



INSTITUTE FOR Learning Innovation

Dover, DE Library User Identity-Motivation Pilot Study **December 2005**

In the fall of 2005, the Institute for Learning Innovation (Institute), an Annapolis-based non-profit learning research and development organization, was contracted by the Delaware State Library system to develop a study to explore the motivations, prior experiences, attitudes and expectations of users of the Dover Public Library. The goal of the study was to develop a better understanding of the public's perceptions and use of libraries as lifelong, free-choice learning resources in order to help libraries better serve their public's lifelong learning needs.

Building and expanding upon previous research, particularly research on the role that identity and visit motivation have on museum learning and behavior, this pilot study utilized multiple methods to investigate the identity-based reasons why people do and do not use libraries regularly and how these identity/motivations impact use of a library in Dover, DE.

This study is a pilot effort to explore the ability of such an approach to provide a detailed, empirical approach to segmenting library users. In the process, we intend that this pilot study will provide data that help to describe why the public uses libraries; using user-centered, identity-based motivational categories rather than library-centered, activity-defined categories. The study will also help lay the foundation for better understanding the impact libraries have on lifelong learning and how library services and programs can be designed to better support personalized free-choice learning experiences.

Methods

Phase One: Library User Interception

In November of 2005, 113 pre and post interviews were collected across 20 hours including weekday, evening, and weekend hours at the Dover Public Library. Visitors were intercepted (next available patron) as they entered the library's main entrance. The sample was representative of the Dover Public Library demographics. The refusal rate

was extremely low (7%) and library patrons were enthusiastic about the opportunity to share feelings about libraries. Visitors were asked to review a series of cards outlining possible motivations for that day’s library visit. The motivational categories used were based upon combining categories developed for museum visitors verified and amplified by open-ended interviews with 20 library users during a preliminary investigation; the 20 users involved in the preliminary investigation were not part of the pilot study sample described below. Visitors were also asked a series of short questions, and asked to return to the table after they had completed their visit. At the time of exit, the visitors’ time investment, task success and follow-up contact information was noted. (See protocol, Appendix A)

Phase Two: Follow Up Phone Interviews

Approximately one month to 6 weeks later, 29 of the original sample of library users (approximately 25%) were successfully re-contacted at home by telephone. These subjects agreed to participate in a thirty minute phone conversation (see protocol Appendix B). The purpose of the phone interview was to confirm the accuracy of the motivation rating categories used on the survey instrument, to explore the users’ personal and past history of library use, to investigate connections between lifelong learning and library use, to assess library user satisfaction with current library offerings, and to discover potential new programs and services. Extensive notes were taken during the interview process to support later analysis.

Phase One Findings: Library Interceptions

Table 1. Motivations for visiting the library

Reason for Visit	% of Patrons Choosing this Response
I always find something interesting here	32%
I love to learn new things	11%
I’m here to bring my child(ren)	11%
I’m here to get something for someone else	5%
I’m here because I study X, and want to find more information	9%
I’m here to complete a school assignment	10%
I’m here to find the answer to a specific problem	16%
I’m here to check my email	10%
I’m here to find information on a specific topic	10%
I’m interested in X, and want to find out more about that	4%
This library has a good selection of DVD’s / videos	21%
I feel refreshed or rejuvenated when I leave.	9%
I had to prove I was here for another program	1%
I belong here – I support this library	16%
I always come to read..... (here)	8%
Other	8%

Library users were happy to talk about their library use. They were asked to select a reason for their visit from a series of 12 cards containing reasons that had been developed from previous interviews with library users (Table 1). Visitors were encouraged to try to find one or two reasons that BEST described the reason for their visit TODAY.

- 62% of visitors chose more than one reason
- Cards were presented in random order; if visitors couldn't select – they told the interviewer why they were there in their own words. They were then assigned to “Other.”

Motivation Categories

A qualitative content analysis of responses was used to generate eight basic reasons for library attendance, plus an “Other” category. These eight identity-related reasons were then used to develop Motivation Categories; categories of users with similar needs. These are currently described as:

Explorer: Is the user that is simply curious and loves to learn new things, but does not have a content or subject agenda driving their visit. They know they'll find something interesting at the library and likes learning the types of things they learn there.

Facilitator: Is the user who is there largely to support someone else. They come to cultivate library going and behavior in their children, or because they want to check out audio books for a friend. Their purpose is to support someone else.

Scholar: Is the user that has deep interest and a history of research work in one topic area. Examples of users in this category described themselves as a “genealogist” or a “religious scholar.” These individuals often use the interlibrary loan services or travel to specific libraries with supportive collections.

