

Strategic Planning—Thinking and Doing



Overview

The university library director has just met with the new president of his institution. During the conversation, the president asked about the development of information services at the university and wondered, aloud, why there did not appear to be a strategic plan developed as a guide for the library and as a public document to enlighten the academic community about systems and services. The director, somewhat chagrined, acknowledged that most large academic libraries and several smaller ones, as well as other types of libraries, have developed proactive plans. However, he secretly feels that it is a fad that does not carry substance. He does recognize, from that discussion, that a plan is expected and quite necessary for the future of information services on the campus. He searches out several Web sites of libraries in other universities and colleges, in addition to conducting a literature search through library literature, with particular attention to some of the projects and programs that have been instigated and implemented by the Association of Research Libraries and the American Library Association's Library Administration and Management Association (LAMA) and like institutions in other countries.

This is but one example of the important role that accountability planning plays in offering information services in all types of information services institutions, whether they are public libraries funded by local or state governments, school learning resource centers supported by local tax dollars, university or college libraries supported by governments and tuition, or specialized information centers in both for-profit and private organizations. A manager or management group must determine the most

appropriate way of demonstrating accountability while developing needed services. This chapter will present an introduction to the topic of strategic planning for information services.

Thinking strategically means focusing upon a vision for the organization as it attempts to create distinctive value for those whom its services exist. Strategic planning can be useful only if it supports such strategic thinking as a step in the organization's strategic management; those three steps are the basis for an effective organization. Strategic thinking means asking not only if the organization is doing things right but also, more importantly, "Are we doing the right thing?" More precisely, it means making a strategic thinking assessment by keeping in mind an awareness of the greater environment in which the organization operates. Those outside factors are likely to affect the fulfillment of the organization's purpose. This awareness allows the information services organization to be more creative in developing effective responses to those forces. Strategic thinking facilitates the conversion of a vision and mission into goals and action plans. Therefore, a strategic planning process is only as good as the strategic thinking that leads to its development and actions. In order to be most successful in the planning effort, this thinking precedes planning and planning precedes actions. The whole process requires some degree of looking around or so-called futuring, by considering the many important factors, inside and outside, that have potential effect on the organization's future. Strategic thinking most oftentimes involves brainstorming, including such actions as what-if scenario planning. Successful thinking requires looking backward and identifying successful accomplishments that need to be capitalized upon as well as looking forward by letting go of some things that have been maintained "because we have always done them that way." In other words, it means challenging assumptions so that new directions and initiatives can be created. Without strategic thinking, a strategic planning process is likely to be no more than an exercise in futility.

Strategic thinking, then, is a process of creating a better tomorrow for the information services organization, and it requires insight through synthesis as well as analysis, nonlinear as well as linear thinking, visual as well as verbal conceptualizing, implicit as well as explicit thinking, and the need to engage the heart as well as the head.¹



Some Definitions

Strategic visioning: A proactive view, leading to a plan to anticipate the future of the library organization.

Strategic acting: A process of strategically analyzing the organization's efforts.

Strategic planning: A systematic method used by organizations to adapt to expected changes.

Core values: A set of common beliefs held by the organization.

PLANNING STRATEGICALLY

Many systems, methods, models, and options for strategic planning are being developed in many not-for-profit organizations in preparation for an unpredictable future. This is why strategic thinking as a basis for the development of information services is not just desirable but mandatory. To be truly strategic in actions, however, some ambiguity must be tolerated, meaning that some uncertainty becomes acceptable. Faced with that unknown future, library and information services organizations are challenged to maintain the process of converting information to knowledge, through staff initiatives, for the benefit of customers. Such strategic planning involves a continuous process of making entrepreneurial, even risk-taking, decisions systematically, with the greatest possible knowledge of future consequences.

The process of strategic thinking and then planning is a proactive one and as such provides the underlay for initiative, by developing and employing a mindset that guides organizational thinking and acting. It calls upon members of an information services organization to discern what is truly important and to position it within a relatively long-term context by imagining and exploring the identified innovative possibilities. In a sense, the process can be described as a way of taking control of the future by developing the vision of the results that the organization wants to achieve. This requires revisiting and reenvisioning the organization and the service mission that is most desirable. It involves reexamining the organization's strengths and weaknesses and identifying threats as well as opportunities that exist and ones that can hinder or encourage that future state of information services. Management and staff colleagues, working together, are required to participate in the exploration of future options and directions in a systematic way. Three primary questions guide this future strategic thinking exercise:

1. What seems to be happening? Answering that question requires addressing, meaning perceiving, how one builds the relevant knowledge base.
2. What possibilities are presented? This requires addressing, meaning understanding, how one determines the significance or use of the knowledge base.
3. What is the organization going to do about it? This requires reasoning, how to determine the significance or use of the knowledge base.²

Resolving this questioning mix involves identifying the *political*, *economic*, *sociological*, and *technological* (PEST) forces external to the organization. The outcome of this PEST analysis, an acronym for the process, has an influence on what eventually can be accomplished. A knowledge base developed from identifying and describing those forces, plus input from customers, allows the information services organization to develop scenarios of what information services appear reasonable and desirable. If those are then compared to the identification of an organization's own strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats (SWOT), possibilities for the future begin to emerge. Intangible inputs also are identified in this strategic thinking process,

including the organizational culture and values, that play a role in developing a vision and mission. There should be an attempt to convert those intangibles into outputs of trust identified through honesty, openness, and reliability; satisfaction; team spirit; and commitment of pride, loyalty, and ownership of the process. Strategic planning can assist libraries and information centers in developing this kind of thinking mode that facilitates projecting the organization into a desired future.

PLANNING—THE OUTCOME

Strategic planning, then, is the systematic outcome of a thinking process that enables libraries and information centers to organize efforts necessary to carry out major decisions and to measure the results of these decisions against the expectations through organized, systematic feedback and adjustments. Libraries and information centers as customer-focused organizations develop services to meet their needs and also market to nonusers who are potential customers. Therefore, strategic planning must start with the customer. That focus is primary in all types of libraries and information centers today. Just as with strategic thinking, several questions must be addressed in the process:

