

Planning and Policy Making

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Introduction

Customer service is a strategic issue for library and information managers. It is at the heart of what we do and why we exist – our purpose and mission – and it is the means by which we move our organizations forward. Customer service must drive library and information policy and planning. This cannot be an afterthought, seen just as a supporting/subsidiary strategy or an operational matter. It is a fundamental enabler of effective library and information services and therefore a primary concern for senior managers and team leaders.

Library and information managers have responded to the customer service imperative in various ways, including interpersonal skills training for frontline staff; formal suggestions schemes for staff and users; customer surveys and focus groups to identify needs; customer charters and service definitions or standards. However, many customer care initiatives have not delivered the benefits expected, because they have concentrated on training for frontline staff and not pursued customer focus at a strategic level. In contrast, significant improvements in customer service have been achieved through Total Quality Management programmes which emphasize both standardised systems and cultural change throughout the organization.

Customer service is thus as much about purpose and culture as it is about service and delivery. The key to building a successful customer service culture is strategic management which brings together corporate values, planning capabilities, organizational responsibilities, strategic thinking and operational decisions *at all levels* and *across all functions* of an organization (Gluck, Kaufman and Walleck, 1980). This chapter discusses the concepts and processes of strategic management and shows how library and information managers can manage customer service strategically by putting customer focus into their planning systems. It uses contemporary examples from university, public and national libraries, but the principles identified and practices illustrated apply to all library and information services.

Concepts and terms

Strategic management is essentially about deciding and refining organizational objectives and working consistently and persistently to translate those objectives into actions and outcomes. It requires an understanding of the business arena, assessment of your resource base and the creation of a shared view of the future. This can be expressed as a series of questions,

- Why do we exist? What business are we in? (mission)
- Where are we now? How did we get here? (situation audit)
- What factors will impact our future? (environmental appraisal)
- What do we want to be? Where do we want to go? (vision and goals)
- How can we get there? What are the implications? (strategic options)
- What needs to be done? Who will do it? When? (action plans)
- How will we track progress? (performance indicators)

Strategy

The word 'strategy' is used at one level to denote overall direction, as shown by Johnson and Scholes (1999), 'Strategy is the *direction* and *scope* of an organisation over the *long term*: which achieves *advantage* for the organisation through its configuration of *resources* within a changing *environment*, to meet the needs of *markets* and to fulfil *stakeholder* expectations.'

However, as well as representing the overall objective for an organization or *what* it aims to do, 'strategy' is also used to describe *how* an organization will achieve its objective or aim. At this level, strategies are defined sets or emerging patterns (not necessarily articulated) of actions and tasks taking the organization towards its goals and targets. Drucker (1988) accordingly defines strategy as 'a company's basic approach to achieving its overall objectives' and describes *strategic planning* as 'the planning for a company's long-term future that includes the setting of major overall objectives, the determination of the basic approaches to be used in pursuing these objectives, and the means to be used in obtaining the necessary resources to be employed'.

The terminology of strategy and planning is confusing as there is no standard usage: people use the same terms in different ways, and the terms can also have different meanings according to context. People often confuse 'policy' and 'strategy' and find it difficult to distinguish between 'mission' and 'vision'. Writers often conceptualize aims, directions, goals, objectives, strategies and targets as a hierarchy of objectives (using 'objective' as a generic term) but may place these terms in different orders; the choice of term at successive levels in the hierarchy is not significant, but it is important to have consistency of usage within an organization to aid communication and avoid confusion.

Policy

The term 'policy' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'strategy' and also has connotations of long-term high-level decisions. However, 'policy' is more often seen as a statement of *principles*, intended to provide a framework for decisions on a continuing basis. This contrasts with the time-limited nature of strategy statements which guide action over a given period. McKee (1989) draws a useful distinction between *strategic plans* which encapsulate decisions converting the basic goals and objectives of an organization into actions and *standing plans* (in effect policy statements) which enable an element of 'programmed' decision-making on matters of agreed policy that arise in a recurring pattern or cycle.

Examples of issues which libraries have traditionally dealt with in policy statements include the scope of their collections, the borrowing entitlements of customers and any limits or charges imposed for enquiries. An indicative contemporary example is the University of Sydney Library (2001) *Policy on networked electronic access – preference over print*, which sets out the rationale for the policy and five guidelines for its implementation, as well as outlining the consultation with customers that preceded its development. The policies website of the British Library (2001a) includes statements on specific areas of its activities (for example, on collections and digitisation) as well as statements in support of wider concerns, such as freedom of information and equal opportunities.

This differentiation of ongoing (standing) policies from time-specific strategies is evident in the guidance on Annual Library Plans issued to public library authorities in England by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). This guidance explicitly links delivery *policies* with service *philosophies*, but relates three-year *strategies* to planned *changes* – improving or varying services in line with identified strengths, areas for development, opportunities and threats. The areas expected to be covered by policies include the location of libraries and their opening times; stock selection, deployment and withdrawal; study facilities; reservation services, including any limitations; and the use of library premises by community groups (DCMS, 2001; 2002).

