
Strategic Planning and Catalysts for New Generation of Libraries

E Rama Reddy

Abstract

Strategic Planning in Libraries is absolutely necessary in view of the present day rapid advances in technology. Most libraries are in the area of education and research, in a college or University supporting both teaching and research. Strategic planning should be a cooperative effort with inputs from administration, the computer center personnel, faculty, students and the library staff. Role of librarian is increasingly important during the strategic planning, as educator and leader within the process, whether the process happens within the library or in the Institution. The strategic plan developed should offer a pattern that integrates major goals, policies and actions of the institution into a cohesive whole. It should help allocate resources, capitalize on relative strengths and mitigate against weaknesses etc. This paper details well defined strategic plans for the library to set a clear direction, allow looking at the strengths and weaknesses with the environment, and devoting resources to strengthen support in the core areas of teaching and research.

Keywords : Strategic Planning, Academic Libraries, Change Management

0. What is strategic planning in Libraries ?

Strategic planning is a management tool to help the libraries to do better. It is used to determine mission, vision, values, goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities, timeliness etc. This is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what the library is, what it does and why it does it, with a focus on the future. Strategic planning is only useful if it supports strategic thinking and leads to strategic management. This is the basis for an effective organization.

1. What is strategic management in Libraries?

This is the application of strategic thinking the jobs of leading the library. This has the following three elements:

- Formulation of the library's future mission in the light of changing external factors such as regulation, competition, technology and the users.
- Development of a competitive strategy to achieve the mission
- Creation of the library structure which will deploy resources to successfully carry out its competitive strategy.

2. Planning environment

University Libraries are affected by many changes in education and research that had impact on the University as a whole. Some of these changes present opportunities and some threaten higher education and academic libraries as they operate. In addition there are other factors in the environment that are of specific importance to libraries as they plan for the future. Some of the important factors include:

2.1 Changes in Academic Libraries

Academic Libraries are on the path to change in India slowly. They are starting to engage in collaborations and partnerships in consortia mode. Collaborations and partnerships require new skills for staff, such as knowledge of licensing and negotiations, technical infrastructure management. Libraries are also in the midst of expanding the building space for traditional collections apart from new forms of media and non-traditional information resources. Traditional models of academic library services are insufficient to meet current requirements and the librarians need to engage in devising new models.

2.2 Changes in Technology

The increasing online environment is resulting in users who are more technology savvy and are demanding and expecting more from the libraries. The potential of delivering information anytime anyplace challenges libraries to re-examine how space is organized and used. It is necessary to create new modes to deliver services to the users desktops even outside the campuses. As more resources are created via the web, issues arise related to licensing, archiving, security and access. Librarians are challenged to develop new technical skills and abilities to validate the quality of information resources over the web.

2.3 Changes in Publishing

The transition from print to electronic distribution brought significant disruption to the publishing industry and also marketing the resources. The challenges are traditional scholarly communication converting the traditional publishing to the digital environment; new intellectual property rights issues, alternatives to journals and dramatic increase in all forms of information content etc. These challenges along with enabling technologies have created major issues around copyright, ownership and management of digital resources.

2.4 Changes in Education

Innovations in the design and delivery of education to reach to the people are on the increase. But effectiveness of such innovations and the impact on the faculty productivity is still not clear. The new modes of learning need different approach and new support system for both students and the faculty.

2.5 Changes in Research Environment

Research funding, which was with government support is now available from public and private sources. While these new partnerships are important to the research, they also raise issues about the priorities, type of resources and support and the faculty interest, addressing the legal issues etc. only established research libraries remain unaffected by these challenges in research funding

3. Strategic planning principles

In developing a strategy it is important to ask right questions to formulate right choices. The typical right questions for the academic libraries to answer are:

- What do libraries need to do to support excellence in the students
- How the library can support a divergent research needs, on and off campus including support in collaborative research.

