partner or team with whom they could check in and hold themselves to a consistent practice of assessment for professional development. Some interviewees had strong mentorship relationships or colleagues and supervisors whom they trusted to provide insight and feedback.

However, whether this was or was not the case among interviewees, there seemed to be a consistent desire to make some relationships, and the content of those discussions, more intentionally focused on self-assessment.

Generally speaking, we all have relationships with supervisors and peers, and some of us are lucky enough to have mentors, however, we may not necessarily set aside the time to have a pointed conversation about self-assessment. Tarrant describes purposeful peer discussion when outlining his coaching model: “the notion of peer support [...] the idea that having someone to work with who was not an authority figure, who was not an expert, but instead someone at a similar stage of development is an attempt to get away from the inhibitions brought about by having ‘judgment’ getting in the way of authentic reflection” (37). Perhaps there is a way for institutions to provide some framework for this type of checking-in, while maintaining that it be an optional component of professional practice, one that need not be part of the employee-supervisor relationship.

The second dynamic that our findings lead us to consider is that of visible versus invisible work. Self-assessment is usually a part of our work as librarians that is not formalized in any way. However, being a highly individual personal process, the work of self-assessing remains largely invisible².

We hope that this research will make the practice of self-assessment at work more visible, and hence a more accessible practice to new librarians. It seems quite plausible that an institution could support self-assessment by giving librarians time or training, or by facilitating peer relationships, and thereby acknowledging that it is a respected part of professional practice, for which librarians can be expected to dedicate a portion of time. Though it should be up to individual librarians to choose to undertake self-assessment, institutions can provide permission and guidance.

Impact on Practice

There may not be a one-size-fits-all solution for supporting self-assessment practices, however there are certainly some starting points. This research was initially presented at the British Columbia Library Association 2014 annual conference. In that presentation we shared preliminary findings from our study but spent most of the session focusing on getting participants to evaluate their own self-assessment practices and to consider the role of their workplace in these practices through hands-on activities; in essence, session participants were answering our research question for themselves and sharing their evaluation with the broader group (See Appendix B for session worksheet³). They listed the aspects of their work that could benefit from assessment, and considered ways they might approach the process. They were also asked to apply three questions to their workshop experience, which are often used as a starting point for reflective practice: What happened? Why was it relevant? How will it inform my future work? (see

² See Star & Strauss' work, for example, their article “Layers of Silence, Arenas of Voice: The Ecology of Visible and Invisible work.”

³ A number of session participants requested access to this worksheet after the session so that they could use it as a tool in starting a conversation around self-assessment at their own institutions.

example in Hampe 3) We hope that by sharing our findings and by highlighting general themes that emerged from our interviews, this research can invite others to consider self-assessment practices for themselves and to engage in conversations with their colleagues and their workplaces on the topic.

If you are someone looking to introduce more self-assessment into your own professional practice, see if you can find a supportive peer, mentor, or group that will share in your goal. If you are in a position to shape training programs for new employees, consider highlighting self-assessment strategies as part of training programs. If you are in a position to shape institutional assessment practices of librarians, or if you are a supervisor or mentor and wish to promote positive self-assessment practices within your workplace, consider the relationships between personal and institutional practices, and the place of invisible work, in developing a program or facilitating a relationship. In thinking through this study's research questions, in an individual or local context, we hope that librarians can engage in the conversation and shape self-assessment practices in a way that is meaningful for their work and their context.

Further Research

Several questions emerge as a result of this preliminary research: Is self-assessment something institutions can support or does it just come with experience and personal growth? Can and should we measure the efficacy or impact of self-assessment? What is gained or lost when we make the informal formal, the individual social, and the private public?

In addition to investigating self-assessment more closely through the above lines of inquiry, it will also be necessary to investigate the practice more broadly, that is, explore the ways self-assessment intersects with many related discourses within our profession. Self-assessment is closely linked to the practices of assessment more generally. What are the ways in which self-assessment practices intersect with institutional assessment practices? What is the relationship between self-assessment and common professional standards or benchmarks that guide our profession as a whole? There are many other related discussions that surfaced in our initial investigations into self-assessment, such as ones involving evidence-based librarianship and communities of practice. In terms of examining the ways in which self-assessment intersects with any of these related discussions, it will be useful to consider the ways in which these practices function together to ensure that we are cultivating practices that support individual development, institutional success, and the development of our profession more broadly.