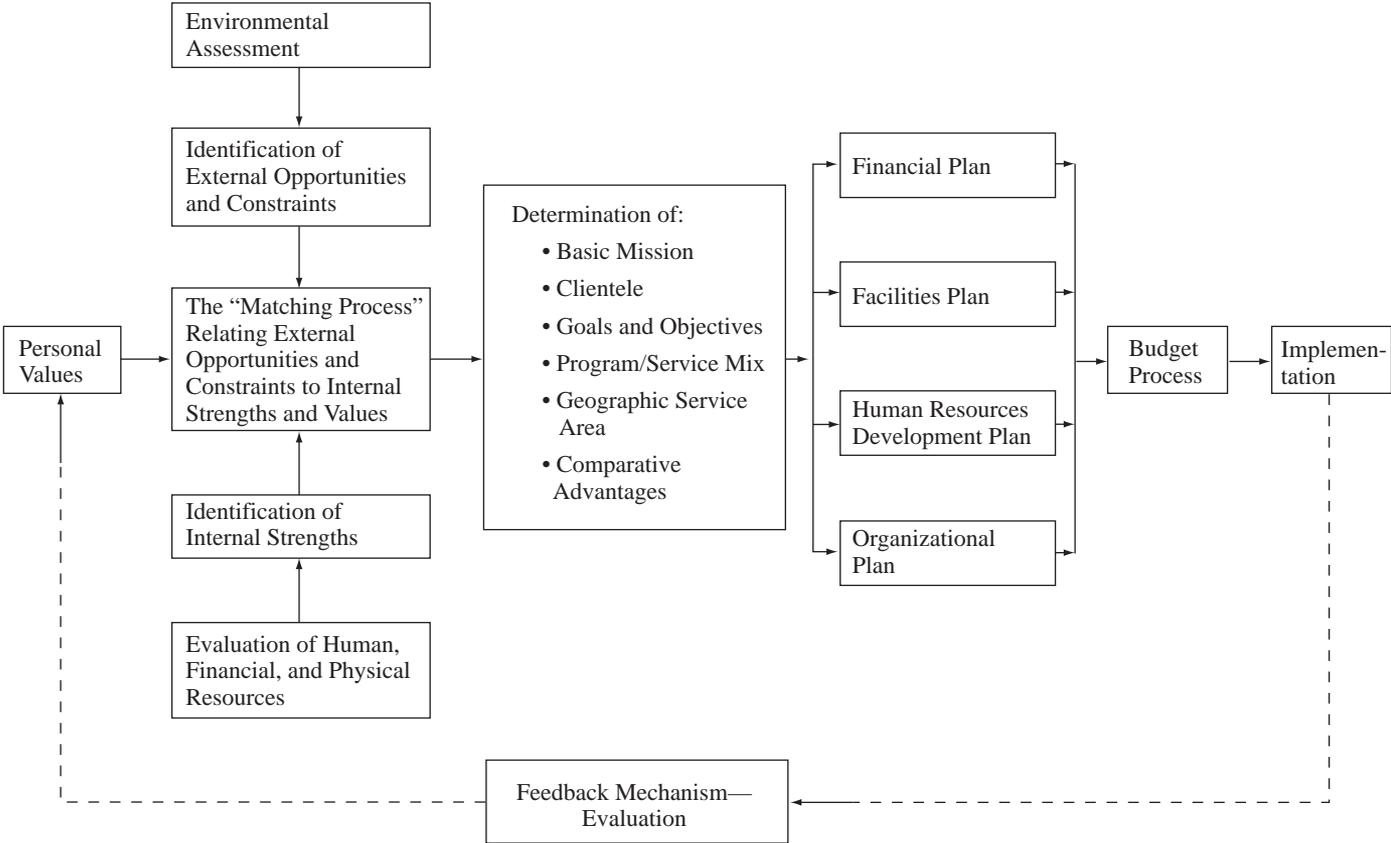
- Who are we? Requires reaffirming or creating the organizations vision and mission.
- Where are we now? Requires a SWOT analysis, which includes both an internal examination and an external view of trends and threats.
- Where do we want to be? Requires the visioning aspect and then preliminary goal and objective setting.
- How do we get there? Requires the development of specific action, financial and communications plans.
- How are we doing? Requires periodic review of the plan, noting successes and shortcomings, and preparation of a revitalized plan.

Figure 5.1 illustrates this strategic planning process common to library and information centers that have initiated strategic plans.

Strategic planning was introduced in the business world more than half a century ago to address market shifts. However, it now has much wider, almost universal, application in not-for-profit organizations as well. Despite its usefulness, the concept has not been universally applied in libraries, whether in higher education planning, city or regional or state planning, school system planning, or corporate planning. However, most large library and information centers and many smaller ones are now involved in some form of strategic planning.

Many organizations automatically associate strategic planning with growth and new resources management. In today's world of "doing more with less," however, it is equally important for successful retrenchment and maintenance of efforts and particularly with the development of technological systems that enable services, developed and maintained by libraries, to be available

Figure 5.1—Strategic Planning Is a Continuous Process



beyond the walls of a physical building. Strategic planning requires developing a vision for the organization's information services, identifying a mission within that context, setting realistic goals, establishing attainable objectives, and developing activities that can be carried out as policies and procedures that accomplish those goals and objectives. In its simplest definition, it is a process of translating decisions into policies and policies into actions so that a successful transition can take place in moving from the current scenario to one envisioning the future.

Systematic, planned change is the most effective way to implement new services and preserve important existing ones, while eliminating those programs and services whose usefulness has passed. This scenario requires an organizational arrangement that makes systematic, orderly change possible and attainable within a realistic time frame. Flexibility in development, implementation, and time constraints presents the greatest challenges to a strategic planning effort. "Change at the Speed of Thought" is the metaphor of the day, and this requires a flexible process, perhaps even "preferred futuring."³

In order to implement a successful strategic planning process, two criteria are necessary:

1. The entire organization should be informed of the process and buy into its success, with all participants being kept informed of its progresses.
2. The administration of the larger organization—academic institution, town officials, school district, or company CEOs—should be aware of decisions, commitments, and efforts as a result of the planning activities.

Within such an acknowledged scenario, the library or information center can proceed with a systematic planning process that has a chance of maximum success with a minimum amount of resistance. Most experts agree that a strategic plan should attempt to project at least five years into the future, while recognizing that there should be an ongoing, periodic planning process in place, not a one-time affair resulting in a document that is never again consulted. In fact, with today's changing climate, many libraries and information centers are revisiting their strategic planning efforts on a more retracted basis.

The question of time frame addresses one of the most difficult aspects of strategic planning, which is that of projecting and making assumptions about external forces and the likelihood of change—demographics, technology, and so forth. It must be recognized that the farther ahead one plans and projects, the greater the uncertainty and, therefore, the greater the challenge. Such uncertainty makes it imperative that strategic plans receive continuous review and assessment so that certain aspects can be updated, deleted, or rethought as the library's goals are achieved and as priorities shift. Such a review also can indicate how realistic and achievable the goal-setting process has been.

One weakness in many strategic plans is that seldom, if ever, is there a contingency plan for failure or shortcomings. With shortened timelines, however, more effective and realistic monitoring is achieved.

ENVIRONMENT—THE ASSESSMENT



What Do You Think?

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” asked Alice. “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

—*Alice in Wonderland*

How can an organization get from where it is now to where it would like to be? What steps must be taken to accomplish that goal?

One primary benefit of strategic planning is that it serves as a necessary self-analysis or self-study that allows the organization to identify its strengths and weaknesses and then develop priorities within the framework of those physical and financial capabilities. The need for such an assessment has been heightened by the increasing pace of change in library and information services—what is done and the way it is done. The library or information center as an open, social system with specific goals of service interacts with the larger environment through the underlying values that it exists to support. Strategic planning assumes that an organization is responsive to a dynamic, changing environment. Being strategic, then, means having a clear understanding of the organization’s objectives, while at the same time being aware of the organization’s resources, and incorporating both into being consciously responsive to a dynamic external environment. The process is disciplined in that it calls for a certain order and pattern to keep it focused and productive. This self-examination begins with identifying the beliefs, values, and ethos that guide the library’s or information center’s service goals. Commitment of individuals working in the organization to develop organizational strategies is vital and is evident in common values and shared beliefs or ideologies that are deemed good and desirable and that can act as guidelines for actions and the implementation of decisions.

