

Can a cumulative effects framework be applied to information literacy assessment?

Have we lost sight of the forest, by evaluating only the trees?

Environmental ecosystems are complex. Evaluating only one aspect of an ecosystem, does not provide a true measure of its impact. The same is true for information literacy. To evaluate information literacy goals only in a class setting, without taking into account other factors, does not provide us with an accurate overview of how we are doing.

As resource demands grow, we must be able to measure the effects of all library information literacy activities, large and small, on values that are important to the greater University of Alberta community.

Taking a framework meant for a holistic approach to our environment - may be the answer to how to evaluate our library research instruction, to ensure high quality sessions are offered, and there are enough individuals to work with the students.

Currently, library research sessions evaluate on three main criteria - student feedback, faculty feedback and quality of the research assignment. Often - only one of the three areas are assessed.

Areas that are currently being left out, include: services desks, individual consultations, online chat reference services and information that is provided via E Class through online modules or online tutorials.

Without taking other factors into account, most library information literacy evaluation is truly only looking at one tree type - instead of the information environment.

Objectives

The framework for addressing cumulative environmental effects is made up of 5 steps. Below is how the 5 steps can be used for more holistic evaluation of information literacy.

Step 1 Scoping

- Identify the scope of effects to be considered
- Set appropriate boundaries
- Identify areas previously not included in evaluation

Step 2 Analysis

- Assess the condition of the information literacy environment
- Assess the increasing areas where information literacy is provided
- Measure the informational effects of the project, and how it may influence future projects and activities

Step 3 Mitigating

- Identify all players to be involved

Step 4 Determining Significance

- Consider existing information literacy areas, guidelines and objectives are most valuable
- Where possible, consider the areas that touch on information literacy but are typically included in assessment

Step 5 Follow-up

- Evaluate the accuracy of the assessment
- Evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures for improving assessment of areas that should be included in information literacy

How can the framework be applied?

Assessing and Managing Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects are changes to environmental, social and economic values caused by the combined effect of past, present and potential future activities and natural processes.

This framework is important in libraries - because just as in the natural environment, information literacy teaching is subjected to both internal and external influences.

Environmental assessments consider cumulative effects when evaluating large projects; however, most library evaluations are small in size and do not provide enough of a holistic approach. This is why the framework is a possible answer to this problem. The framework incorporates the combined effects of all activities and there weights when making future and current decisions.

Through the cumulative effects framework, interagency teams of experts support integrated resource management and decision-making through cumulative effects assessments that report and map the current and future condition and trend for identified values. This looking forward and looking back approach can help us to create a more well rounded view of our information literacy ecosystem.

Cumulative effects framework, can be applied to information literacy assessment as there are overlapping comparative areas. For example information literacy practitioners are currently mapping out the best time for such activities to arise as part of a course and the ideal number of course offerings. Other areas appropriate for assessment include: how our current classes are going, as well as other avenues for teaching information literacy (desk, chat reference, consults, and peers) that are not in the traditional classroom setting. The framework can also help identify what the goals for the future should be.

The Benefits

Librarians will have the information and tools they need to manage identified values while supporting resource activities and development that yield information literacy benefits. Assessing cumulative effects on a larger scale rather than a class-by-class basis will reduce review times, create clearer expectations for assessment and will result in knowing where we are meeting our users needs and where we need to improve.

The Results

The cumulative effects framework should help provide: better, more sustainable information literacy instruction and help to create more efficient, consistent and transparent decision-making.

We aren't there yet

We're testing it out

Meaningful engagement with external audiences (those outside of the library) is vital for the successful implementation of the cumulative effects framework. We are engaging and collaborating with library sectors, researchers, instructors, and students to see if the framework will work.

Once fully tested, we will be able to determine if this framework will provide a more holistic evaluation and allow for evidence based application of where it would be best to place our efforts for library instruction. Unfortunately, holistic approaches to information literacy assessment take time and incur setbacks.

Although many of the players have been identified, the project will take significantly longer than previously thought. Therefore, we are approaching this poster as the first planning phase of our evaluation.