Despite differences in terminology and presentation, literature and practice point to general consensus about what constitutes 'strategic management' – the term generally preferred now to emphasise the iterative nature and comprehensive scope of the policy and strategy process. There are four main aspects, which can be seen as a set of interlocking components:

- *environmental/situation analysis* – which involves gathering information about external factors and internal concerns, using tools such as competitive benchmarking, stakeholder mapping, customer surveys and SWOT (see below)

- *strategic profiling* – which requires discussion of fundamental issues (such as the scope, purpose, functions and principles of your organization) and decisions about high-level objectives, future aspirations and goals
- *strategy development* – which determines the forward path to the destination identified, by evaluating alternative options, considering supporting strategies, specifying performance indicators and developing action plans
- *programme management* – which includes both strategy implementation via projects and operational control of services: taking actions, monitoring progress and balancing service development with 'business as usual'.

Planning processes

Both planning horizons (timespans covered by plans) and planning timelines (time taken for the process) have shortened significantly in recent years. In past decades long-range plans covered five, ten or even twenty years, but today organizations generally opt for no more than five years – often only three, as required by DCMS – and the same pattern is evident in information services. Irrespective of the period covered, strategic plans are usually reviewed annually to inform yearly budgets and operational plans and sometimes 'rolled forward' by dropping the first year and adding another at the end; a more fundamental reappraisal is usually required every three or four years.

In the 1980s, when many libraries first embarked on strategic planning, it was quite common for the process to be conducted over a year or more. Today the period of any formally defined process is more likely to be six months or less as the pace of change is so fast that a longer gestation period makes no sense. This streamlined approach is exemplified by the latest planning model promoted by the Public Library Association, which recommends a timeline of four to five months, compared with the eight to ten previously suggested (Nelson, 2001).

Models for operationalizing the strategic planning process vary and need to be considered in relation to the size and type of organization and the scope and purpose of the plan. Library and information managers have learned over the years that planning processes (whatever their scale) need to be properly managed and carefully planned.

The key activities are as follows:

- defining the project
- assessing your position
- setting strategic objectives
- identifying different strategies
- evaluating the alternatives
- preparing budget estimates
- formulating the plan
- initiating action programmes
- monitoring service developments
- reviewing the strategy.

These tasks can be interpreted at various levels: for example, 'setting strategic objectives' could include a full review of organizational values, purpose and functions and the development of a strategic vision, or it might be confined to determining strategic directions and goals for the next year or two. Apart from the crucial first step of defining the task – 'planning to plan' – the ordering of activities is largely a matter of individual choice, as some people like to start with strategic objectives (including mission and vision) whereas others prefer to begin with situation analysis. The last three tasks move beyond planning to implementation, but often information obtained and insights gained here will prompt revision and rethinking of earlier work, demonstrating that the process needs to be seen as iterative – and interactive – rather than linear.

Interactive planning

Ackoff (1981) introduced the concept of 'interactive planning' more than two decades ago but the principles of his approach are particularly relevant today, namely that planning should be

- *participative* – to build understanding and help implementation
- *continuous* – to monitor the environment and evaluate any changes
- *holistic* – to co-ordinate and integrate multiple units and different levels.

One of the trends evident in both library planning and business strategy is the progressive move to a more participative and inclusive style with more extensive involvement of staff, customers and other stakeholders. Hamel (1996) makes the case for involving 'new voices' in the strategy process, complementing the 'hierarchy of experience' with a 'hierarchy of imagination'. He particularly advocates inclusion of staff with a youthful perspective, those who are new recruits and people on the geographical periphery (distant sites). In the public library context, Nelson (2001) identifies several categories of participants, such as people with specialist skills and knowledge, community representatives – users and non-users – and decision-makers. She also argues that the respective levels of participation for community representatives and library staff should shift during the process, with the community having more influence on the vision, needs and priorities, but less involvement in discussing goals, activities and resources.

Ackoff's (1981) principle of continuity is reflected in growing acknowledgement by managers of 'real-time strategy' as a continuous process rather than a 'one-off' exercise or part of an annual ritual. The compression of the formal strategic planning process into only a few months makes the requirement for library and information managers to engage staff continuously in less formal strategic thinking and environmental scanning even more important. The formal or organized planning process then becomes more concerned with capturing and documenting information and decisions rather than initiating and undertaking scans, benchmarking and surveys as the latter become ongoing activities.

The holistic principle is evident in the need for library and information planning to be co-ordinated and integrated with the objectives and plans of the parent organization and wider community. The DCMS (2001, 2002) guidelines require public libraries to show how their objectives and plans fit their authority's corporate objectives and plans requested by other government departments, such as local and regional cultural strategies, plans for lifelong learning and e-government, as well as the corporate ICT plan. Academic libraries should similarly demonstrate linkage between their strategic plans and the strategies and policies of their institutions. Many UK higher education institutions now have not only a strategic/corporate plan, but also strategies for research, enterprise, learning and teaching, recruitment, widening participation, regional collaboration, internationalization, external relations, human resources, estates and information, as well as strategic plans for their different academic, administrative and service units.

The planning context has thus become much more complex and fluid with continuous identification of policy issues by government and others. This requires a more sophisticated and flexible approach to policy and strategy, which is best seen as a *network* or *web* of strategies, rather than the traditional conception as a hierarchy of plans. Fortunately, this coincides with the establishment of the World Wide Web as a universal communication medium which provides the ability – literally and technically – to make links between related documents and demonstrate relationships between different activities.