Self-examination allows the library or information center to formulate actions that address threats and weaknesses while taking advantage of opportunities that promote the vision of what it would like to be, envisioned in a mission statement, with what it can afford to be, regulated by the organization’s physical and financial capabilities. If great disparity exists, a resolution must be sought by reducing expectations and/or increasing resources. Most organizations focus their planning strategies on concerns relating to new directions, services and systems, marketing and public relations, growth and finances, and performance and personnel development. This process of mining information that is vital to the organization’s survival, the self-analysis and environmental scanning process, produces several obvious benefits. Perhaps the most important one is that of viewing itself in relation to the greater environment.

100 Planning

Strategic issues often arise as a part of the planning process and may produce conflicts among both internal and external sources. They are critical challenges that particularly affect the organization's mission and values. They may involve philosophy (why), means (how), ends (what), persons advantaged or disadvantaged by outcome (who), location (where), and timing (when). An open system is prepared to deal with those conflicts and to resolve them. From an analysis emerges a concise understanding of what the organization is and whom it serves—those primary stakeholders whose satisfaction guides ultimate services—and how it intends to achieve a plan by identifying priorities of service and directing decision making.

The planning process analyzes capabilities, assesses environmental pressures and opportunities, sets objectives, examines alternate courses of action, and implements a preferred course. However, the distinguishing mark of strategic planning from other forms of planning is through the deliberate attempt to concentrate resources in areas that can make a substantial difference in future performance and capability. Thus, strategic planning is as much a frame of reference and a way of thinking as it is a set of procedures identified in the planning tool. The process does not concentrate upon projecting past experiences into future practices. Rather, it concentrates upon understanding the ever-changing environment in which the library or information center plays a vital role. It encourages creativity, has the potential of improving communications within the organization, markets the initiative to its users, and allows libraries and other information organizations and their staffs to identify and adopt options that may be unique to their individual settings and at a particular time in the organization's life.

The plan itself encourages managers to experiment with various alternatives before committing resources by promoting a systems approach in:

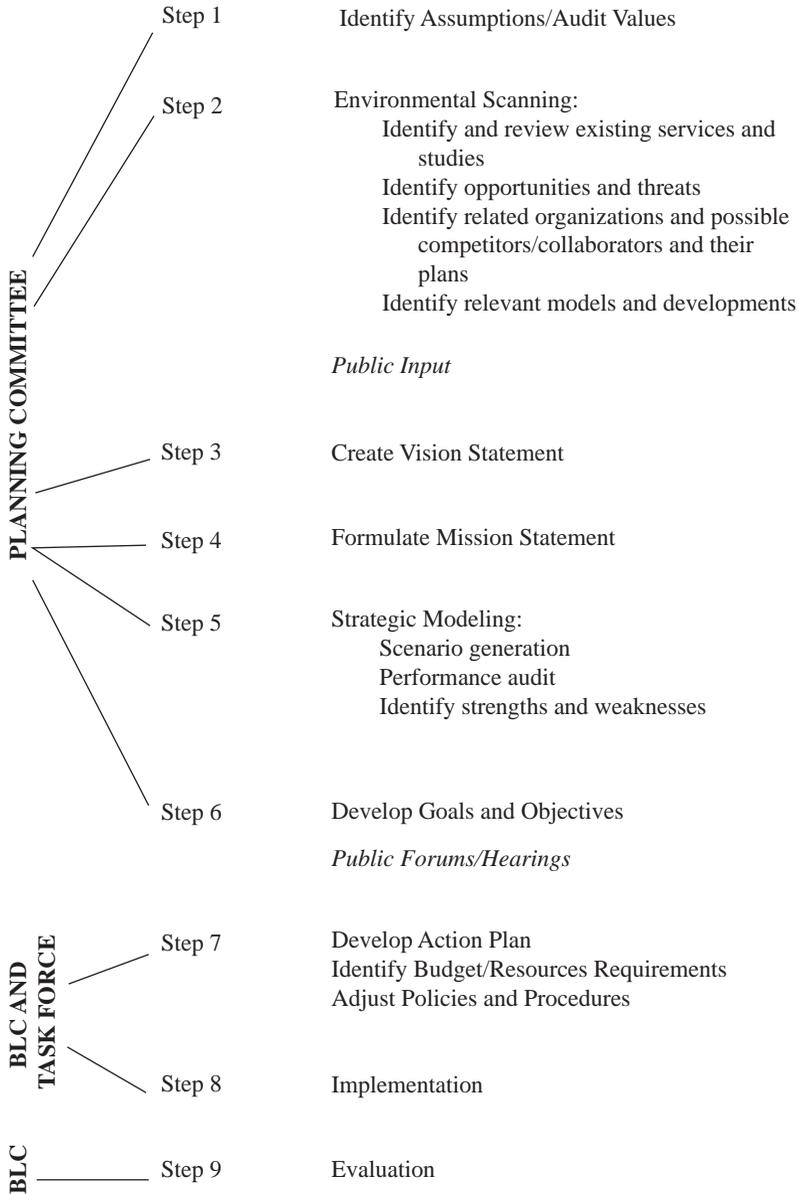
- Providing a mechanism to avoid overemphasizing organizational parts at the expense of the whole.
- Guiding managers to make decisions that are in line with the aims and strategies of the whole organization.
- Providing a basis for measuring the performance of the organization as a whole, of an operating unit, and of an individual.
- Forwarding to higher levels of management those issues of strategic importance with which they should be concerned.
- Serving as a training device by requiring participants to ask and answer the very questions that managers must address.
- Improving managerial motivation and morale through a sense of creative participation in the development of known expectations.⁴

Before beginning a strategic planning process, an organization must seriously address and adequately answer several basic questions: Why it is necessary to plan strategically, and why at this particular point in the organization's life? Who should be involved and how involved should they be? How does strategic thinking lead to strategic planning for this organization and what needs to be known beforehand? Is there understanding among all the primary players of

Figure 5.2—Development of a Strategic Plan

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS

Proposed Process for Development of a Strategic Plan
for the
Future of Library Services in Massachusetts



102 Planning

the factors to be considered and how they interrelate? What additional resources are needed and how will they be made available? Is a strategic planning consultant necessary? How long will the process take? Is the larger organization of which the library or information center is a part committed to supporting the strategic planning effort and what type of support is committed to the outcome and to facilitate success? How will the process be implemented and how will it be evaluated? After those initial questions have been answered to the satisfaction of members of the organization, the important first step in a strategic plan process is the identification of a coordinating team or task force with the responsibility for the major planning phases. In addition, other work teams and task forces are likely to be involved, as appropriate, at various times and levels in the process.

To facilitate the activities, some organizational planning teams work with strategic planning consultants. The primary role of that consultant is to help the team or task force decide what data are to be collected, how they will be collected and by whom, and how they will be analyzed and used. A consultant acts as both a catalyst and facilitator in identifying organizational goals and objectives. He or she does not force opinions on the group because no two organizations are alike and a cookie-cutter approach cannot be imposed upon an organization's missions and goals. A realistic time frame must be set for the strategic planning process.

One vital issue is to consider factors that are in place or have the potential of being developed in the larger context in which information services plays an important role, including the global environment, and that have the potential of affecting the end result of a plan. This issue is answered using a formal environmental scanning process of "looking around."