Conclusion

This study was motivated by an interest in opening up the conversation around self-assessment within the library field. In interviewing a small sample of librarians we found both commonalities and diversity in individual self-assessment practices and needs. While the results of this case study are not generalizable, some emerging themes were

identified that can serve as a basis for more pointed personal and professional conversations around self-assessment practices.

Project management, career management and interpersonal skills development emerged as areas of focus in interviewees' self-assessment practices. As for areas of future growth in the practice of self-assessment, some participants identified an interest in and a need for peer networks to support individual practices. Our research also opened up an exploration of the relationship between individual and institutional assessment practices, and the interplay between visible and invisible work. In terms of what this research means for institutions, organizations seeking to cultivate self-assessment practices may try incorporating self-assessment strategies into training programs, or consider supporting some form of peer consultation.

This research highlights that self-assessment resists a one-size-fits-all solution. Individual self-assessment practices and needs may vary according to the individual and their stage of career development, and the supports afforded by institutions may differ. However, continued conversation on this topic may help individuals to proactively shape their personal practice, while helping organizations to affirm the validity of this work by offering supports attuned to the needs of librarians throughout their careers.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Introduction

We are here to discuss self-assessment by librarians. The definition that we are using for self-assessment is as follows: “Self-assessment is a means of developing internal standards and comparing performance to those standards. It requires looking in 3 directions: back at completed work, down at present work to determine next steps, and forward to the future to apply to the next learning opportunity what has been learned. There are formal and informal ways that we might self-assess” (Donham 15). Do you have any questions about what we mean by self-assessment?

Interview Questions

1. What career groups do you belong to? Are you a new librarian, a mid-career librarian or a mature librarian?
 - A new librarian is defined as any librarian with two years or less experience
 - A mid-career librarian is defined as any librarian with between 2-5 years of experience
 - A mature librarian is defined as any librarian with more than 5 years of professional experience working as a librarian
2. How much energy do you think you spend on self-assessment, either looking back at completed work, or looking at your present work, or looking forward to your future work? Could you estimate how much time you spend on these activities?
3. Do you use specific tools when you self-assess? Please describe these tools and their use.
 - Professional benchmarks such as RUSA's Liaison Librarian guidelines?
 - Your job description or framework agreement?
 - Assessment-focused writing or reflective practice?
 - Blogs, conference sessions or other professional writing?
 - Debriefing with colleagues or your supervisor?
 - Formal evaluation with your supervisor?
 - External criteria or evaluation?

- Any other tools?
4. Where did you get these formal or informal assessment tools?
 - Conversations with colleagues?
 - Mentors?
 - Did they evolve out of institutional processes?
 5. Why do you self-assess? Or, if you don't do any self-assessment, why not?
 6. Are you satisfied with the amount of self-assessment you do? If not, what are some of the challenges you encounter?
 7. Do you share your self-assessment with your supervisor? Please tell us more about your motivations and your outcomes in regards to sharing.
 8. Are you ever asked in the context of your work to self-assess?
 9. Do you think that self-assessment is valuable? If so why?
 10. In regards to self-assessment, is there anything that you would find helpful in terms of your project, portfolio or career management? i.e. from your supervisor, your colleagues, your workplace or your professional community?

Appendix B: BCLA presentation worksheet

Activity 1

A) Please list the elements of your professional practice that you think are important to assess.

Element	Do you currently assess?		If yes, using what tools?
	Yes	No	
1. <i>Communication with team members</i>	✓		<i>Discuss with mentor</i>
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

B) Write down one element of your professional practice that you would like to assess more effectively, perhaps something from your “no” column.

What are some tools you might use to assess this?

C) Share your responses with a partner.

Activity 2

A) What can your managers do to help cultivate the practice of self-assessment in your workplace?

B) What can your colleagues do to help cultivate the practice of self-assessment in your workplace?

C) What can you do to cultivate the practice of self-assessment in your workplace?

D) With a new partner, take a few minutes to discuss your answers above. How are your workplaces similar/different?

Activity 3 (closing)

A) Take 2 minutes to answer the following questions:

What stood out for you in today's discussion?

Why was it relevant to you?

How will this impact your work in the future?

B) If you wish, share your thoughts with a partner on the way out!