Practical examples

Library and information services use a variety of planning models and methods but some common themes are evident from their websites and documents, such as the use of steering committees, management retreats, facilitated workshops, focus groups, customer surveys and public consultation.

New Mexico State University Library (1998) designed a planning process around five special committees responsible for environmental scanning, values scan and mission formulation, strategic business modelling, performance audit and gap analysis, and contingency planning and implementation. The University of Memphis Libraries (1999) worked through a Strategic Plan Team and five Goal Teams, with Objective Teams to oversee implementation. Waterford Public Library (2002) used a planning consultant to lead its research phase and then brought in Trustees and managers for decision-making about the future.

Several textbooks and many case studies describe and detail the pitfalls of planning exercises. Common mistakes include: allowing some managers to opt out; assigning responsibilities to committees rather than individuals; confusing strategic planning with operational planning; constructing over-elaborate systems and procedures; generating long lists of unprioritized initiatives; ignoring resource implications and funding issues; and not following through from strategy to action. Less well documented, but obviously a critical success factor for service organizations, is the incorporation of customer focus in every step of the process. This can be achieved either directly, by involving customers in person; or indirectly, by involving frontline staff, who are close to customers and understand their wants and needs. Experience suggests that a mix of these methods is likely to produce the best results.

Environmental appraisal

Information about your current situation and likely future developments can be analysed and synthesized using various strategy tools.

Stakeholder mapping

A 'stakeholder' can be seen as any individual or group with an involvement or interest in an organization in the past, present or future. The stakeholders of a library or information service obviously include its customers, subdivided into various categories, but also include service staff, top management, funding authorities, other regulators, suppliers, partners, competitors and the local community. A *stakeholder analysis* can be used to identify people who could or should be informed about or involved in the planning process. For example, Merton Library & Heritage Service consulted staff, managers, users, non-users and suppliers as 'key stakeholders' in the development of its strategy (Pateman, 2002).

There are several different ways of categorizing individuals and groups, for example by their perceived importance to or influence on the service. A common method of representing this diagrammatically is to draw a *stakeholder map* with the service at the centre of the page and to position stakeholders in boxes or circles whose closeness or distance from the service reflects their perceived influence. Conducting this type of exercise with various groups of service staff often exposes different views of stakeholders and their importance and can thus be used to stimulate debate on the priority to be given to these groups and their needs.

Customer surveys

Regular surveys of actual and potential customers are now standard practice for most library and information services and the findings of such exercises obviously should inform strategy and policy development. Thus the DCMS (2002) guidelines formally require public libraries to include in their annual plans the outcome of user surveys, public consultation exercises and market research carried out in the last two years, as well as a review of comments and suggestions received in the previous year. Similarly, the strategic planning team at the University of Arizona Library (n.d.) included the following questions about customers and the environment to focus initial input from library teams to its current situation analysis:

1. If you have conducted customer surveys or collected other customer data over the last 12 months, either formally or informally, summarize the key findings.
2. Based on the feedback, what are you doing to meet customers' needs? (e.g., projects created, process improvement undertaken)
3. What products and services have been requested that you have not been able to provide? (e.g., access to ALL full-text journals online)
4. What would need to change to be able to provide these products or services?
5. Looking to the environment beyond the library, list forces that will change the way we serve our customers (e.g., electronic publishing, copyright laws).

However, as well as drawing on the results of past surveys, it is desirable to consult customers (and other stakeholders) as an explicit part of any strategic planning process. This enables managers to confirm and update previous findings, to focus questions on emerging strategic issues and to raise awareness of planning activities among stakeholders. DCMS does not require local authorities to consult the public on the preparation of their library plans, but the guidelines for 2002 (in contrast to 2001) state that 'this would be welcomed'.

Various methods can be used to identify the perceptions and preferences of individuals and groups. Methods commonly used for library planning include general surveys, open forums, focus groups and personal interviews. For example, Tacoma Public Library (n.d.) used small group discussions and a random sample telephone survey; Waterford Public Library (2002) gathered opinions from about 1000 people through a user survey, focus groups (with town department heads, school teachers, community organizations and library users) and personal interviews with community leaders (business people, philanthropists and government officials) in addition to feeding in results of a previous user survey conducted via touch-screen computers. Redwood City Public Library (1998) conducted focus group discussions with young people, civic leaders and multicultural representatives, using the following questions:

1. What words come to mind when you hear the phrase "public library"?
2. If you were talking to a person from another city, what would you tell him/her about Redwood City Libraries?
3. Many people see the library as a support for formal learning. How do you see it?
4. What do you see as the 2 or 3 weaknesses or shortcomings of the library?
5. Why do you think people don't use the library?
6. What do you see as the 2 or 3 key opportunities which the library could take advantage of in the future?

Redwood also included summaries of the focus group discussions in the public version of its strategic plan, providing visible evidence of the importance and influence of community input to the strategic planning process.