A part of that looking around can be accomplished by the SWOT analysis, basically an environmental scan, which involves a formalized examination of the strengths and weaknesses that are internal to the organization as well as the opportunities and threats that are factors not specifically under the control of the organization but important to the future of information and knowledge services.

The process examines the microenvironment, that is who the customers are and what their needs are, as well as the internal environment, meaning facilities, structure of the organization, personnel resources, finances available, and organizational structure. Positive and negative events inside and outside of the library or information services organization can influence changes in any or all of these categories. The microenvironment might be considered a simple dichotomy: the external opportunities and constraints.

A second segment of the macroenvironment process sometimes includes the PEST analysis, which helps identify the opportunities and threats by viewing overlapping layers in the greater environment: economic trends, governmental regulations, inflation, demographics, and technological factors among them. PEST analysis includes examining Political issues, including governmental institutions' attitude toward information services and information policies and external stakeholders that affect resources, and Economic forces, including looking at systems and general economic conditions and trends within and outside the country, can be observed and documented. Social forces,

Figure 5.3—Looking-Around Aspect of the Planning Process

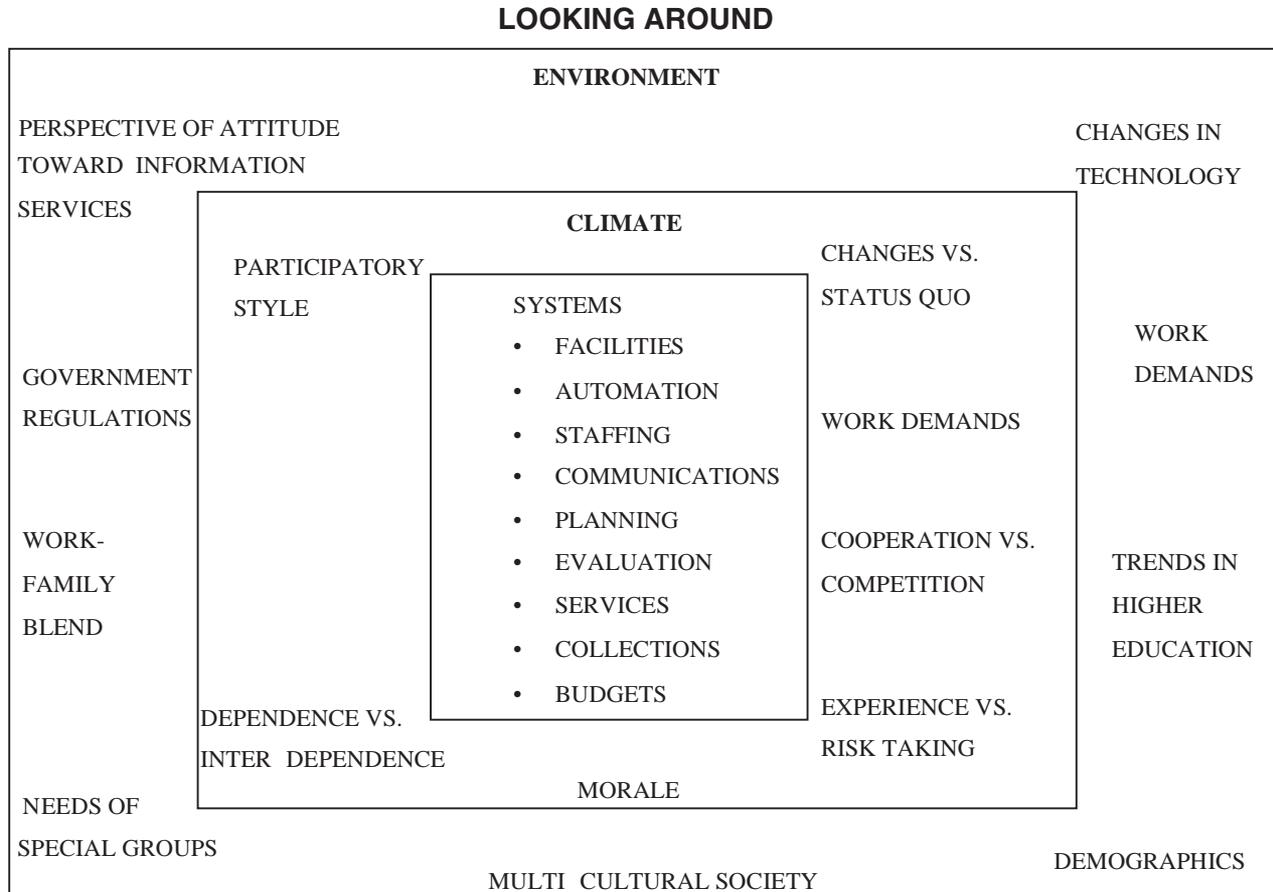
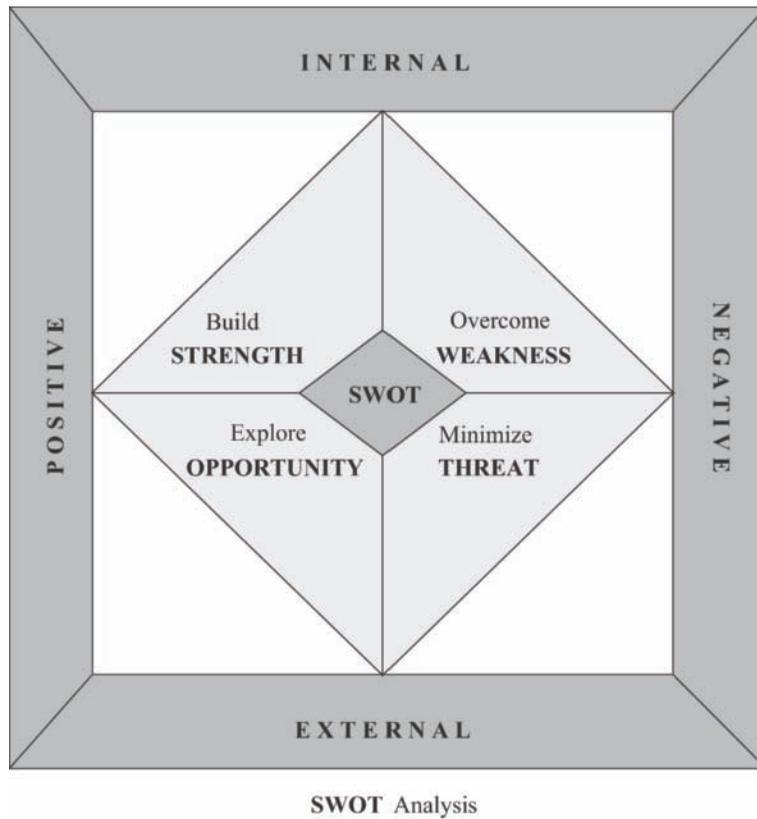