It was determined that - much like a cumulative framework needs to take an outside perspective - so did this project. Therefore we are also currently in talks with the other players before rolling out the full project.

References

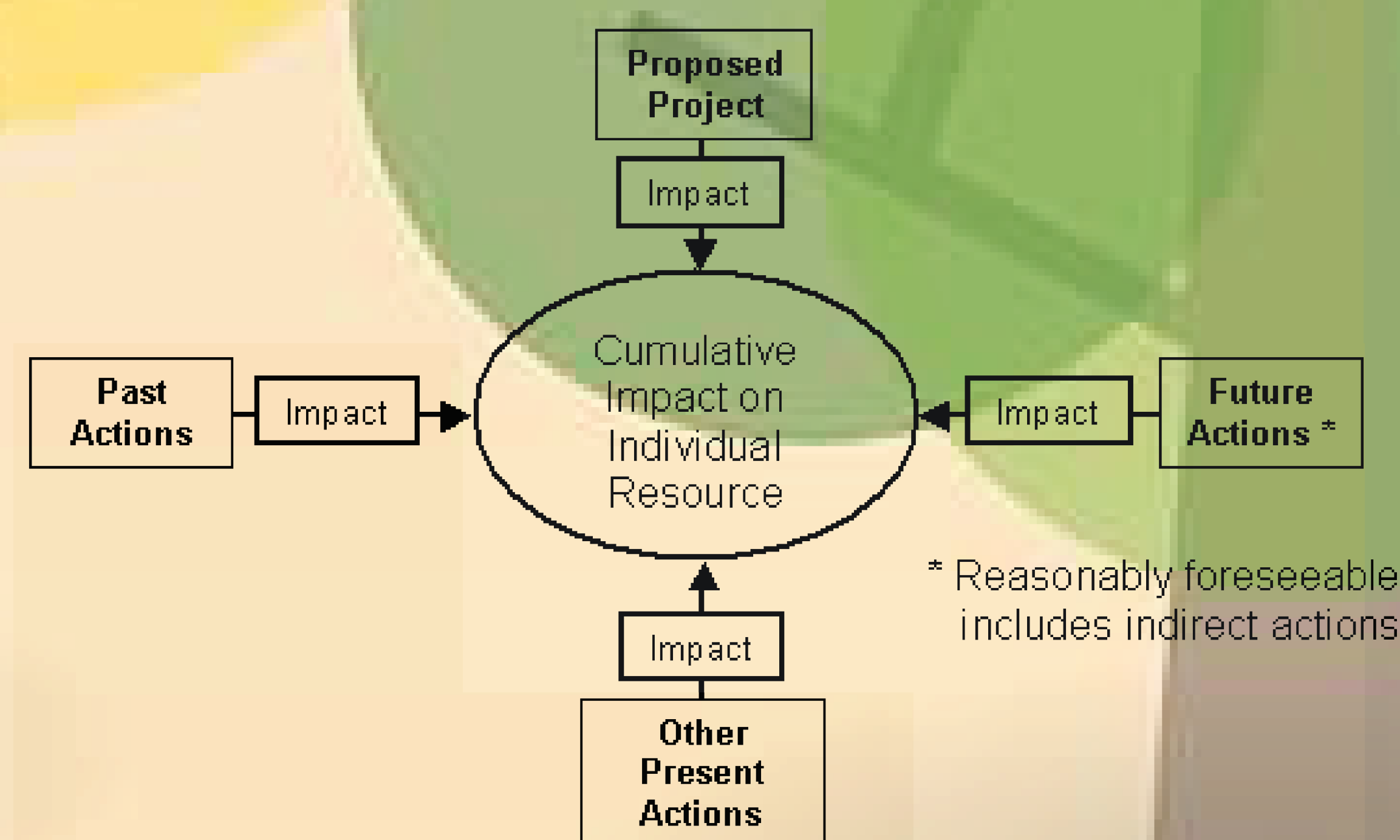
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Frameworks help identify all of the areas to evaluate



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