

## Using a Library Impact Map to Assist Strategic Planning in Academic Libraries

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### Introduction

The pace and degree of change in any library depend on a variety of factors, some within its control (e.g., environment and attitude) and many outside of its control (e.g., economic changes and migration into or out of an area). Strategic planning enables libraries to exert control over these changes and to adapt to the future, especially when the future seems uncertain and unpredictable. Strategic plans provide guidelines for moving into an uncertain future with the ability to set a direction but the flexibility to adjust to emerging issues.

A literature review was conducted using the search terms “strategic planning” and “libraries,” with search parameters of 2010 to 2014 and peer-reviewed articles. In addition, for a strategic-planning perspective from nonlibrary organizations, strategic-planning articles with one hundred or more citations were also examined. The review revealed an overabundance of articles discussing strategic planning in the context of case studies that used specific planning tools and heuristics or emphasized key steps in the strategic-planning process. Some of the tools and heuristics are briefly described below.

**Rating Tool.** Bielavitz described the use of a rating tool to assist librarians in deciding which future projects should be included in a strategic plan. Proposed projects were described and clearly defined. Committee members individually rated each project on a variety of markers connected to university priorities, library goals, required resources, time needed, degree of difficulty and level of direct control. Individual scores for each rated project were amalgamated

into a single score for each project. This proactive team approach provided for strong alignment and facilitated discussion among participants so that once the strategic plan was implemented, there was greater agreement and support.<sup>1</sup>

**Metrics.** Franklin described a tool used in the development of a strategic plan based on the emerging economic realities during the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009. The library refocused its strategic plan on three areas of excellence to meet the needs of five user groups. Each library unit was tasked with developing metrics for each goal so progress toward the goal could be measured and success determined. The metrics had a dual focus of matching provided library services with specific patron needs. The metrics also became the driving force in the implementation of the strategic plan. This dual effort focused the attention and actions of librarians while building stronger support for the library and its services on the broader campus.<sup>2</sup>

**SWOT Analysis.** Other libraries and nonlibrary organizations employed a SWOT analysis that identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the strategic plan. A variety of internal and external resources were identified as helpful or hindering. Helpful resources were integrated into the plan's details. Contingencies for hindering forces were prepared should the need arise. This tool allowed those implementing the plan to quickly identify areas of support and strength from which they could draw. It also highlighted areas to move cautiously around or to avoid. It also provided resources from which librarians could draw upon should the need arise. The instrument helped planners know how to proceed in both short-term and long-term goal setting for the plan.<sup>3</sup>

**Scorecard.** In some cases, a balanced or strategic scorecard was developed. The scorecard focused the strategic plan on four service areas: customer needs, internal processes, financial considerations, and library personnel's innovation and learning. The scorecard enabled library planners to examine current strengths in each of these four areas and to develop plans for

strengthening weaker areas. The scorecard also ensured that the plan balanced both the appropriateness of planning efforts with the realities of what needed to be maintained and what needed to be strengthened. It helped direct library efforts and resources to specific tasks to improve the efficacy of the strategic plan.<sup>4</sup>

**Discussion Groups.** Several discussion groups inform strategic planning. The first type of discussion involves library faculty and staff. This discussion encourages some self-reflection at individual and organizational levels to determine what changes need to be made and the pace at which they can be made.<sup>5</sup> The second type of discussion group involves forming a partnership with patrons to determine needs and changes to the library. Appleton and Abernathy describe a process wherein library personnel held quarterly meetings involving library leadership, student services and student's union representatives. In addition to these quarterly meetings, forums were used as a means to exchange ideas, to share innovations, or to simply get suggestions from participants. Finally, a fifteen-member Learning Resource Centre Critical Friends Group was created to engage students on centre decisions and improvements.<sup>6</sup>

Wade described the development of a strategic plan for the National Library of Scotland following a government mandate. Plans rotate on a three-year cycle to tie in with the government's budgeting cycle. Highly participative discussions involving stakeholders ranging from library staff to trustees identified sources of data that could be collected and used. This data then informed the planners' decisions on how to change and align library services with the government mandates to meet patron needs. In doing so, the library was able to become more agile and efficient in its delivery of services.<sup>7</sup> In each case, discussion groups provided feedback important to the strategic plan that enabled librarians to meet the specific needs of patrons.