Figure 5.4—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

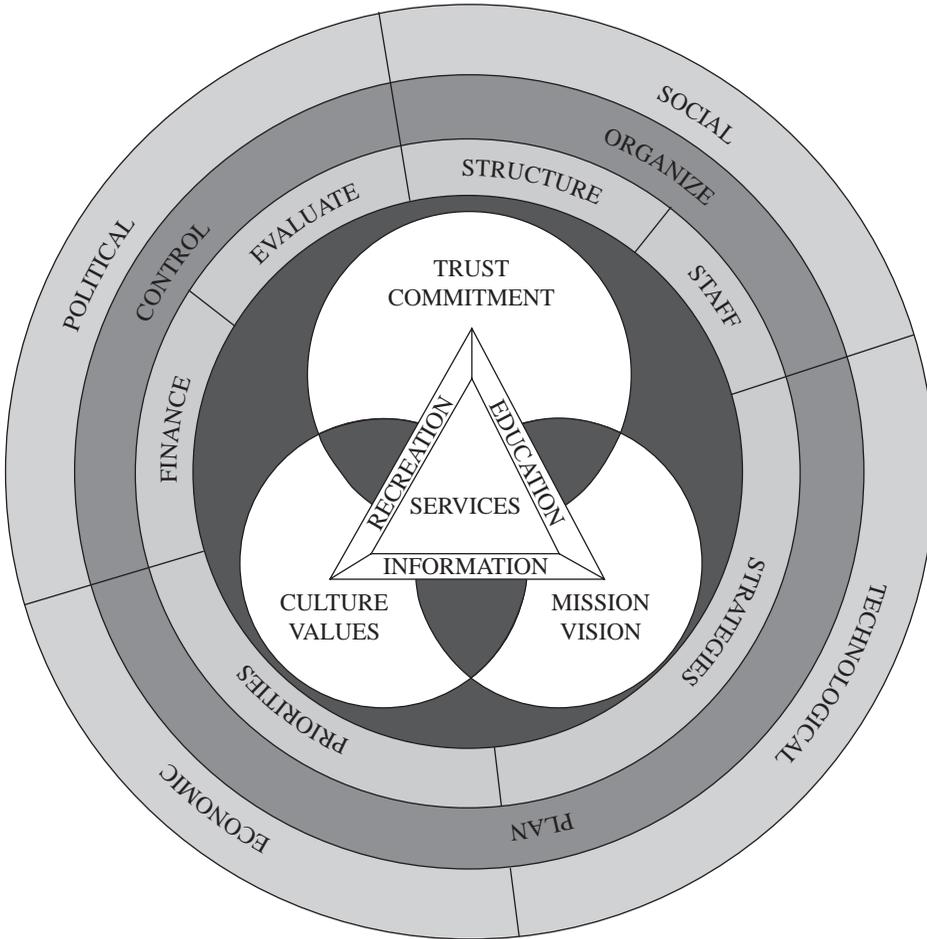
including the norms and values that characterize the local culture, and Technological forces, developing software and hardware systems that are likely to have impact, change what is occurring or may occur in the near future.

Both the SWOT analysis and the PEST analysis help focus planning on the mission and vision of the organization and help develop strategies to monitor external and internal forces. The external environmental scan and the internal self-analysis merge in the process to provide the focus for developing strategies and converting them into plans, policies, processes, and procedures.

The steps in the strategic planning process, after the planning team has been identified and the environmental scan and strengths/weaknesses exercise have been carried out, are to:

- Identify the organizational culture and the values or assumptions that are the organization's guiding principles. This leads to creation of a vision statement that focuses on a better future by communicating enthusiasm and excitement.
- Formulate the vision and mission statements that identify a distinctiveness.
- Develop the goals and objectives.

Figure 5.5—Political, Economic, Social, and Technological (PEST) Factors Impact Planning



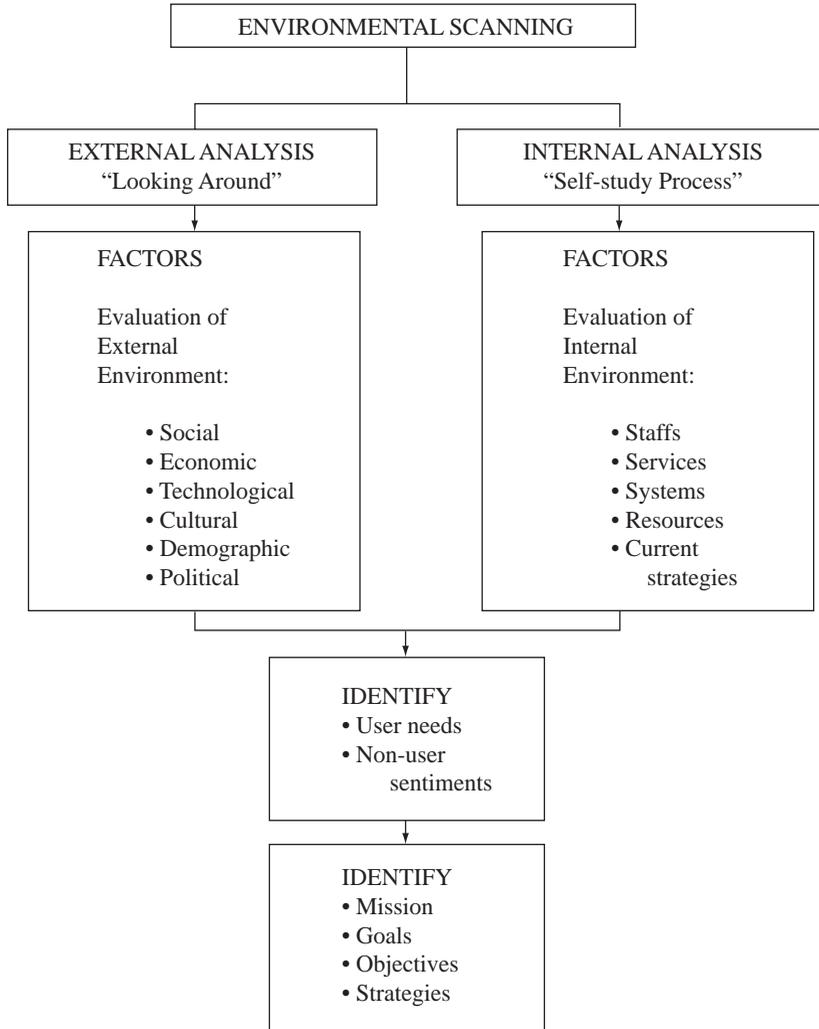
- Develop strategies and action plans. This requires identifying resource funds and developing policies and procedures to accomplish the objectives.
- Implement the strategic plan.
- Monitor, evaluate, and adjust the plan as objectives are accomplished and as priorities shift.



Try This!

Develop a vision statement for a large public library in a diverse population setting. What are the criteria to be considered and how have they been identified?

Figure 5.6—Several Factors Must Be Considered in Initial Strategic Planning Steps



An initial strategic planning exercise, just as with planning of any magnitude, should be viewed as only that—the initial step in a continuous process. No plan, no matter how well formulated, can or will implement itself. Success in the process requires direction and commitment to succeed. Therefore, the final step in the cycle is one of monitoring, the evaluating and adjusting that is essential to the process. Following through with clearly developed implementation steps, measuring progress toward the goals, and incorporating feedback are a continuation of the process of planning. The greatest cause for failure of the process lies in poor execution of the plan, a lack of follow-through accompanied by a lack of commitment to see that it is accomplished or that adjustments are made so that it can be accomplished.