Problem Solver: This user has a specific question or problem that they're trying to solve. This includes users planning a trip, learning about a new pregnancy, or looking for information on how to write a successful job resume.

Hobbyist: This user has a specific interest area, and comes to the library to further that particular interest. Interesting examples include the NASCAR specialist and the Aviation buff, both of whom come to stay on top of what is new in their field.

Experience Seeker: This user perceives the library as a venue for entertainment or social connection. They come to the library to be around people, particularly people like themselves, or to read the newspaper. They may also come to check out books or DVD, but are less concerned about the books or DVD they choose, and really describe themselves as looking for something to occupy their time.

Patron This user has a strong sense of belonging to the library, and joins the local library immediately when they change communities. They often volunteer for the library, and go out of their way to bring other, less committed users, with them.

Spiritual Pilgrim: This user focuses on the library as a place of reflection or rejuvenation. They speak of the library as their ‘peace’ place, or as a “constant” in their life. They come to the library because it nurtures a spiritual need.

Other: This category includes a range of users whose motivations did not meet the criteria of the above categories. Examples include users who were at the library just to drop something off or pick something up, or the individual that had to prove he was at the

library in order to get credit for another program. Table 2 summarizes how the 113 library users were distributed across these nine categories.

Table 2. Distribution of library users as a function of motivational categories.

Category	Total % Choosing this Category	% Who Chose this Category Alone	Chose this Category in Combination
Explorer	35%	13%	22%
Facilitator	16%	9%	7%
Scholar	9%	3%	6%
Problem Solver	23%	11%	12%
Hobbyist	4%	1%	3%
Experience Seeker	36%	8%	28%
Patron	16%	3%	13%
Spiritual Pilgrim	8%	0	8%
Other	9%	6%	3%

Phase Two Findings: Follow-up Phone Interviews

1. The phone interviews strongly supported the ability of this preliminary instrument to identify and categorize library user’s identity-related motivations. Fully 80% of the phone interviews confirmed the Motivation Category identified by the Card Sort Activity during the original interception interview. In two cases, users identified not one or two, but three motivational categories. Further conversation with these users indicated that they were actually Patrons, which is why they identified with so many motivations. In addition, there may need to be some refinement between the Problem Solver and Scholar categories; some users seemed to fall between these two categories. Overall, though, these categories appear to provide a reliable and valid method for identifying the identity-based motivations library users have for using the library.

2. Predictably, findings of this pilot study were quite similar to other recent research with regard to library use patterns. Users described a major shift in their information seeking behaviors indicating an ever greater reliance upon the internet to solve their day-to-day information-seeking needs. However, other significant changes in library use also emerged:

- Library users, (particularly those with small children) spoke of having less leisure time, and hence spending less time reading for pleasure and pursuing hobbies. At the same time, they felt that their need to be able to find reliable information and ‘answers’ had increased.
- A large number of library users in our sample had internet access at home, and often completed research and information seeking needs there. Thus, a number of users described their library use as becoming more ‘entertainment’-oriented rather than information-related as their research needs were fulfilled at home.
- Many users were attempting to customize their library experience, while streamlining their actual visit, by browsing the library’s holdings at home, online, further identifying their (usually fiction) choices, and placing these items on hold – requiring only a quick trip to the library to pick-up or return the materials. Many

visitors mentioned spending significantly less time in the library, because they complete their browsing online.

- A number of library users spoke of using their eyes all day long using computers at work, and hence preferring to check-out audio books in order to pursue their 'reading' habit so that they could "rest their eyes."
- A number of adult library users had returned to formal education settings, thus returning to library use in order to fulfill course research and reading assignments.

3. Most of the library users in our study expressed a strong emotional investment in their local library, which was often developed by being taken to the library as a child. Many individuals described the sense of wonderment and special 'place' that accompanied their childhood library visits that was later transformed into a deep desire to share that with their own children. More surprisingly perhaps, for some younger adult visitors, the library plays the role of community 'constant' or safe haven in their lives; lives disrupted by family moves, divorces and other changes.

One male in his 20's described the library as '*sacred ground*' and another young mother who had grown up in Dover, described the library as "*the only thing in her life that had not changed.*" Most of the library users in our study did not see libraries as outdated or superfluous due to the advent of the internet; rather, they deeply desired that the library continue to evolve in ways that allow them to continue to play an important role in people's lives and communities.