Another method of surveying opinion is to produce a *consultation paper* setting out ideas about the future of the service and inviting responses on specific points. For example, the National Library of Wales (1999a) published a paper, *Choosing the future*, which was launched at five briefing meetings around the country, distributed to 1700 organizations and individuals, and mounted on its website. The paper invited general comments and responses to six questions:

1. Are there ways in which you think we should perform the core functions differently or better? (The functions were collecting; preserving; giving access and information; publicising and interpreting; and professional collaboration.)
2. Do you agree that the Library should seek to develop in the five new directions described? (The directions were encouraging more use of the building; a better service to higher education; a service to all learners; bringing the library to the world: digitization; and building partnerships with others.)

3. If so, which do you think are the most important? Have you any particular suggestions about the way they should be developed?
4. Are there other “new directions” you think the Library should take?
5. Are you interested in discussing the opportunity of a partnership with the Library on any issue? If so, what might you be looking for from such a partnership?
6. Have you any views on how the Library should seek the substantial resources needed to implement new initiatives?

The Library then published a summary of the responses, which then informed the development of a new strategy, which was presented in the form of a corporate plan (National Library of Wales, 1999b).

SWOT analysis

The tool often used to gather together information about external forces and internal capabilities is *SWOT analysis*, which involves capturing the Strengths and Weaknesses of an organization or service and the Opportunities and Threats represented by environmental trends. Although widely used by library and information managers, SWOTs are often conducted with insufficient thought and focus, resulting in long unstructured lists, unclear and ambiguous wording, no prioritization or weighting of factors and apparently conflicting statements (e.g. the same point listed as a strength and a weakness).

Contradictory statements can be dealt with by asking what particular aspects of the attributes identified are a strength or weakness. Focus can be achieved by asking those involved to think about particular areas; for example, the DCMS (2002) guidelines specify the following.

‘Analyse the strengths, areas for development, opportunities and threats for your library service in a tabular form against *at least the following key areas*:

- stock provision and deployment, including the quality of the stock
- reader and audience development
- meeting the public library standards
- social inclusion
- lifelong learners
- customer response
- resource issues.’

Significantly, the areas specified by DCMS vary slightly from year to year. More to the point, in carrying out SWOT analysis, it is essential to ask whether *customers* see the attributes identified as strengths and weaknesses in the same way that staff do. Managers thus need to ensure that a customer perspective is injected into every step in the planning process by asking for evidence of customer behaviour and opinions in relation to statements made by staff. This perspective can be provided either indirectly (by drawing on user surveys, etc.) or directly, by involving customer representatives in the analysis (e.g. via focus groups).

Strategic profile

Decisions about your long-term objectives, desired future situation and medium-term goals should be captured in a series of cohesive statements.

Information missions

Most library and information services include a formal statement of their fundamental purpose or mission in their strategy documents. The length and format of such statements varies from a few lines to several paragraphs or a full page. A common model is to begin with a sentence or paragraph summarizing the overall role and then supplement this with a set of bullet points or sentences, highlighting key functions or activities.

While the purpose of libraries has not changed fundamentally, the shifts of emphasis from holdings to access, from print to electronic and from mediation to self-service have led to changes in the phrasing of mission statements to reflect more accurately the customer focus and networked service of the contemporary environment. Thus the University of Queensland Library (2001) purports to 'link people with information' and the Mission of the University of Washington Libraries (2001) refers to 'connecting people with knowledge'. Maintaining currency in the language used is one of the prime motives for reviewing mission statements periodically; another is the desire to differentiate a service from its peers, by highlighting distinctive aspects, illustrated by the Birkbeck College Library (2001) aim to 'develop and maintain services which especially suit the needs of students who are in employment'.

The motivational dimension of a mission statement is often overlooked: this is not just an intellectual exercise, it is an important communication task. If customer service is your *raison d'être*, this must be reflected in the content, style and tone of your statement. The following examples illustrate this point.

'The Redwood City Public Library is the learning center of our community and the place people turn to for the discovery of ideas, the joy of reading and the power of information. Community needs drive our services and we take a personal interest in ensuring that they are delivered in a welcoming, convenient and responsive manner.'

'The University of Arizona Library is dedicated to meeting the diverse information, curricular and research needs of students, faculty, staff and other customers.'

'The Library's aim is to deliver information in the form, at the place and at the time of most benefit to the user, within the requirements of the University.
...To fulfil this mission it is important that the Library gives absolute priority to the needs of its user community...' (Edinburgh University Library, 2000)

Syracuse University Library (2000) distinguishes its *purpose* statement as a timeless expression of its 'reason for being' from its *mission*, which is defined as 'a bold, audacious statement... connecting [our] values and purpose with concrete, time-specific goals and initiatives'. On that basis, cultural change centered on the user is an essential plank of its mission,

'By 2005, we will transform the Library into the University's primary gateway for scholarly information. To accomplish this mission we must:

- develop and sustain a highly user-centered culture
- secure staff, facilities, technology, and funding that support and promote this new culture
- deliver information literacy programs that enable effective use of our services, collections, and resources'.

Service values

The production of formal statements of the beliefs or principles that underpin organizational or professional philosophies has become more common recently and this is reflected in the prominence now given to values in many library strategic plans. Values statements can be seen as a part of the framework that guides discretionary decision-making along with policy, vision and direction statements. Statements of service values can be particularly useful at times of rapid change in reassuring people that underlying values remain constant even though the service around them is changing radically. Such statements can also be used to support cultural change by asserting new values seen as critical to success in the future, such as customer service or user focus.