In order for the process to proceed smoothly at the operational level, there should be a common understanding of the meanings of terms used in the strategic planning process.

Vision

Vision drives the planning process. A vision statement, as an act of foresight, outlines what the organization wants to be. It is inspirational; set within a context of the future, it is timeless, and it provides clear decision-making criteria. It envisions changes that will affect systems and services. It is as simple or as complex as necessary to stretch the organization's capabilities and image of itself. It gives shape and direction to the organization's future. An example of a simple, yet comprehensive, statement is one from the Calgary Public Library, which states the vision is "A world of information and ideas within reach of every Calgarian."⁵

Developing a vision statement requires drawing upon the imagination of good information services. Sometimes the sophisticated technique of visioning is used by organizations to help develop vision statements as part of their strategic planning by examining and understanding all of the possibilities available for them to envision a scenario for the future. Vision focuses on the ultimate end result of an effort, not how to get there. As a guiding statement, it should answer the question "What is the preferred future for this organization?" The procedure of visioning seeks to create a compelling picture of a desirable future that represents quantum changes from the past. It has many critics who maintain that it can generate impractical and ungrounded concepts. When visioning focuses on generating a thoughtful vision statement, a process engaging people in the exploration of possibilities, it can be energizing and enlightening for an organization. It can help distance a library from a constrained view of the future and is a particularly powerful way of tying values to action.

Simply stated, it should be an inspiring statement of the future, which can become the guide for actions and behaviors toward the accomplishment of a mission.

Values and Culture

Values are the organization's essential and enduring tenets—a small set of general guiding principles that are proved, enduring guidelines for human conduct. Values are usually stated in terms of respect for other people, their honesty and integrity, a commitment to the social responsibilities and diversity in the organization's work force; engagement in activities with commitment to innovation, collaboration and excellence in services, and social responsibility.

Following from the identified values and a vision for the future, other components necessary to accomplish the strategic plan can be stated. One of the difficulties in stating components in the strategic thinking and planning process is the confusion that exists in the terminology used. In the literature,

Figure 5.7—University of California–Berkeley Library’s Value Statement

<p>The University of California Berkley Libraries</p> <p>Value Statement endorses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collegiality and cooperation by working together to build a civil environment, cooperation, and supporting each other and appreciate diversity; 2. Effective communication through regular and ongoing open communication throughout the system; 3. Excellence and creativity through quality services within the organization’s stated needs and priorities; 4. Fairness, by recognizing the importance of everyone and every part of the organization’s function; 5. Participatory decision making that affects daily work; 6. Professional growth and development given through opportunities and challenges; 7. Recognition through clear and fair rewards policy and competitive pay structure and recognition of individuals successes; and 8. Provide a safe, comfortable, and healthy environment for staff and users.

Source: Library Staff, University of California–Berkeley Library (2002), <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/AboutLibrary/values.html>.

objective is often used as a generic term variously referring to philosophy, vision, mission, purposes, goals, guiding principles, strategies, targets, quotas, policies, activities, and even deadlines. Because of the lack of consistency in the use of the terms, confusion often arises.

A hierarchical process, with integral relationships, can then be developed among components after the vision has been articulated, with the mission preceding goals, which precede objectives, which precede activities and strategies from which policies and procedures emanate and then evaluation is possible. Each of these components builds on the previous one.

With that understanding, activities and policies can be developed and directed toward the achievement of the goals and objectives based upon mission, vision, and value formulation. Clear commitment to and formulation of all components at the different levels encourage consistent planning and decision making over the long term and at various levels of the organization. Unfortunately, in some organizations parts of that whole exist only in the unilateral thinking of management and are not made explicit by verbalizing and sharing them. Such a casual approach must be avoided, because it can lead to confusion, discouragement, and resistance. A great deal of energy can be expended on such faulty and secretive assumptions. It should be recognized by all in the organization that it is difficult, if not impossible, to be accountable for achieving portions of a plan if they have not been clearly articulated and communicated to all involved in implementing them.

Mission

Identification of this broad service aspiration is one primary step in the planning process. The mission statement is a short, succinct statement focusing on the purpose of the organization, its reason for existence, and what it hopes to accomplish. This overarching, comprehensive concept or principle is intended to guide the organization in establishing goals and developing strategies to achieve those goals. Defining its mission is the most important strategic step an organization can take. The effort is based upon the values and beliefs previously identified in the organization's vision. The mission statement should answer three primary questions: "Who (customers)?" "What (services)?" and "How (activities)?" all focused by the previously answered question of "Why (the vision)?" It demonstrates the value the organization can make in the lives, personal and professional, of those it serves.

Only by closely examining external forces and perceived constraints can an effective mission statement be formulated. A clearly formulated, broadly discussed, and mutually accepted statement enables all parts of an organization to work toward common goals. Taken together, these should provide the focus for policy making and for management decisions of all types and at all levels. Only after this analysis has been completed, and the mission has been embedded in the strategic thinking and culture of the organization can quantitative and qualitative goals and objectives, to achieve the mission, be considered. This requires that the concise mission statement be shared with all members of the organization, funding authorities, and supporters so that everyone understands and is committed to its basic principles. This sharing action reduces the possibilities of fragmentation and dissension and enables the statement to be used as an important marketing tool.

Of course, all types of libraries and information centers are typically created with a mission of service. For public libraries, this mission has traditionally included education, information, and recreation or entertainment, and the

Figure 5.8—Components of a Mission Statement



library's services have emerged as a vehicle to accomplish a broader mission. A concise mission statement, for example, from the Boston Public Library states, "The mission of the Boston Public Library is to preserve and provide access to the historical record of our society and to serve the cultural, educational and informational needs of the people of the City and the Commonwealth."⁶

Some form of an organization's mission statement is often set forth in a charter, the constitution and bylaws, annual reports, or other authoritative pronouncements of the organization. Although one might assume that the mission will not change, it does, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically. Therefore, the statement process is not set in stone; it may be constant and fluid, with the flexibility to accommodate change in internal and external forces. Consider, for example, the Baltimore County, Maryland, system. Thirty years ago, its mission was "to make readily available to the greatest possible number of county residents the most wanted library materials of all kinds, and to serve as a point of access for any needed information." A later system's mission statement was "to make readily available to Baltimore County residents library materials and information services in a cost-effective manner, proportionate to levels of demand and use, and to provide access to resources outside the library system," and in the current statement it is to "provide innovative, quality services responding to the needs of our diverse community as we: Promote the love of reading; Excel at providing resources to customers of all ages; and Create welcoming spaces for our community."⁷

To ensure that a library or information center continues to respond appropriately to the changing environment, it should be obvious from this example that its mission should be revisited and reviewed periodically.

Goals, Themes, and Directions

In formulating goals, planners are required to delve one step deeper by resolving the overlap between the needs of the users and a desire to provide appropriate services with the physical and financial capabilities of the library or information center. This intersection provides the foundation for identifying and describing the library's goals. Failure to identify concisely and correctly this common ground leads to the selection of goals—and later objectives and activities—that may be unrelated, unrealistic, unattainable, and subject to false starts that could lead to ultimate failure. Likewise, goals and objectives are likely to change over time and, therefore, must be viewed as flexible, timely, and changeable.