4. Not surprising given that these were all current users of the Dover library, this group of users expressed general satisfaction with the customer services currently offered by the Dover Library. The average ranking of their satisfaction was 7.0 on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being not satisfied at all and 10 being fully satisfied), with a range of 5 to 10. In particular, users commented on the following positive library services:

- Helpfulness and friendliness of staff
- Wide selection of DVD, video and CD materials
- Accessibility - hours of operation

5. Library users, while somewhat hesitant to speak negatively of the library, and recognizing limitations of the Dover Library with regard to staff, space and finances, clearly identified a number of areas they felt the library could better serve their needs. While some overlap existed across different users, for the most part suggestions for improved library use directly correlated with the motivational category they self-defined themselves as falling into. The three most common Motivation Categories (cf, Table 2) were Experience Seeker (36% of users), Explorers (35% of users) and Problem Solver (23% of users). The needs expressed by the Problem Solvers strongly overlapped those of the Scholar category, thus for the purposes of analysis these two categories were combined; the combined Problem Solver/Scholar category represented 32% of

interviewed users.¹ For each of these three dominant motivational categories, a summary of the ways in which libraries could better support library user's needs are presented, followed by a specific case study. Names used in the case studies are fictitious, and the use of italics indicates a direct quote from an interviewee.

Experience Seekers – Building Community

All users believed that at a rudimentary level, libraries already act as community centers, allowing communities to communicate shared values such as cultural diversity or the joy of learning and reading. However, a disproportionate number of Experience Seekers spoke of the potential for libraries to expand this role by offering opportunities for them to come to the library for a wider variety of activities, such as:

- Offering enriched programming such as classes, guest speakers, reading groups, etc. Users spoke of wanting an interactive exchange with experts, which is not available on television or the internet. In addition to presentations with personal accounts and/or expert knowledge, users wanted to be able to ask questions, and connect personally with the presenter. Topics suggested ranged from travelogues, to cultural diversity (the music of Thailand), to parenting classes.
- Libraries should be an important space to share and transfer important values about reading, learning and the love of books. In an age of children absorbed by electronic games and equipment, parents, in particular, spoke of an urgent and expanding role for the library in engaging young children, and sustaining young teens, in a closer relationship with reading and books. (This overlapped with Facilitators category)
- Libraries could work harder at building community by offering individuals the opportunity to engage with others who share specific interests and learning preferences; all while providing a safe space to support identity-building and personal exploration. Again, a number of the individuals we talked with felt libraries could expand this role through both expansion of above mentioned programs as well as through the development of specialized groups or clubs. Suggestions ranged from an educational series focused on regional history, offered through presentations, reading assignments and resource suggestions, to a mystery-readers book group.

Experience Seeker Case Study: “Martha” a Delaware rural resident in her 50s

Martha is a voracious reader of mystery novels. In addition to her consumption of those, she and her husband frequently enjoy borrowing movies and books on tape when they travel. Despite the fact that she grew up in an area without a local library close by and that her parents were both busy working and unable to take her to libraries, they instilled in her a love of books and reading. When Martha was a teenager they moved to New York City, which occasioned her first library use. She began to go every afternoon after school to do her homework and “*that’s where I fell in love with libraries.*” She loves to come to the library just to see what’s new. When she wants to learn something new, she

¹ NOTE: Since individuals could select more than one category, there was some overlap of individuals between categories and totals exceeded 100%.

tends to use a combination of the internet and books. She feels strongly that the internet is a useful tool, but superficial, and that books provide a depth of detail unavailable online.

“I think they could do a much better job of programming – more informative things you can’t get online or on TV. I went to hear a man who went to Africa for a few months to do research – something interesting, I forget exactly what, but it was interesting. I liked the give and take with this guy – which is what you can’t get with the internet or a DVD. People who can talk about their own experiences. Like why don’t they go to the Muslim community and get the religious leader to talk about what Islam is – partly the info and partly the give and take. I think they could use community expertise better, I really do.”

Explorers - Customization

Explorers, in particular, felt a need to be able to customize their use of the library. While often echoing the desire for special presentations as outlined above, Explorers also wanted the ability to tailor their library use to their specific interests. These are the users that spoke of wanting a quiet room where they could read, or browse through selections, without cell-phones, students chatting or front desk noise. As well, these users suggested:

- Reading suggestion lists, both online and/or hard copy, for readers interested in a specific topic or author. Users cited the Amazon.com example of responding to previous purchases with a suggestion list.
- Users also suggested a similar recommended list in response to current events such as the tsunami, political events and science news. Readers felt it would be important to have enough copies of such recommendations to serve a large need – and while they recognized such topical recommendations might be short lived, they would be strongly utilized by a large group in a short time, which, they felt would compensate for being in circulation for only a year or so.
- Explorers want to be in communication with the Library. They spoke of their desire to receive the above recommendations by e-mail prompt. They suggested that their local library should keep in constant contact with them; the library should reach out and make recommendations customized to their particular reading needs and habits. In short, Explorers wanted a library that knew who they were, who understand what they wanted and respond personally to those needs.
- Some Explorers spoke of a deep love of the narrative form, and a recent change in their reading habits. As many individuals spend all day in front of a computer ‘reading’ they express the need to rest their eyes in the evening. When, in previous years, they might spend a portion of their evening reading, they now prefer to listen to audio-books. A few individuals talked about a library service that recommended audio-books (these folks want unabridged) that matched authors they prefer. Some users even spoke of read-aloud evenings at the library. Again, these individuals spoke of their desire for services to be customized to their specific needs and interests.