**Scenarios/Futures Thinking.** Using twenty-six forward-looking scenarios based on the environment in which the library must operate (e.g., technology, education, scholarly

communications and society), librarians rated each scenario on two scales: the likelihood that the scenario will happen and the degree of impact the scenario would have on the library. Using these ratings, librarians held a series of discussions to inform strategic planning from the perspective of library patrons while considering the realities of environmental factors. This not only enabled librarians to think beyond the walls of the library but provided a unified vision to assist in the strategic plan.<sup>8</sup>

Shoemaker used two scenarios in planning to compensate for under-thinking and overthinking potential changes in the organization. This compensation allowed planners to chart a middle course between what was known and what was uncertain or unknowable. In an iterative process, scenarios were developed and refined until they represented scenarios that become helpful for strategic planning. These scenarios were then used with members of the organization to visualize what could be and how to accomplish the plan.<sup>9</sup>

Each of these tools and heuristics either explicitly or implicitly requires the use of data to inform the tool use or implementation of the heuristic. Data collection is the only step in the strategic-planning process that is mentioned twice—at the start of the planning and at the end.<sup>10</sup> In an iterative planning process, data collection becomes the cement that helps librarians determine how well the plan worked and, at the same time, provide information for the next round of planning. In this way, strategic planners examine what has happened in the past and match it with what is happening in the present to plan a future direction.

As the first and last steps in strategic planning, relevant data needs to be collected and disseminated to the proper individuals to assist in making informed decisions. Lag and lead data provide the critical measures needed. Lag data provides measures of events that have already occurred to provide an analysis of what has happened. Such data may include items like the circulation patterns of books and periodicals or the booking of group study rooms. This type of

data collection facilitates another step in the strategic planning process: the identification of trends and patterns within the organization. This data helps librarians to adjust to the changing patterns and to envision the future potential of libraries.<sup>11</sup>

Companioned to lag data are lead data. When specific initiatives are undertaken, lead data are used to determine if the change had the intended effect and if the desired degree of change was achieved. An example of lead data is projecting how many collections will be added to the library and how many more patrons will be able to access and discover items in the collection.<sup>12</sup> Other examples may include the realignment of library services to changing university foci and goals.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of the initiative, lead data become the road signs that indicate that the project is moving in the planned direction and at the planned pace. They also provide information that enables librarians to adjust the plan to fit unexpected circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

Another step in the strategic-planning process examines the environment of the library. Strategic planners should become aware of what makes up the library's ecosystem and determine how well the parts of the ecosystem function together. The library's ecosystem includes the strengths of library personnel and resources that facilitate the planning and implementation process. In this step, librarians evaluate how well library services meet patron needs and university foci. This step also includes resources outside of the library that may be accessed to support the strategic plan. A final activity in this step identifies the library's weak points or stressors. Identifying these aspects of the library's environment enables planners to build on strengths while planning for areas of weakness.<sup>15</sup>

Another step assesses the culture of the environment and the engagement of personnel within the library so that their attitude toward change can be identified and quantified. Culture and engagement not only reflect the relationships within the library but also include how the library faculty and staff engage with library patrons. Strategic planners should have an understanding of

how library communication occurs and how library personnel are engaged in the planning process.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the strategic plan should clearly outline a vision of the future potential of the library. This vision brings what has happened and is happening into focus in a way that describes why a change is needed for the library to remain vital and relevant. Establishing and focusing on the library's vision and goals is not a one-time activity-it becomes an iterative process ingrained in the culture of the library. In this way, the vision and goals direct the library's efforts toward a common purpose and toward services that meet the university's foci. The vision should open the lines of communication between all levels of the library administration and personnel so that all may contribute to the success and vitality of the library.<sup>17</sup>

These steps in the strategic-planning process are not mutually exclusive, nor are they sequential in their occurrence. Each process has a place and a time of primary importance in the strategic-planning process. Properly executed, a strategic plan will move the library forward in the right direction by involving all library personnel, by increasing the shared values of librarians and by providing an opportunity for individuals and groups within the library to express concerns with the plan.

By using the steps outlined and the illustrated planning tools and heuristics, strategic planning becomes an evaluative process whereby library personnel collect data to better understand what they are doing and how well they are doing it. Armed with this information, they are able to chart a course to prepare for the changing needs of patrons so that libraries and their services remain valued and relevant.

To foster this process, a mechanism is needed that enables strategic planners to see the relationships between the services library personnel provide and the areas of focus of the university that the library serves. Such a mechanism should have the ability to provide a broad

description of the relationships key to strategic planning and also to facilitate strategic planners' focus on specific levels of service. The library impact map (LIM) is such an instrument. The LIM provides a view of the interplay between library services and institutional foci by indicating where impactful relationships occur.<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that while the LIM is described within the context of an academic library at an university, it is flexible enough to be used in other libraries and organizations.

### Creation of a LIM

Megan Oakleaf describes the LIM as the intersection of library services and institutional foci. The LIM is formatted as a table in which each library service is listed in the column header and each institutional focus is listed in the row header. Each library adjusts both of these features to describe those features unique to their academic library and university. The intersection between these two is rated on a five-point scale to indicate the impact of each relationship on the library's strategic plan.<sup>18</sup>

The five rating codes are:

- **Y<sup>++</sup>** = Yes, there is an impact with evidence/data and it is communicated to the stakeholders.
- **Y<sup>+</sup>** = Yes, there is an impact and we have evidence/data of the impact.
- **Y** = Yes, we believe there is an impact relationship.
- **CB** = There "could be" an impact if we did something better or differently.
- **N** = No, there is no impact.