Values statements in library plans typically take the form of five to seven words or phrases as 'headlines' which are then elaborated in a longer phrase or sentence. Libraries have traditionally concentrated on values associated with our professional mission, such as the preservation of our cultural heritage, service to the community, promotion of information literacy and support for intellectual freedom; but they have often also incorporated into their statements references to more general humanistic values, such as democracy, diversity, equity, integrity, literacy and privacy. Contemporary examples still reflect these important concerns but tend to give more prominence to modes of working and styles of delivery felt necessary for success in the changing environment around us, notably collaboration and partnership, flexibility and responsiveness, initiative and innovation.

Redwood City Library (1998) echoes the sentiments of its mission statement in the first element of its statement of core values – 'The Library is driven by community needs' – and reinforces its commitment to customer service in two more of the ten points. The values of the Waterford Public Library (2001) extend over a whole page and cover collaboration with community groups and sensitivity to community values, as well as an explicit commitment to customer service, 'Quality customer service is our hallmark. We value courtesy, helpful and friendly service, patience, and the display of interest and enthusiasm for all patrons' needs. We value our role as information providers, helping patrons discern the quality and accuracy of information.'

The University of Queensland Library (2001) lists eight shared values – commitment to excellence; teamwork and personal responsibility; flexibility and innovation; open communication; staff development; accountability; equity and integrity – and specifically mentions customers in five of the eight points. The University of Arizona Library (n.d.) expresses its values in the form of *Principles* and places *Customer Focus* as the first of five concepts that are elaborated in a series of statements,

I. CUSTOMER FOCUS

We actively seek to identify, meet, and exceed customer wants and needs.

We welcome, guide, and support customers, both internal and external, with attention and respect.

We create and sustain partnerships.

We provide access to information in its most useful form.

In contrast to their American and Australian counterparts, few British libraries include values statements in their strategy documents.

Strategic visioning

Visioning is now a much more frequent activity in all types of organizations, as an integral part of strategic planning and management, particularly associated with rapid and radical organizational change. Visioning exercises and vision statements are used to capture insights and ideas about the future and to communicate to stakeholders the scope and scale of the transformation envisaged. The content and length of statements vary, but most commentators agree that visions need to be both aspirational and inspirational, which means that style and tone are critical to their success. Managers can add power and immediacy by using striking imagery and writing in the present tense.

Library vision statements are most often around one to two pages long, but published examples range from a few paragraphs to several pages. A few libraries have chosen to present their visions much more succinctly in a short paragraph or even just a single sentence. Short statements run the risk of blandness and require careful drafting to ensure that they have real meaning and sufficient focus to distinguish the service from its peers.

The Waterford Public Library (2001) Vision for the Future runs to almost three pages and also sets out a list of 20 *planning assumptions* which underpin the vision and other aspects of the strategic plan.

The vision restates and elaborates the commitment to quality customer service given in the values statement, as shown by the following extracts:

'Serving the community involves both responsiveness and leadership: the Library must not only respond to patron demand but also anticipate patron needs for new materials, resources, and services. It regularly monitors patron satisfaction and analyses community needs through data provided by the computer system, surveys, and conversations with focus groups.'

'Our Library of the future means a building that is comfortable, with amenities that welcome patrons of all ages. This could include seating that invites relaxation, a café, quiet areas, group work areas, a teen lounge, and more. It requires materials, services, programs, policies, and dedicated, dynamic staff members. It means more personalized customer services that consider individual needs.'

The British Library (2001b) offers a more succinct vision which effectively brings together its main strategies for collections and access with its three 'enabling strategies' of *user focus*, partnership working and web delivery – 'Making accessible the world's intellectual, scientific and cultural heritage. The collections of the British Library and other great collections will be accessible on everyone's virtual bookshelf – at work, at school, at college, at home.'

This top-level vision statement is elaborated by five short paragraphs explaining in more detail what is envisaged and how these strategies will work together, for example

'We will work closely with our major users and other stakeholders to support their objectives and develop services in line with their changing needs. We will reach out to schools and lifelong learners in collaboration with public libraries and education agencies who share this commitment. We want the British Library to make a difference to the broadest possible range of people and for them to be able to engage with us wherever they happen to be and whenever they choose.'

The University of Arizona Library (n.d.) Vision 2010 is similarly presented in six paragraphs but is approximately twice the length, running to almost a full page. The following extract reinforces the messages about *customer focus* and partnership working already conveyed,

'Students are at the center of our work. We are full partners with faculty collaborating in the development of courses that provide learning experiences matching students' needs. We create an environment of exchange among students, scholars, researchers and ourselves. We help students graduate as self-sufficient, free-thinking, and productive members of society who continue to learn and grow.'

The Syracuse University Library (2000) Vision is much shorter, a single sentence providing 'a snapshot of the Library transformed', but it places similar emphasis on meeting user needs: 'Our vision of Syracuse University Library – its people, services, collections, and facilities – is of a nationally significant research library that understands the needs of its users and has actively developed the resources and methods to meet those needs now and in the future.'