Explorer Case Study: “Henry” a male Dover resident in his 50s

Henry does most of his browsing via the online catalogue at home, allowing him to put books on hold and organize interlibrary loans. He greatly appreciates the ability to customize his library use this way. His parents took him to the library as a child, and he proudly remembers receiving his first library card at the age of 6. His family instilled in him a love of reading and books, but book purchases were a luxury his family could not afford, thus the library was about both providing reading materials and access to educational materials. In his leisure time Henry enjoys boating and listening to the music, and he makes regular use of the library's CD collection to sample new genres of music. Recently diagnosed with a blood disorder, the library was his primary source of medical information. Henry also does not enjoy travel, but is curious about the rest of the world. He frequently checks out DVDs that are nonfiction travelogues and documentaries.

"I like getting what I want – I don't really have the time or the inclination to go and browse – although I guess that's what I do on the internet. If my wife reads about a book she wants in a magazine, or the paper – I jump up and put it on hold for her..... It's in my nature to borrow, rather than buy books, but I have bought books from online services. I like how they have recommendations for me, based on what I've bought before. It makes me consider things I wouldn't know existed. I think the library could do something like that."

Problem Solvers and Scholars – Research Support

As other research indicates, many visitors are turning to the internet to satisfy immediate information needs formerly fulfilled by the library's resources. Library users described internet resources as being easier and faster to access, but also more current and up-to-date. However the internet does not provide users with the same 'self-paced' learning, (described as the ability to 'study' new information where, when, and as often as they would need to facilitate learning). They felt the library could better support their research needs by:

- Offering access to online resources, some of which are not readily available on their home computer. More than increasing the number of computers for access, users talked about better tools to help them search the internet, and getting suggestions from the library for reliable sites for doing their research.
- Offering reference direction and support to the large array of online resources, as reference librarians have long done for print materials. Users are overwhelmed with the vast array of responses to their online queries, and do not have the ability to focus in on relevant, reliable materials. Many spoke of using the reference librarian for support in this task, but wanted further direction in terms of tools, classes and search frameworks offered by the library. For example: Several users described the desire for a medical search tool in which you entered the diagnosis you wanted more information about, and the library responded with suggestions for books, online sources and community groups that might support those users needs.

- Some users expressed frustration in finding materials identified through an internet search, but unavailable because they are in ‘academic’ and ‘professional’ locations.

Problem Solver Case Study: “Lucretia” a female Dover resident in her late 20s

Lucretia feels her needs are only moderately met by the Dover Library because she compared it to the Wilmington Library downtown, where the resources are better in the categories of professional and scholarly journals. Her parents did not take her to the library, that she can remember; rather, the concept of the library was shaped by her time in school.

“They took us to the library and taught us to use the card files and how to find things. The message I always got was that the library is a place of learning.”

When Lucretia needs to learn something new she first goes to the internet because of its easy access. She uses the internet to identify journals – both online and hard copy, and then tries to get those journals via interlibrary loan. Finally, she says she uses the library to find local specialists.

“I think the library should provide some sort of tool or class to guide research. So, if you’re diagnosed with arthritis, for instance, you have guidance about places to go look for information. So, under arthritis for instance, they might have categories – different kinds – and then categories of information like cures, natural cures, pharmaceutical, home remedies – that kind of thing – and then suggestions of places to look for that kinds of information, so, you know, more places to look for information you want. Some kind of framework to support research directions.”

Conclusions

Although limited in scope and scale, this pilot study provides strong supporting evidence for the premise that library users can be meaningfully segmented as a function of their identity-based motivations for using libraries and that taking an identity-motivation approach to library user segmentation has the potential to support improved library practice.