By providing additional layers to the library services and the institutional foci, library strategic planners are able to focus on extra levels to inform and adjust strategic plans. Each

library service is located within its respective department and division. Locating each service within its respective library department and division provides a broader level of analysis that facilitates discussion on library impact and actions. Library planners may examine how well individual services or selected departments are providing data regarding each institutional area of focus. A similar process is used to place each institutional focus within the library's goals. This view indicates what data is being collected to specify the success of each goal. Figure 1 provides a partial example of the LIM with impact codings (not all library services are listed).

Again, depending on the library, the goals, areas of institutional focus, library services and departments will vary in name and responsibility. As job descriptions of individuals providing the service changes, a service located in one department may be relocated to a different department. A similar process would occur if a given university focus, or specific goal where the focus was placed, changed.

Rating the intersection of each service and institutional focus can be conducted in several ways depending on the size of the institution and the culture of collaboration within the library. A single individual may initially rate each intersection, but this approach does not foster broad input from library personnel. For a large library, it may be difficult to find a single person who has a broad understanding of all library services and all institutional foci. In this example, a single individual would have over 1,300 codings.



**Figure 1.** A populated, partial LIM. Not all library services are shown. (See next page)

AUL		Public Services									
Department Head		Subject Librarians							Library Access Services (Circulation, ILL, Holds & Deliveries, Course Reserve)		
Library Goals	Library Impact Map	Reference, Physical	Reference, Digital	Reference, Subject Guides	Reference, Consultations	Liaison Services	Instruction, Course-Integrated	Circulation	Interlibrary Loan	Reserves	Copyright Services
Foster Deep Collaboration	Faculty Teaching	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y++	Y++
	Faculty Innovation, Entrepreneurship	CB	CB	CB	CB	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y
	Institutional Brand	N	N	N	N	CB	N	N	Y	N	Y
	Institutional Development, Funding, Endowments	N	N	N	N	Y	N	CB	CB	N	N
	Faculty Research Productivity	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y+	N	Y	Y	N	N
	Local, Global Engagement, Community-Building	Y	Y	Y	Y	CB	Y	N	Y	N	N
	Character-Building	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y++
	Student-Faculty Academic Report	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Improve Discoverability and Accessibility of Resources	Student GPA, Test Achievement	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y+	Y+	Y+	N
	Student Learning Outcomes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CB	CB	Y	CB
	Faculty Recruitment, Tenure, Promotion	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
	Faculty Service	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y++
	Faculty Grant-Seeking	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	CB	CB	N	N

	Faculty Patents, Technology Transfer	Y	Y	Y	Y	CB	N	N	N	N	Y
	Institutional Prestige	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
	Undergraduate Research	N	N	N	N	CB	N	N	Y	Y	N
Provide Space That Facilitate	Student Career Success	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y+	Y	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y
	Institutional Efficiencies	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Student Experience, Engagement	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	CB	Y	Y	Y	N
	Student Recruitment, Enrollment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y+

Y<sup>++</sup> = Yes, there is an impact with evidence/data and it is communicated to the stakeholders. Y<sup>+</sup> = Yes, there is an impact and we have evidence/data of the impact. Y = Yes, we believe there is an impact relationship. CB = There “could be” an impact if we did something better or differently. N = No, there is no impact.

A committee approach may be used in which a small group, relative to the size of the library, with expertise in given library services is asked to rate each of the library’s respective services according to the degree of impact for each institutional focus. This approach shares the rating responsibility, engages more people in the process and can be completed in a relatively short time. This method also establishes a framework for further discussions.

A final coding method requires each department to discuss the ratings for each of their services for each institutional focus. While this approach would engage the broadest discussion of the impact and have more accuracy, as more expertise is engaged in coding, the process could be quite drawn out. Involving a larger group would also shift the focus from merely rating the relationship to discussing methods to change the relationship rating, which may prolong the coding of the map. The method used would depend on the size of the library (e.g., how many services it provides), the cooperative culture of the library and the environment supporting strategic planning.

Individuals whose expertise is situated in the university foci could also undertake this coding process, although it is doubtful that enough people with university foci expertise would have sufficient knowledge and understanding of library services to make accurate impact codings. However, if such individuals are located, placing them on coding teams would strengthen and broaden the coding and planning processes.

It is recommended that each rating be color-coded. This step provides a strong visual of the LIM ratings and enables strategic planners and librarians to quickly identify key patterns and relationships. While not shown in this article, color-coding in the LIM helps librarians identify key patterns and relationships and facilitates further exploration of these patterns.