-
- How the library can continue to facilitate and preserve developments in knowledge across the campus and in the wider scope of research and scholarship
 - How to participate actively in campus-wide solutions to information technology applications to support teaching and research.
 - How the library can contribute and strengthen the life on campus in the institution.

Libraries in the academic institutions are creative partners in the research and learning process. They select, organize, present and preserve information resources relevant to education and research in the Universities. They sustain these resources and provide quality services on behalf of the present and future research and scholarly community. They build intellectual connection among these resources and educate the university community in the effective use of information. The libraries want the university community to think first when they need information.

Today's complex and challenging environment requires the libraries to focus on core mission and willingness to experiment. Small changes may meet the university's short-term needs but they will be inadequate to sustain excellence on the long term needs.

4. Focus and action plans

4.1 Providing rapid, easy and precise access to high quality information to support teaching and research.

Locating and accessing accurate information has become increasingly difficult in today's environment. The challenge to the libraries is to provide user-friendly, integrated, responsive and precise access to all resources in any medium in all relevant disciplines wherever and whenever it is needed. This requires libraries to develop tools to merge an invaluable traditional asset with emerging forms of research and instruction. Simply providing access is not sufficient. Overwhelming volume of information is available and the users need to have confidence in libraries that they would get the best resources to meet their specific needs. This requires the librarian to play the increasingly important roles of evaluator and organizer of information and educator of users. Librarian requires new skills and approaches to be successful in meeting the user requirements.

Another important aspect of access is availability of access over time. In addition to providing access to current materials, the preservation and sustainability of resources, whether owned, developed or accessed, whether in print or electronic is an important goal that must be fulfilled. Emphasis should be on relevance and excellence to define the standard for best practices in the libraries.

Action plan :

4.1.1 Expanding network based access to collection by providing online digital resources whenever needed.

This strategy focuses on the need to continue to build collections that provide the best and most relevant resources to the university community and ensuring ease of access for users. As more digital resources become available the library staff needs to develop tools and processes to add an expanding variety of digital contents to supplement the library resources to contribute to the libraries' goal of excellence.

4.1.2 Improve access to materials that are based in the library and acquired externally by providing enhanced access and delivery of resources.

Access to resources that are owned by the library could be enhanced through improved organization of physical materials and better delivery system with value-added services such as electronic table of contents, reviews or html links etc. In the cases of materials not owned by the library, the challenge is to develop a systematic approach that ensures timely and accurate delivery. In both the cases the focus is delivery of services to the expectations of users.

- Library should be developed as a virtual gateway to quality resources and services regardless of medium (web, print or multimedia). The libraries need to be able to provide enhanced data access and usability to faculty and students. The emphasis should be on the library as an enabling gateway rather than gatekeeper providing access to all relevant high quality information resources.
- Digitize selected university publications and important archival material and also initiate digitization of other materials of value to the university. Space and storage problems can be expected to continue. The libraries should take a leadership role in demonstrating the utility of managing resources into and under digitization. This will require both direct action in digitizing the university materials and collaborating with colleagues on campus, other libraries and within consortia.

4.1.3 Improve service to the students and faculty by reducing fragmentation, expanding service hours and developing training programs in the evaluation and use of information resources.

For faculty and students needing access to the libraries' print resources, the fragmentation of the physical collections and need for useful bibliographic records as the teaching and research become more distributed and more interdisciplinary. Services should be available 24/7, whether through physical presence or electronic connection. Libraries should play major role in educating students in information seeking strategies. With new technologies and techniques there are opportunities for librarians to reach out to students, faculty and researchers and help them to fully utilize the resources that are available.

4.2 Ensuring the library to provide space and operate to facilitate intellectual life in the University

Libraries must be creative partners in the research and teaching process of the University. This requires the library to redefine its role and acquire a place of recognition. In today's learning environment students and faculty need not only individual study and work space but also multimedia spaces that allow group of people to work actively in close proximity to information. Libraries now must provide easy access to all media and learning tools to facilitate variety of working modes to the users. By providing both access to media and resources and opportunities for conversation and collaborative work, the library truly becomes a place for active academic work. Today such space is lacking. The students are looking to the libraries for space that contributes to quality of life and intellectual growth.