Some organizations have developed more personalized 'mini-visions' as illustrative material for plans or reports, to show how the future might look from different stakeholder/customer perspectives. For example, the Follett report on UK academic libraries offered three 'sketches' to illustrate some of the possibilities opened up by the technology of the 'virtual library', written from the perspectives of an undergraduate, an academic and a 'virtual librarian' (Joint Funding Councils' Libraries Review Group, 1993).

Similarly, Rutgers University Libraries (1999) included five 'scenarios of the future' in their plan proposing a Digital Library Initiative (DLI). Under the headings 'Undergraduate teaching and learning' and 'Advanced research', these scenarios explained how a professor, an undergraduate, a graduate student and researchers might find and locate information resources if the DLI became a reality. Providing customers with personalized visions of this type is an effective and powerful way of engaging individuals and demonstrating concern for their needs.

Goal statements

Strategic goals or objectives are statements that indicate the movement or improvement needed to achieve the desired future state (presented in the vision). Effective goals are expressed in action-oriented terms that are capable of conversion into specific targets enabling managers to plan tasks and measure performance. Libraries often group their goals/objectives and targets under broad headings, variously described as 'strategic directions', 'strategic priorities', 'strategic thrusts', 'key action areas', 'key performance areas', 'key result areas', etc.

The Kitchener Public Library (2000) has put Customer Service as the first of six strategic directions in its Strategic Plan and set out six commitments under this heading:

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Kitchener Public Library will improve access and excel in customer service. We will:

- consult with the community to understand and keep pace with your changing needs
- look for new ways to deliver traditional, valued services
- broaden electronic access and offer new services using technology
- provide customized information and self-service options to meet your priorities
- help you develop the skills that are critical to find and evaluate information in an increasingly technological world
- ensure that everyone has equitable access, regardless of financial situation.

The British Library (2001b) gives similar prominence to its enabling strategy of *user focus* by setting out the rationale, goal and two-pronged approach immediately after its vision and mission statements:

'Enabling strategy: user focus

The Library provides a wide range of services to a great variety of user groups. We are now working with our users to establish their changing patterns of need. Our goal is to provide services that are relevant, easy to use and fulfil expectations. We will integrate related services and offer seamless access in ways which are appropriate to our different user groups.

Strategy for user focus

- To interact effectively with our users to maximise the fitness for purpose and value of what the Library provides
- To extend our user base by enhancing the relevance and accessibility of services.

Syracuse University Library (2000) sets out both a rationale and success indicators for its goal of a *user-centered culture*:

Goal: Develop a highly user-centered culture that guides the actions of Library staff and informs all Library policies, procedures, and decisions.

Rationale: To be a viable and responsive service organization, we must fully understand the needs of our users and deliver consistently excellent service in response.

Success indicators:

- user surveys/feedback tell us that we are consistently meeting their needs, providing excellent service, etc.
- reconfigured public service points focused on core user activities
- staffing schedule consistent with users' needs
- initiate innovative reference service delivery, e.g., Netmeeting, webcams, tele-reference, instant messenger, chat software
- self-service options (e.g., recall, hold, interlibrary loan (ILL), copy requests, checkout, email notification)
- improved output options: e-books, ILL/document delivery, faxing, email, photocopying, printing; delivery and return of materials (e.g., Paging/courier service)
- reduction in users' complaints about the Bird Library entrance and other services.

Continued development of a *user-centered culture* is the first Goal of the New Mexico State University Library (1998), reflecting its top Strategic Thrust, 'User focus drives decisions'. This goal is followed by a list of seven action points and nine critical success indicators and then further supported by a separate paragraph on Culture,

"In order to accomplish our goals, all library personnel need a common understanding that the user is the reason we exist and that service to the user is the central focus of what we do. The ideas expressed in the mission and values statements must be translated into shared understandings, beliefs and behaviors in our organization. In turn, the Library recognizes contributions at all levels and provides encouragement and respect for creative dissent. A cooperative, risk-taking, collaborative, empowered staff will work together to make decisions that provide the most efficient and effective service to our users."

Identifying customer service, user focus or an equivalent issue as a key strategic direction or priority sends a strong message to both customers and staff about expected behaviours and attitudes. Explicit statements of this type are most often made in the context of a planned programme of major organizational and cultural change. However, such statements can – and arguably should – be used to strengthen or reinforce customer-service culture, even where already embedded. There are several arguments for doing this: first, you simply cannot over-emphasize the importance of customer service; secondly, it is easy for staff to become complacent and stop striving for improvement; and thirdly, the message needs to be effectively conveyed to new staff and new customers.

Strategy development

Goals specify the key directions for an organization or service over the planning period but they cannot be finally confirmed until strategies have been properly developed to the point where resource implications and organizational dependencies can be assessed.

The 'goal-translation process' - whereby each top-level 'goal', 'objective' or 'strategy' is converted from a general statement of what you want to achieve to a more specific description of how it will be done – is the key to successful strategy implementation. Thus, for each of its seventeen goals, Syracuse University Library (2000) lists specific initiatives and details of the project managers, action team leaders and start dates.

