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Strategic planning and quality management at the University of Queensland Library

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Abstract

This paper describes the University of Queensland Library's strategic planning and quality management processes. Priority areas, benchmarking initiatives and performance measurement are discussed, as is the Annual Review, at which priority areas for address in the coming year are determined. One of the strengths of the Library's quality program, through the planning process, is that new initiatives, once proven are then integrated into standard operating procedure. Both the staff and the Library benefit from this, and the Library's culture is one of continuous improvement. The customer is the focus of all activities. Successful outcomes to which the strategic planning and quality processes have contributed are described.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning at the University of Queensland Library is a dynamic activity involving all staff. It has taken several years, and a significant cultural change to move the Library to a point where the planning process is such a part of the Library's culture that it contributes to an annual revitalisation of the Library. Each year, innovative ventures to fulfil the Library's mission of linking people with information are developed for the new year through a process of planning.

In the last five years senior management positions and reporting arrangements have been reorganised to reflect a clearly articulated customer focus, along with committee structures and branch library structures. The Library's mission statement has been revised and a Vision and Values statement developed. Goals for the Library have been determined and the organisation structured to devolve responsibility for operations and initiatives to all sections of the Library. The physical facilities have been upgraded, new information technology installed and systematic improvements in service delivery have eventuated, ranging from an expanded information skills program to new outreach programs including a service to schools.

BACKGROUND

The University

The University of Queensland is a leader among Australian universities, recognised internationally as a premier research institution. It is the largest and oldest university in the state of Queensland enrolling approximately 29,000 students, with 5,000 staff divided almost

equally between research and teaching staff, and general staff. The main University campus is at St Lucia in the western suburbs of Brisbane. Other campuses include: Gatton, the former Queensland Agricultural College, located 100 km from Brisbane, Ipswich, a new campus located 40 km from Brisbane, which is specializing in flexible delivery, a medical school in the Brisbane suburb of Herston with various outposts in teaching hospitals, a dental school and farms and research centres scattered throughout Queensland.

For over fifty years, the University's role was shaped by its responsibility as the sole provider of higher education in Queensland, but the more recent establishment of other Universities has changed the educational context considerably. The University has repositioned itself into a major research and postgraduate training institution, while maintaining its commitment to undergraduate teaching and learning. The University's teaching, learning and research activities have attracted numerous awards. In 1998 the University of Queensland was declared 1998 Good Universities Guide's Australian University of the Year. It received the maximum five star rating for positive graduate outcomes, prestige, student demand, research performance, gender balance and staff qualifications. The University is consistently in the top three in Australia in the amounts of research funding it receives and also consistently performs well in teaching and learning awards nationally.

The Library

The University of Queensland Library is one of the largest academic libraries in Australia and the largest in Queensland. It houses over 2 million volumes, in addition to a large collection of microforms, multimedia, digital files and primary resources. Over 20 service points deliver services up to 84 hours per week across 14 branch libraries located on the St Lucia, Gatton and Ipswich campuses and in the major teaching hospitals, which are jointly funded by the University and Queensland Health. Service delivery through branch libraries is supported by centralised processing and administrative services for the whole system. Personnel are recruited centrally and library materials are ordered and processed centrally. Economies of scale are achieved through the centralised design of information skills and publications programs and management of such services as photocopying.

Policies are developed for the Library as a whole, by participation of as many staff as possible. The Library uses its website to integrate service delivery
 http://www.library.uq.edu.au/ . The Innopac library computer system, marketed by Innovative Interfaces Inc., is used to provide collection management services and access for all clients. The effectiveness of the Library in service delivery is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of its implementation of information technology. The Library provides 1000 personal computers. Over 250 databases are networked via the ERL, Silverplatter's Electronic Reference Library and other databases, including the Web of Science, are available via the Web.   Over 6,000 e-journals are available.The Library won the prestigious institutional Australian University Teaching Award in 1998 and has consistently out-performed most of the partners against which it benchmarks itself.