It is important to note that as library services and university foci are specified and each relationship impact is coded, there may be considerable frustration on the part of the coders. Some services may have an overlap with foci. Clearer definitions of each library service or university focus may be needed to increase understanding and reduce frustration. Collected data may serve more than one purpose or may only partially provide data needed for the intersection. Time needs to be taken to define services and foci to help clarify coder understanding. It may also be difficult to identify lag or potential lead measures and how library services may impact university foci. It may be of benefit to create separate LIMs for lead and lag data.

Each library service and each university focus should be clearly named and include a brief description to assist raters in the coding of the impact. As clarification of terms is sought, a greater understanding of library services and university foci will occur. Patience is needed at all levels to improve understanding and coding accuracy.

## LIM Uses and Opportunities

Once completed, the LIM provides several opportunities for librarians. First and foremost, the LIM provides a data map of library services. This map enables librarians to identify areas of data-collection strength in the library. It also points to areas that could and should be examined and further developed to enhance the library's relevance and importance to its clientele. With the addition of the department and division frameworks and the coding of university foci into library goals, planners are able to better identify trends and patterns within the specific areas of the library. This additional level of data analysis may assist librarians with necessary realignments. The trends and patterns within departments, divisions and goals provide insights about what can be done to support and successfully implement strategic plans. In describing where and to what degree data is being collected and shared within the library, planners have a better gauge of the library's ecosystem and are better prepared for change.<sup>19</sup>

The strongest feature of the LIM is that it promotes discussion among librarians, which may focus on the actual rating given to a relationship. The initial raters may not be aware of any current data-collection or data-dissemination efforts. Other librarians may be able to update the LIM with knowledge of such impacts. This discussion clarifies ratings and increases the understanding of librarians. Other discussions may focus on how librarians can better collect and disseminate data. For example, librarians can discuss what additional efforts or actions would move a lower rating to a Y++ rating. The discussion would identify lead measures that would facilitate movement toward an outward, patron-focused library. It would also inform librarians of potential planning efforts. Through these discussions, librarians become more informed regarding data collection and planning efforts. There are few, if any, surprises regarding what the data indicates is happening and should be done.<sup>20</sup>

The LIM also provides insights about potential collaborations between library services, departments and divisions. These collaborations identify commonalities between the services meeting the needs of each university focus. This discussion leads to decisions regarding who should offer what service and where services complement or overlap one another. In this way, librarians can identify ways to revamp or create new services to meet the needs of patrons. The discussion may also lead to the cessation of a service that is no longer used by patrons. Such collaborations should reduce redundancies and increase fiscal effectiveness. The end result is an increase in the efficient delivery of library and patron services.<sup>21</sup>

The LIM also serves as a foundation for additional layering. Just as the division of goals and departments allows for increased scrutiny of services, additional initiatives could be layered on the impact ratings. For example, if a library developed personas of patrons (user-group descriptions that illustrate patrons' library service needs and facility use patterns), these descriptions could be placed within each coding of the LIM to identify which patrons are being helped by the service, to facilitate additional data collection from patrons and to disseminate collected data to the appropriate individuals. This additional layer increases the outward thinking and planning of libraries to meet patron needs. Another additional initiative may be the creation of specific collaboration labs that utilize the expertise of librarians and outside faculty to service student needs. In each of these examples, the additional layer uses the LIM to identify which service could be used to fulfill the university focus and to meet the needs of patrons. As these discussions continue, the strategic plan is better understood and promoted. There is more participation in the strategic plan. More library personnel are engaged in the process, so there are no surprises as the strategic plan is developed and implemented. There are also more eyes on the horizon to identify concerns and issues, allowing modifications to the strategic plan as needed.<sup>22</sup>

An additional benefit to the extended discussions arising from the development of the LIM is the promotion of the library's value to the broader community. As the library attends to collecting and disseminating evidence of services meeting university foci, the value of the library is substantiated and improved. While this is not a formal operation of strategic planning, it becomes a vital benefit as university leaders and faculty are made aware of the library's value.

## Conclusion

The LIM is a strategic planning tool that enables planners to view trends and patterns at various levels within the library. It not only allows for a broad picture of library services but also facilitates a narrower focus at the library service, department, division and goal levels. It provides the opportunity for library faculty and staff to engage in meaningful conversations about how library value may be identified and disseminated. It also indicates areas for potential collaboration and cooperation between librarians, departments, divisions and faculty outside of the library. Just as a road map indicates potential and alternate pathways to reach a given destination, the LIM provides a similar perspective for strategic plans designed to achieve specific goals toward a common vision. It serves as a foundation upon which future projects and initiatives may be layered. As each of these projects and plans unfolds, a greater understanding of the value of library services within the university community is provided. Ultimately, the LIM assists library administration and personnel in communicating the value of libraries to others.

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