Goals are the organization's broad aspirations defined in operational terms, leading to measurable objectives with strategies and activities emanating from them. Goals provide direction and are intended to produce effectiveness. They also provide a framework for future planning and help motivate individuals and groups in the work environment. Goals must be flexible and are subject to constant modification to reflect changing expectations and focus. Because goals are not specific enough to be termed operational, however, lower-level objectives and activities are required to quantify goals, but goals are the basis for development and measures against which the success or failure of the plan can be determined. Goals are action oriented with that action following through in the form of objectives that specify means of achieving the goals. It must be recognized that sometimes there are two

types of goals functioning in an organization: stated goals and perceived goals. Although stated goals and real goals may be identical, sometimes they are different. If they are real goals, they will have an impact on the organization's policies, structure, operations, and, in general, on the behavior of people. The differences between stated goals and real goals are subtle and often financially driven. For instance, a library may want to offer bookmobile service (stated goal), but if it does not adequately finance the operation, it cannot offer high-quality bookmobile service (real goal). One beneficial way of developing a goal statement is to place it within the larger environmental context. For example, the Purdue University Libraries identifies one trend as "The Libraries' virtual presence will be enhanced by integration into the University learning and discovery environment."⁸ This leads to the identification of how best to serve the needs of library users.

Objectives, Initiatives, Pathways, and Strategies

Several action terms are used to describe the next level of specific activities. *Objectives* is the most generic term used to set a pattern for the structure of the activities. Those activity-oriented objectives provide direction as well as incentive toward achievement. Objectives can be conservative or expansive but always should be stated in terms and conditions that stretch the enterprise. They are specific objectives to achieve goals that specify activities to be accomplished in order to achieve the vision. There is a real danger of setting objectives that are really hopes and not attainable ends or, on the other hand, so easily attainable that they are not challenging. In setting objectives, many things must be taken into account: the strengths of the library, the limitations of the organization and how much can be accomplished with the financial and material resources available, and the mission of the larger institution of which the library or information center is a part. Questions that must be addressed in the objective-setting exercise are:

- Is the objective suitable for this library/information center at this time?
- Does the objective help achieve the goal to which it is related?
- Does it take the organization in the direction it wants to go?
- Does it support the overall mission of the library/information center?
- Is it compatible and complementary with other objectives?
- Is it acceptable and understandable to the majority who will be charged with implementing it?
- Is it affordable for the organization?
- Is it measurable and achievable?
- Is it ambitious enough to be challenging?

The library or information center must be able to prove to both itself and to the funding authority that the objectives are suitable, sustainable, and measurable.

An example goal of the Evanston (Illinois) Public Library at the beginning of its strategic plan in 2000–2010 was to "annually establish 25,000 child book links." (A child book link is defined as each time an individual child hears a

112 Planning

story read to them in a library-sponsored program.) The library began this planning cycle with the target of 8,000 child book links annually, and two years later the actual number increased to 24,126.⁹

Primary elements involved in objectives formulation include:

- **Clients.** Who they are and who they are not (with the potential of converting those who are not).
- **Services.** What new services are needed, which existing ones should be retained, and which should be deleted.
- **Personnel resources.** What professional and support skills are needed to provide identified services.
- **Technological resources.** What can be accessed when and where (many organizations are now instituting a separate strategic plan for technological development).
- **Financial resources.** What and where they are and how to maintain them.
- **Community responsibilities.** The library's obligations as a social institution.

A maximum degree of compatibility should exist between the identified goals and specific objectives to achieve them if the organization is to be successful in its mission. It is also important to remember that many forces influence the process of planning and achieving goals; therefore, the process must be viewed from a number of perspectives. The three primary perspectives are:

1. **Environmental.** Considering constraints imposed on the organization by society in general.
2. **Organizational.** Considering the organization as an open system.
3. **Individual.** Considering the personal goals of the individuals working in the organization.

A balance must be achieved between what is realistic and what is obtainable, what is challenging and what is idealistic but not necessarily completely attainable. As was mentioned under the goals discussion, the greatest problem in planning is bridging the gap between what is desirable (the stated objectives) and what is possible (the real objectives).

Unlike for-profit organizations, in which the first objective is often to create the greatest profit base, most libraries and other information centers have among their primary objectives to provide a useful and needed service and to attract a competent staff. Libraries and information centers, however, are responsible to higher authorities that may restrict some other more social objectives. Still other objectives may be forced upon libraries and information centers by the community, through social obligations, or by the employees, through collective bargaining or other means. Therefore, just as profit objectives in business organizations and their sometimes conflicting social objectives can dictate opposing courses that force compromise, so in information services organizations an individual's personal objectives and those of the organization as a whole can create conflict and sometimes force compromise.

Additionally, specific organizational subobjectives can be departmental, unit, or team-based objectives or even short-range objectives of the whole organization. Most objectives are tangible and measurable, but others are not. For example, one objective may be to improve morale, but how can one measure morale? Nonetheless, objectives should be stated in terms of activities that are in some way quantifiable and measurable.



What Do You Think?

Challenges sometimes result from multiple service goals and related objectives, with attempts being sought to avoid conflict in those activities.

Example: What should a primary service goal of a university library be: to provide needed curricular materials and information, in whatever format, for students at the undergraduate level, or to provide more sophisticated, scholarly materials that will enhance the research efforts of faculty and graduate students and advance the state of knowledge?

How can such issues be resolved? Are the goals mutually exclusive? Can one be chosen over the other? How does this relate to the mission of the organization?

Activities, Tasks, and Initiatives

These elemental tasks are directly related to the objectives and are a way of achieving the objectives. They are usually short term, repetitive, measurable, and numerous at the operational level. They require effective policies and procedures to facilitate their achievement. Activities guide the everyday functioning of the organization and in that sense are pragmatic and narrow.

EVALUATION—ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

Just developing a strategic plan on paper is not enough, and therefore evaluation is vital to any strategic effort. At the end of the established time periods, reports are made to appropriate individuals and groups as to the progress and success. Operational plans that support the goals and benchmarks of the overall strategic plan should be established on a regular yearly basis. Performance measures are required to indicate the progress and anticipated success of the planning effort. Those benchmarks indicate adjustments that may need to be made along the way and should be a part of the process.

Once the body of a strategic plan has been developed, guidelines should be established for monitoring progress in terms of operational adjustments as well as guidelines for overarching decisions for policy making and measurement of success. The measurement and evaluation plan helps ensure that the expected outcomes are reasonable and measurable. In addition, such

114 Planning

evaluation tends to sharpen the organization's thinking about the process. They relate to four basic actions:

- Applying the strategies in operational form by identifying specific performance measures and developing implementation strategies with a view toward ensuring that all understand the goals and objectives that guide performance measures.
- Ensuring that all the various work units within the organization are linked, both tactically and philosophically to achieving the goals and objectives, thus instilling a synergy for the work to be accomplished.
- Communication is important to ensure total understanding of the strategies and how they impact the organization's mission.
- Link the plan to the budgeting process, thereby ensuring a continuing initiative.

The end of the cycle and the beginning of a new stage is the final formal evaluation process, which is based upon data collected since the initiation of the plan. This evaluation component requires a focused design that provides for measuring program success and recommending program improvement, when necessary. Factors such as success, efficiency, effectiveness, benefits, and costs all play a role in this effort.