The results indicate that library users were willing to participate in an effort to better understand how to improve library use, and in particular quickly and without concerns about privacy, happy to engage in a self-rating exercise that described their reasons for utilizing the library on that day. The Card Sort instrument we used, though very preliminary in design, was able to accurately place better than 90% of library users into one of 8 identity-based motivational categories. Additional research will be required to further validate these categories, as suggested above, several categories appear to overlap. It should be noted we were mindful of this likelihood but opted to be “splitters” rather than “lumpers” at this stage of development of a segmentation scheme – it is easy during analysis to combine overlapping categories, but next to impossible to separate a category

if it appears to include multiple groups. Based upon the findings from this pilot study, we would anticipate that the final segmentation scheme will include fewer than 8 categories.

A key finding from this pilot study derived from the post-library-use interviews. The data collected during these interviews provided significant corroboration for the validity of the segmentation scheme. Better than 80% of those interviewed verified the accuracy of our initial classifications. Results from our museum visitor research shows that these identity motivation categories were the single best predictors of long-term visitor learning – better even than which exhibits a visitor saw or how much time they spent in the museum, and we can assume that a similar relationship exists for library users as well.

As with our museum findings, results from this pilot study showed that a library user's identity-based motivational category was an excellent predictor of not only how they wished to use the library, but how they actually did use the library and how they felt the library could better serve them. By segmenting library users we were able to see that different library users had different needs; needs that became clear when we separated users out based upon their identity-based library motivations. Because of small sample size, we opted to only include the three most frequently expressed library use identity motivations – Experience Seekers (36%), Explorers (35%) and Problem Solvers/Scholars (32%). Although there were similarities between across groups, the most striking finding was the significant differences between these three groups of users.

We understand that we will need to follow up this pilot research with additional, in-depth investigations so that we can refine our segmentation categories and improve the validity and reliability of our instruments. However, we believe that these preliminary findings provide an indication of how useful an identity-motivation approach could be to the library community. It is worth noting, that most of the services that the library users suggested are already offered by Dover Public Library, but obviously they are not promoted in such a way that these groups of users could recognize and take advantage of them. Therefore, by taking this approach it should be possible to more readily recognize meaningful groupings of library users and bundle existing services together in ways that directly satisfy each group's unique needs. In conclusion, this approach promises to provide a robust and relatively straight-forward mechanism for allowing all public libraries to more proactively and effectively serve the lifelong learning needs of their various users.

Appendix A

Sex: M F Age Decade: 10-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70+

Zip Code: _____ Card #: _____

1. What brings you to the library today?

2. Who is with you today?

3. When was the last time you were at this, or any library?

4. What do you intend to do while you're here today?

5. Is this the closest library to your home? Y N
If no, why did you choose this library?

6. What role or purpose would you say the library serves in your life?

Thank you for sharing your answers with us. We'd like you to take this card and, after you accomplish whatever you intended to do here today, please drop by the table and return this card to us. Note time: _____

Return:

Take card – note time: _____

1. Were you able to accomplish #1 above? (Please explain)

2. What else did you do while you were here today?

3. We'd like to call you sometime when it is more convenient for you to have a longer conversation. May I call you at home or at work in about 2-3 weeks?

If yes: get:
#: _____

Best time: _____

Name: _____

Appendix B

Outline for Phone Interview

Introduction

1. I want to talk a little about the reason you go to the library. On the day we interviewed you, you stated X, X,X was (were) the reason you were at the library that day. Does this still make sense to you? Would you say this is pretty typical of why you usually go to the library or was this day an exception? (Probe for category fit, particularly on **'d forms)
2. Talk more about the motivation and inquire whether they felt that their needs were truly and fully met on that day – rate on scale 1 – 10 of satisfaction of that need.
3. Is how you use the library currently similar or different to how you've used the library in the past? Much as you have always used it? Or has your use of the library changed over time? (Probe)
4. Did your parents (or a significant adult in your life) take you to the library when you were a child? What were the messages you received about libraries as a child? (Probe the meaning of library to them as a child)
5. What hobbies do you have? What do you do in your leisure time for fun? Does the library play any role in that hobby? Probe deeply.
6. When you need to learn something new – example – tell me about how you go about learning that? Probe – this about how the library fits into their free-choice learning. Is every situation unique or do you have a few trusted resources you know you can rely on to help you meet your learning needs?
7. We know from other research that when people need information about a health problem or trivia question (i.e. who was the 4 president) they usually turn to the Internet. Historically, this role was played by encyclopedias and the library. If today, most people are using the internet to satisfy their information needs, what role do you think the library can or should play in the 21st century?
8. Is (the role just defined above) how you imagine using the library in the future?
9. In your opinion, what's the best thing about your library?
10. What's one thing or service – they already do – that you think they could improve – how?
11. If you were in charge of the library – what new service would you implement to better serve people with needs similar to yourself?

Thanks, etc. etc.