Action plan:

4.2.1 Create space that meets the needs of the academic community.

The needs that should be addressed are:

- Secure individual study space
- Group study and project space, both quiet and noisy
- Space that is conveniently located

-
- Exhibition space for displays and to host events
 - Space that is accessible and secure with 24/7 with minimal staffing but with access to resources and information
 - Easy access to library café
 - Multimedia space

4.2.2 Create space that meets the needs of current and future library operations

It is necessary to reassess the present space and redesign the space slowly with additional construction, if necessary. Most independent library buildings on the campuses can be remodeled to suit to the requirements with future expansions.

4.2.3 Incorporate appropriate emerging information technologies in to library's space

There are many high-end technological advances, such as high bandwidth access wireless capability, that are sufficiently expensive to warrant deployment as shared resources. Library's IT infrastructure should mould into the university's IT infrastructure.

4.3 To be a leader among academic institutions in the use of information technology

Information Technology has dramatic impact on expectations regarding the definition and scope of libraries. But unfortunately, the gap between expectations and reality is vast in the libraries in India. Advances in information technology focus almost exclusively on new applications and short and long term gains. The University libraries have a unique responsibility for the development of sustainable information technology models for the future. IT has now created the need for educators and librarians to understand the impact and potential of the next generation of IT and to ensure that technological advances serve education and society effectively into the next century.

4.3.1 Create a digital library with partners from industry and others to address important problems in applied library and information technologies

The digital library would focus on the new roles and responsibilities of libraries in the changing educational environment of higher education. It would address the need of libraries to sustain and serve digital publications from variety of sources and would also develop strategies and tools for managing the digital materials including the e-prints.

A digital library would provide a venue to experiment with new ways of organizing library services cutting across disciplines, supporting staff exploring new ideas, addressing technical problems and designing new services. It could also serve as a training ground for library staff to learn new skills.

4.3.2 Use the best applied technology to enhance user self-service

Though today's technology may enable the library users to do more on their own, it is not always simple. There are areas where a desire for self service is at odds with system functionality. Technology will be sought that enables the libraries to address self-service check out and check in and user initiated inter-library lending and hot links from within the libraries gateways and online catalogue.

4.3.3 Extend the reach of library staff

As technology enables the students, faculty and researchers to access information from desk tops, they still need access to library expertise and assistance in using these materials. Live connectivity to library services could become a characteristic of the University, enhancing the university's image and reputation in the scholarly community.

5. Conclusion

This is a time of great excitement and challenges for librarians, information professionals and researchers. The possibilities are enormous but the libraries need to develop strategic planning to streamline the processes keeping in view of the present and future requirements. Most libraries in the country need to get ready to invest in the infrastructure creation like the Local Area Network in the Institutions. This will facilitate accessing resources available world over. The Internet has brought many positive developments in the libraries and information services. Libraries have been benefiting from the increased access to resources. The opportunities for communication and creation of new services that were not possible in pre-Internet days are now available. A beginning is made by the UGC by creating "InfoNet" to make available e-journal access to the Universities. This facility will strengthen learning and research activities in the Universities.

Problems do exist in terms of the initial costs, limited local content, rapidly changing technology and insufficient trained human resources, still India has done quite well and the Indian libraries need to do lot more to benefit from the technology.

About Author



Dr. E. Rama Reddy is University Librarian at University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad 500 046, India and holds M.A., M.L.I.Sc., and Ph.D. Earlier he worked with Osmania Medical College and Osmania University. He received UNESCO Fellowship, A.T. Fellowship of ACU London, participated in Internship program at N.W. Missouri University, USA, & Indo-Netherland exchange program and visited National Taiwan University, Taipei. He visited 7 countries, organized several conferences & seminars, member of several committes and acted as invited experts in various programs in india & abroad. He has completed several projects, published several books & actively involved in professional associations.

E-Mail : errlib@uohyd.ernet.in