The kinds of information and how it is collected are decided as the final component of the initial planning process and are key to the success of the library or information center's plan. They must be built in as a systematic part of the plan. The results are useful for both internal purposes—guiding the future of the organization—and external—as communication with the greater community. Involvement of staff, users, and other stakeholders in this process is valuable in improving programs and activities. Stakeholder participation in the evaluation sometimes proves extremely useful in helping the organization verify its effectiveness, or lack thereof. A systematic collection of data and other information about the program of information services also enables stakeholders to better understand the organization, recommend improvements its effectiveness, and thereby buy into future programming.

Someone should be designated as responsible for monitoring progress toward each objective that has been established. A person or team can be identified in relation to the success of each goal, and that person or team becomes responsible for developing a timeline for accomplishing the objective, identifying measures to evaluate progress, and establishing processes and procedures at the functional level. Individual strategies can be assigned to one or more units or teams within the organization for execution, and these units in turn assign activities to individuals or specific sections of the unit. If this process is followed, the strategic plan can automatically be used at the functional level for decision making. This, of course, entails designating responsibilities for implementing the various steps in the planning process. A mechanism is required for coordination, evaluation, and monitoring the various activities and tasks that are necessary for the implementation of a plan. Such an implementation plans provide an opportunity to specify recommendations

for resource allocation strategies, assignments of responsibility, coordinating mechanisms, and priority-setting criteria.

Performance indicators will have been built into the plan, and ideally each unit can execute several subplans simultaneously, making consistent progress toward various objectives in keeping with the established priorities. In practice, this may not always work effectively because, by nature, some people tend to invest more time in fulfilling objectives related to their own particular interests, thus slighting the priorities established for the unit. In addition, unforeseen circumstances, such as the loss of a key person, can jeopardize the achievement of objectives or can, at least, force major revisions or delays.

It is obvious that organizations with clear goals and objectives tend to have higher staff morale. Understanding those goals and objectives and their environment and actively participating in understanding them and carrying them out is the best assurance of loyalty to the plan of service. Unfortunately, some people carry out tasks; they do not achieve objectives. Some employees do not even know the objectives of an organization. Ask that person what justifies their position, and some will answer by listing the work they do, the tasks they perform, or the machines they control or supervise. These individuals are concerned with means and methods and may be unable to describe the goals and objectives.

Perhaps a simplistic, yet primary, benefit of setting goals and objectives is to provide a new way to look at those jobs; it concentrates thought and gives a sense of purpose and commitment. By developing a plan and establishing written goals and objectives and communicating them to the staff and the organization's customers, the organization encourages individuals to think through logical courses of action and provides a yardstick for decision making and ongoing activities. Such a planning exercise is the most effective way of measuring output for the organization.

Therefore, reviewing strategies, revising priorities, reassessing the plan, and reassuring the primary constituency is a vital element, a prelude, to the next round of strategic planning, a continuing process, a circle from initiating, developing, instituting, and reviewing. In that process, attention is paid to what has worked (successful strategies) and what has not worked (failed attempts, with a review of why), what efforts have been successful and should be retained, as well as a review of which have not been totally successful and should be adjusted, phased out, or immediately discarded. No library or information center can afford to put forth the same goals and programs on a continuous basis. Customer needs, financial outlays, larger organizational priorities, operating methods, and market needs are in continuous flux. This requires revisiting objectives and strategies on a periodic basis, probably no longer than a five-year period. Change is required as circumstances dictate.

PLANNING HIERARCHY—AN EXAMPLE

An example of the hierarchy of mission to goals to objectives to activities is illustrated in figure 5.9 from the strategic plan of Highland Park Public Library. Only one example is selected from each of the elements in goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

Figure 5.9—Highland Park Public Library Strategic Plan

HIGHLAND PARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

STRATEGIC PLAN

2006–2010

MISSION

The Highland Park Public Library's mission is to provide the highest quality Library services to community members for life long learning, cultural enrichment, and enjoyment.

VALUES

The Highland Park Public Library firmly believes in and supports each of the following:

- ***Free access and services.***

All residents of Highland Park have a right to free, equitable, and convenient access to Library resources in an inviting, comfortable, and safe environment.

- ***Intellectual freedom.***

The Library supports freedom of speech and the right of residents to receive uncensored information. It provides a forum for debate and exchange of ideas in the community.

- ***Fostering education for all age levels.***

The Library supports early reading readiness, formal and alternative education, and lifelong learning.

- ***A climate of respect and trust.***

Mutual respect and trust are honored both internally and externally. Patrons and staff are valued, supported, and respected.

- ***Privacy.***

The Library preserves the discreet use of its services and materials.

- ***Patron-centered service.***

The Library strives for excellent, personalized service. It creates and makes available information, materials, and programs that anticipate and respond to patron needs.

- ***Diversity.***

The Library reflects and encourages diversity in its services, collections, and staff.

- ***Strong partnerships within and beyond the community.***

The Library's resources, involvement, and leadership in the community are extended through partnerships with community members and organizations.

VISION

The Highland Park Public Library strives to be an essential center for community learning and discovery.

Programming Goal

Continue to expand services and resources, which reflect diversity and stimulate learning. Objectives

A. Provide resources, services, and programs to help children under five develop a foundation for language development and literacy.

Objectives - Programming

Provide resources, services, and programs to help children under five develop a foundation for language development and literacy.

Potential Activities

- Expand storytime offerings for children under three and their caregiver.
- Create a preschool activity center.

CONCLUSION

Strategic planning is the most popular approach in management of today's knowledge-based organizations. It helps define the organization's reason for being and mission. Because the planning process can be a costly proposition, improper selection or faulty specification of objectives wastes planning time and money, resulting in frustrations and disenchantment, rendering the entire planning activity futile. Every information services organization needs to spell out its own goals and objectives, instead of relying on those of other organizations, because those components determine the policies, procedures, and organizational structure of the library or information center. Planning represents the beginning of a process upon which other principles are based.

NOTES

1. Richard L. Hughes and Katherine Colarelli Beatty, *Becoming a Strategic Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 45.
2. Stuart Wells, "To Plan, Perchance, to Think; Aye, There's the Rub," *Information Outlook* 5 (September 2001): 10–11.
3. Ronald Lippitt, "Futuring before You Plan," in *The NTL Managers' Handbook*, ed. R. A. Ritvo and A. G. Sargent (Arlington, VA: NTL Institute, 1983).
4. Benjamin B. Tregue and John W. Zimmerman, "Strategic Thinking," *Management Review* 68 (February 1979): 10–11.
5. Calgary Public Library, Alberta, Canada, "Vision" (n.d.), <http://www.calgarypubliclibrary.com/library/vision.htm>.
6. Boston Public Library Board of Trustees, "Mission Statement" (n.d.), <http://www.bpl.org/general/trustees/mission.htm>.
7. Baltimore County Public Library, "Mission Statement" (n.d.), http://www.bcplonline.org/libpg/lib_facts.html#mission%20statement.
8. Purdue University Libraries, "Strategic Plan 2006–2011" (2006), <http://www.lib.purdue.edu/admin/stratplans/>.
9. Evanston Public Library, "Strategic Plan 2000–2010: A Decade of Outreach" (2003), <http://www.epl.org/library/strategic-plan-00.html>.