

STRATEGIC PLANNING

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A process and framework for relating an organization to its environment, defining its scope and direction, and deciding actions needed to achieve specified goals. This involves gathering and processing information, identifying and evaluating options, deciding and refining objectives, formulating and implementing plans, monitoring and reviewing progress.

Strategic planning originated in the USA during the 1960s and spread to Europe and beyond in the 1970s and 1980s to become an accepted part of managerial thinking and practice in the business world and public sector. It differs from traditional long-range planning in its focus on environmental forces and concern with fundamental questions about where an organization is going and how it will get there. Strategic planning is about the systematic management of discontinuous change, requiring continuous monitoring of a changing environment and frequent review of organizational priorities in line with environmental factors. There is considerable overlap between corporate/business strategy and marketing strategy, and many of the models and tools used in strategic planning are concerned with marketing variables. However, strategic planning is essentially about defining the business (or businesses) of an organization and setting overall objectives, while marketing plans elaborate strategies to achieve these objectives. Nevertheless, market research is an essential aspect of the environmental analysis that underpins strategic planning.

The adoption of strategic planning concepts and techniques by library and information service managers has followed the general trend, with US libraries acting as pioneers from the 1970s onwards, and libraries in other countries gradually following their lead. In the United Kingdom, the British Library was among the first to produce and publish a formal strategic plan in 1985, but was quickly emulated by academic and government libraries. In both the USA and the UK public libraries also began to adopt formal planning processes during the 1980s.

There have been some centralized initiatives to encourage formal planning in libraries, notably the process developed by the Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association (Palmour et al. 1980), the manual produced by the UK Library and Information Services Council Working Group on Public Library Objectives (1991) and the programme offered by the Association of Research Libraries Office of Management Studies (Juwon and Webster 1991). The contribution of professional associations is also evident at international level in papers presented at the General Conference of IFLA where representatives of national libraries have pointed to the value of strategic planning for developing countries as well as richer nations in raising awareness and opening debate on their function and role with government, users, the general public and the professional community (Ferguson 1992; Donlon and Line 1992). Developments in special libraries are less well documented but the Special Libraries Association promoted the concept by publishing a practical guide (Asantewa 1992).

Approaches and terminology used in strategic planning vary but common elements include a statement of purpose or mission, the articulation of values or principles, a vision of the desired

future, a set of goals and targets, and an action plan with a timetable. Early examples of library plans were often developed over eighteen months or longer, but planning processes have gradually been streamlined, evidenced by the later Public Library Association recommendation of a four- to five-month timeline to complete a plan (Nelson 2001). From the mid-1990s, the trend has been away from extensive documentation of environmental factors and service characteristics to concise presentation of key issues, proposed strategies and intended results. Time spans covered have also shortened with plans typically limited to five years or less. Some library managers have extended the scope of their planning processes by using more sophisticated techniques such as scenario development (Giesecke 1998) or developing broader plans for interorganizational activity (Bolt and Stephan 1998).

The impetus for strategic planning may come from within a library or information unit, but some form of plan is usually required by the parent body or funding authority. Library planning needs to be related to general organizational objectives and strategies for particular units or functions, especially those concerned with information provision. The nature and scope of library plans will also be affected by the development of enterprise-wide information or knowledge strategies, which are often associated with the convergence and restructuring of library and information technology services, and the adoption of formal approaches to knowledge management.

Despite the time and effort required for strategic planning, published accounts point to significant benefits, including new perspectives on services, strengthened cases for funding, easier delegation of decisions, more ownership of changes and a shared sense of purpose, especially where staff and users have participated in the planning process. Strategic planning also helps managers to identify critical issues and is a prerequisite for performance measurement in libraries.

References

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- Bolt, N. M. and Stephan, S. S. (1998) **Strategic Planning for Multitype Library Cooperatives: A Planning Process**. American Library Association.
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- Ferguson, S. (1992) 'Strategic planning for national libraries in developing countries: an optimist's view', **IFLA Journal**, 18 (4), 339-344
- Giesecke, J. (ed.) (1998) **Scenario Planning for Libraries**, American Library Association
- Jurow, S. and Webster, D. (1991) 'Building new futures for research libraries', **Journal of Library Administration**, 14 (2), 5-19

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Library and Information Services Council Working Group on Public Library Objectives (1991) **Setting Objectives for Public Library Services: A Manual of Public Library Objectives.** HMSO

Nelson, S. (2001) **The New Planning for Results: A Streamlined Approach.** American Library Association

Palmour, V. E., Bellassai, M. C. and DeWath, N. V. (1980) **A Planning Process for Public Libraries.** American Library Association

Further reading

Corrall, S. (2000) **Strategic Management of Information Services: A Planning Handbook.** ASLIB/IMI

Comprehensive guide with practical examples and annotated bibliographies covering general management and information services.

Favret, L. (1995) 'Local government change and strategic management: an historical perspective and a case study', **Public Library Journal**, 10 (4), 95-101

Case study of the London Borough of Bromley, relating library developments to organizational strategies.

Hughes, A. (2000) 'Information strategies', in J. Elkin and D. Law (eds) **Managing Information.** Open University Press, pp. 49–64

Discussion of strategy development in higher education including speculation about future migration to knowledge management.

Hussey, D. (1999) **Strategy and Planning: A Manager's Guide.** John Wiley

Concise introduction with separate chapters on marketing, financial and human resource planning.

Jacob, M. E. L. (1990) **Strategic Planning: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians.** Neal Schuman.

A step-by-step guide with checklists, worksheets and examples from US library practice, including sample scenarios and models of value-added services.