Supporting strategies

The process of strategy development needs to extend beyond the selection of core/primary strategies associated with high-level goals, as these strategies may have policy and resource implications which necessitate changes to existing practice and funding. They may also have wider implications for areas such as service promotion and publicity, staff development and training, the ICT infrastructure and organizational structures.

A useful model for thinking about organizations and strategy development is the '7-S' framework developed at the McKinsey consulting firm and popularized by ex-McKinsey consultants, such as Peters and Waterman (1982) and Pascale (1990). This framework identifies seven inter-related factors that determine the effectiveness of an organization and its ability to change – Strategy, Structure, Systems, Style, Staff, Skills and Shared values. It makes the point that it is hard to make progress in any one of these critical areas without considering the others. For example, the commitments of Kitchener Public Library (2000) to broaden electronic access and help customers develop skills require *supporting strategies* for ICT systems and staff skills, which are picked up under two other themes – Technology and Organizational Effectiveness. The British Library (2001b) lists seven 'key support activities' required to progress its strategy for user focus, for example

- Increase our investment in research into the needs of users and potential users
- Develop an integrated approach to service provision so that users can easily access the range of services which are of value to them
- Develop and promote the British Library brand in order to improve public understanding of what we provide.

Cultural change, such as the shift from a functional/product-based service to a mission/customer-led service, is frequently carried through with corresponding structural adjustments as giving people new roles, responsibilities and relationships often forces new behaviours and fosters different attitudes. Re-structuring a library into client-oriented teams as the main organizational unit sends a clear message to both staff and users about the importance of customer focus. Thus many university libraries have replaced 'subject librarians' with 'liaison librarians' supporting designated academic units, signalling a more outward-looking and proactive style with the focus on people rather than subjects. At Merton Library & Heritage Service, development of a new strategy required structural change to support the strategic objectives and espoused new culture: the split between professional staff and so-called customer service/non-professional staff was 'ditched' and new posts of Library & Service Managers were created, each with responsibility for one of the three new objectives – community development, economic regeneration and lifelong learning (Pateman, 2002).

Performance indicators

Performance measurement is an essential part of strategic management with a potential role at every point in the planning cycle, from the gathering of baseline data about your current situation, competitive position and customer perceptions, through the setting of performance targets in strategy development, to the monitoring and evaluation of progress in programme management. Traditional approaches to performance measurement in library and information services have tended to concentrate on operational and financial data, related to resource utilisation (e.g. money and staff used to purchase and process materials) and service transactions (e.g. interactions between staff, materials and users) rather than strategic issues such as quality of service and outcomes for customers.

In the last decade there has been a conceptual breakthrough in performance measurement with the development by Kaplan and Norton (1992) of the Balanced Scorecard framework. As the label indicates, this framework aims to provide a *balanced* presentation of measures, offering several perspectives of organizational performance in a concise but comprehensive *scorecard*. An effective scorecard should enable instant recognition of an organization's strategic objectives. Kaplan and Norton recommend a limit of 16 to 20 'key measures' from four perspectives, balancing the traditional financial/funding and operational/process concerns with additional customer/service and innovation/learning measures. In this model, managers set goals and measures under these headings, reflecting the targets of their forward strategies.

This ensures that customer service gets top management attention alongside financial performance. The goals (and measures) might include improvements in quality (satisfaction ratings), speed (turnaround times), access (opening hours) and support (training sessions).

Service budgets

The relationship between strategic planning and resource allocation is often problematic. Strategic objectives should inform budget allocations, which should in turn inform the phasing and refinement of strategic developments and service goals in an iterative process. However, in some organizations, planning and budgeting are not properly connected with the result that planning and strategy-making are constrained by resource allocation decisions taken without reference to strategic priorities. Irrespective of organizational circumstances, it is essential for library and information managers to think strategically and imaginatively when preparing service plans and to consider the funding implications and options for achieving their strategic objectives. At a minimum, plans should distinguish between goals that can be met within existing resources and those that require additional funds. Preferably, they should include estimates of the amount of additional resource needed and indicate whether any internal reallocation or external funding might be possible.

The 'line-item' method of budgeting, which lists elements of expenditure in basic categories (such as salaries, materials, equipment, etc.), is not a very effective approach as this focus on inputs makes it difficult to relate expenditure to services or objectives. In contrast, *programme budgeting* organises line-item budgets around service areas (typically reflecting management structures) and has the potential to support fuller understanding of the level of investment in different services. Service managers therefore need to consider whether their budgeting and accounting methods should be modified to reflect changes to organizational structures and culture, for example to provide information on the relative costs of serving different customer groups.

Strategy documents

Some people argue that it is not worth bothering with formal plans because they become out-of-date almost as soon as they are written. This assumes that strategy documents are static entities, but a sensible process makes provision for refining and updating both the plans of an organization and the assumptions on which they are based. Many libraries are formally required to submit some form of plan as part of an organizational planning cycle, but in any case there are sound reasons for documenting plans – in print or electronically.

1. The process of writing and editing forces people to think through their goals and objectives and serves as a double check on overall consistency, organizational capacity and other critical issues.
2. Written plans provide a visual medium of communication with both internal and external audiences and make it easier to convey a consistent message to staff, customers and other stakeholders in different places at different times.
3. A formal record of intended activities serves as a mechanism for control, enabling regular and ad hoc monitoring of whether specified actions have been carried out and underlying assumptions have proved correct.