The University of Queensland is a publicly funded institution, as are most universities in Australia. In the last few years. reductions in government funding have begun to impact. In the last three years the Library has received only small increases in funding. The Library is expected to cover any salary increases resulting from enterprise bargaining agreements. At the same time, increases in the prices of library materials have been higher than the

Consumer Price Index and the Library, with its considerable purchasing of overseas materials, is exposed to the continuing devaluation of the Australian dollar. While much information is available in electronic form, there is no indication that this will be cheaper, rather a further 10% at least seems to be associated with access to electronic versions. The Library must also continue to maintain for some time print collections as well as acquiring new electronically networked databases. The cost of providing appropriate access to material via new technology is also significant in the purchase of additional software and hardware. In this climate it is necessary for the Library to review critically all resource allocations and to ensure services are provided as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In September 1993, the current University Librarian took over from the previous incumbent, who had occupied the position for 27 years. Her appointment was at a time of changes in the Higher Education sector with regard to funding and increased emphasis on new technologies and flexible learning and teaching. On her appointment, the University Librarian engaged a consultant who undertook a review of the Library. Gaps in service provision were identified and recommendations made about improvements. The University Librarian instigated both operational and cultural changes throughout the Library which, while well respected and competently administered, had lost its innovative edge. There was a reorganisation of senior management positions and reporting arrangements, committee structures, and to some extent branch library structures to focus on service delivery. The customer became the focus. At the same time, a program to upgrade the physical facilities and the Library's information technology was put in place.

To assist the staff in embracing the new heightened focus on the customer, much greater importance was given to the process of strategic planning and the notion of quality management. This meant quality as defined by the customer.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

In 1991 Viljoen described strategic planning as the "development and implementation of a plan of action for an organization which will ensure the long-run success of that organization" (Viljoen, 1991:3). What does "long run success" really mean? Most organizations determine success as the achievement of goals outlined in their strategic plan. Usually one of these goals relates to some financial aspect of the organization, either a balanced budget, or in the case of commercial business, a high profit. Other indicators of organisational success may include few complaints, lots of congratulations, increased resources, excellent results in benchmarking against similar organizations, well trained staff with high morale and an increased market share.

The University of Queensland has a Strategic Plan for the whole of the University http://www.uq.edu.au/about/organisation/strategic-plans/. It is a concise document setting out the University's mission, goals, objectives and general targets and strategies. It is supported by operational plans for each of the seven faculties, the Central Administration, the Library and the Information Technology Service. The plan is reviewed annually by the University's Executive and the Senate, the overarching controlling body of the University. The University also has a Research Management Plan and a Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan, which provide further background to the Library's planning approaches.

Although the Library has been involved in strategic planning since 1988, in the last few years much greater emphasis has been placed on the process and the outcomes. It is not simply something done to meet bureaucratic requirements but an essential tool to ensure the Library is providing the best possible service to its customers. The Library's first formal strategic plan in 1988 aimed to provide a framework for reflection on what was being done, a common understanding of overall priorities, a background for sectional plans, and a means of communication within the Library and with the University community at large.

The next plan, developed after the appointment of the current University Librarian began with the development of a mission statement: *We link people with information, enabling the University of Queensland to achieve excellence in teaching,learning and research.* This has been shortened in all public material to *We link people with information.* This phrase appears on all documents and pamphlets produced by the Library, and on the name badges of the staff. It is a constant reminder to all of the prime purpose of the Library. Five goals were identified within the Plan and combined with strategies to meet the goals. The goals were:

1. Enable students, staff and researchers to locate relevant information effectively to support current programs and lifelong learning.
2. Provide to customers in a timely manner relevant sources of information for teaching and research, from our own collection and by links to sources outside the Library
3. Ensure Library staff are empowered and can interact closely with academic programs
4. Ensure adequate funding and facilities to support the Library's mission
5. Manage the Library's resources effectively.

At the end of each year staff met to review the previous priorities and the achievements, and to determine the priorities for the following year. The priorities and strategies chosen to meet the goals changed each year, at the meeting now known as the Annual Retreat. In 1999, the University as a whole changed its approach. Sections were required to complete Operational Plans, rather than Strategic Plans. Goals became an overall Statement of Purpose and strategies became Operational Priorities and also included Performance Indicators. The Library also included in its Statement of Purpose its values, which had previously been separately listed. The Plan is available at http://www.library.uq.edu.au/about/profile.html.

The Planning Process

An effective planning process involves staff in rethinking what they are doing, beginning with a blank sheet, and feeling free to explore the unknown. There are many methods used to develop a Strategic Plan. Whatever tool is used, it is vital that the staff are involved in the process and more importantly that they feel their contribution is valued and used.