The level of detail included will be influenced by formal requirements, personal preferences and specific decisions on whether to develop a hierarchy or family of plans presenting successively more detailed elaborations of strategies, actions and timetables. The plan needs to state what you intend to do and why, how you will do it and when, with enough information on background and resources to convince readers. It is essential to define the scope of the plan, particularly the period covered and the services included (for example, library services only, library and ICT services) and it is desirable to provide a contents list and an executive summary if the document runs to more than five pages.

Practical examples

Contemporary library planning statements vary significantly in length, content and format, with examples found of five, ten, twenty and thirty pages. Documents prepared in accordance with the DCMS guidelines tend to be around 100 pages, but the general trend is towards more concise documents, covering shorter timespans, with a sharper focus on intended results. Lengthy descriptions of service characteristics have been replaced with briefer summaries of strategic issues, proposed approaches and performance indicators. Vision statements have become more prominent, often forming the main narrative section of the plan and sometimes comprising a set of alternative scenarios representing different planning assumptions or particular customer perspectives. Many elements previously included (such as SWOT analyses and statistical data) are now relegated to appendices or excluded altogether.

The content of the final documentation usually has three elements:

- an introductory section, which sets the context of the document, covering both the external environment and internal issues;
- the overall strategy, which states the ambitions of the service, expressed in its vision, mission, values and goals;
- the forward plan, which lays out the intentions for the period, elaborated as strategies and actions with responsibilities and timescales.

The latter part may form a separate document and additional information may be included as appendices (for example, the remit and/or membership of the planning team, the results of customer surveys, risk analyses and contingency plans). The introduction may be prefaced by a foreword (from the library director or committee chair) and include acknowledgements of staff and community contributions.

Many libraries now make their plans available via their websites, often offering several formats (typically HTML and PDF or Word). The style of presentation is generally quite simple, but some libraries have been more creative in their use of layout and design: for example, the Kitchener Public Library (2000) plan is professionally designed, with sidebars and photographs on many pages; Houston Public Library (2001) uses sidebars to provide quotes from stakeholders, highlight facts and figures and reinforce key points; and Macquarie University Library (1999) makes creative use of blocks and columns of text in double-page spreads to convey 'where we want to be', 'desired outcomes' and 'how we will do it' in relation to teaching partnerships, research partnerships and community outreach.

More significantly, there is a trend towards using websites to make the planning process more transparent and participative. The Strategic Long Range Planning Team home page of the University of Arizona Library (n.d.) provides links to a wealth of documentation, such as the 'team charge' and other descriptions of the planning process, in addition to end-products from that process (including a 17-page current situation analysis). The University Libraries at Virginia Tech have a webpage devoted to their strategic plan steps, which lists their steering committee and co-ordinators and then describes the process, with links to working papers, workshop outputs and draft plans (Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 2002). The website for the Syracuse University Library (2000) strategic plans has links to progress reports, invites questions about the plan and allows library staff to express their interest, suggest an initiative or submit a report. The introductory part of the plan provides an explanation of the process and a glossary of planning terminology; definitions of terms (such as 'mission statement' and 'planning themes') are then repeated at the relevant points in the text.

National and public libraries are also explaining their planning processes and inviting comments from customers via their websites: the British Library (2001b, 2001c) launched an online consultation survey when it published its *New strategic directions* and then published a report on the responses; Houston Public Library (n.d.) has a web form for comments on its plan, which promises a personal response to those who request it. The Annual Library Plans provided for DCMS are not very customer-friendly documents, but some authorities, such as West Berkshire Council (2002) and Westminster City Council (n.d.), have added introductory overviews and/or produced special summaries to aid communication.

A significant weakness in current practice is that plans are often not very customer-friendly. Electronic communication offers opportunities to repackage material in imaginative and innovative ways for different audiences, but such facilities are not yet being widely exploited. Many stakeholder groups do not want or need the same amount of detail as funding bodies and formal committees and so managers should be giving more thought to reworking their plans for communication with service customers, special interest groups, community leaders, etc. In addition to the complete versions of their plans, strategy websites could include summaries, extracts and key points for particular groups, as well as background papers and PowerPoint slides from presentations to open meetings.

Conclusion

A successful customer-service culture is not something that can be designed and built in the way that you can plan and construct a new building or a computer system, but the tools and techniques of strategic management can be used to facilitate cultural change or to strengthen an established culture. Library and information managers need to ensure that their policies and strategies (as stated and enacted) reflect a culture of real customer service. The key to achieving this is to build customer perspectives into your planning processes, through a combination of direct personal engagement and indirect 'proxy' involvement via frontline staff, and to make your service responsive to changing needs by making strategic planning a continuous process that is also integrated with the wider internal and external policy context.

Customers are more likely to participate if they can see evidence of your commitment to listen to their views and act on their suggestions. Customer focus can be demonstrated in formal statements of your mission, values, vision and goals, but must also be reflected in performance measures, service budgets, organizational structures and management behaviour. Communication style is a critical issue: managers need to shift from the one-size-fits-all mindset and think carefully about their intended audiences; concise customised messages in clear everyday language will support and promote a customer-service strategy and culture.

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