The University of Queensland Library has employed Mellish and Associates to facilitate the Library's Annual Retreat for the last three years. In 1997 and 1998, an "Appreciative Inquiry" process was used to assist the group review the achievements of the previous year and position it for the future.

The **Appreciative Inquiry** (AI) process was developed by David Cooperrider[1], a professor of organisational behaviour at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland USA in the

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[1] Cooperrider, David

early 80s. It is a form of action research that helps organisations create new, generative images for themselves based on an affirmative understanding of their past. He defines AI as the art and science of ferreting out the best in an organization through skilful questioning, and bringing key stakeholders together with the knowledge to plan the future or change the present The process consists of four steps:

1. **Discovery,** which is also known as the "appreciating" phase, involves staff in identifying the strengths of the organization or the positive experiences of the staff.
2. **Dreaming** is also known as the "envisioning results" phase. In this phase staff use the information from the discovery phase as a base for speculating or "dreaming" on possible future developments for the organization.
3. **Design** is also referred as "co-constructing" phase. In this phase participants develop ways of turning their dreams into reality.
4. **Destiny** is also known as the "sustaining" phase or the "How to empower, learn and adjust" part of the process. When AI was first developed the fourth D stood for "delivery" and was dedicated to writing action and implementation plans. This is still an option although Cooperrider now favours a more free form of approach.

Each year the Library has involved additional staff in the annual review and planning process. In 1997, 36 senior staff participated. This group is known as *Seven up*. The name reflects the structure of Higher Education Workers in Australia who are classified from Levels 1 through 10. From Level 7, staff are considered managers. In 1998, 85 staff were involved and in 1999 almost the entire staff (250) participated in the planning process.

For the 1999 Retreat, a number of tools were used, including De Bono's coloured hats. In order to involve all staff in the process repeat sessions were run, culminating with a full day session of 36 senior staff to finalise the priorities for the coming year. While evaluating the 1999 Retreat, the members of the Library Management Group, which includes the University Librarian and the six senior managers, were disappointed with the lack of innovative ideas brought forward. Although this could have been as a result of involving so many people and perhaps insufficient time for so many people, it could well be that the Appreciative Inquiry process was far more successful in bringing out innovative ideas. It also could be attributed to the fact that the issues facing the majority of staff involved the basic operations of the Library. Nevertheless the priorities established for 2000 have been approached with gusto by the staff and the various taskforces are making good progress. The model of total staff involvement worked sufficiently well for us to repeat the approach this year. Additional time will be allocated to facilitate the process.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The quality movement has long been established in Australian academic libraries. Williamson (1996) notes that a survey in 1994 revealed that at that time university libraries were in fact ahead of their universities in introducing quality processes and management. The University of Queensland Library is continually seeking to improve the quality of its services. The Library's objective is to meet (and exceed) customer needs. All staff would say *the customer is the focus of what we do*. This statement has become part of the Library's culture. "Quality" initiatives now permeate all activities and involve all staff. The Library has a Quality Program.

Effective data gathering, synthesis and dissemination throughout the organization underpin the process. . In vernacular parlance *it's a package deal*. Strategic planning and quality management are integrated processes with each informing, and being informed by, the other.

The Library's Quality Program encompasses three areas:
- Continuous improvement
- Performance measurement
- Benchmarking

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is most closely aligned with the strategic planning process, where priority areas are identified and steps taken to improve service delivery. Continuous improvement is the aim. Many tools are used, including performance measurement and benchmarking. Each year the Library forms taskforces to address issues identified through the strategic planning process as requiring improvement. In 2000 the areas being addressed are:

- Flexible Delivery of Information Skills

Aim: to produce a modular multi-modal framework of core information skills

- Missing Books – "Where is it when it is not where I looked for it?"

Aim: to identify why the client couldn't find what they wanted and to develop strategies, both library wide and branch specific, for dealing with the problem

- Virtual Reference Desk

Aim: primary objective is to enhance our information service by the provision of an information service which is not limited by time and location

- LMC – Liaison, Marketing, Communication

Aim: increase staff and student knowledge and awareness of library services by improving communication strategies. (Look at new methods to improve awareness of our services and to enhance the library staff's ability to promote library services)

- CYBERBIZ

Aim: to develop an Australian Business Gateway

- Materials Movement and Management

Aim: to identify a best practice model for the transportation and storage of Library Materials so that they are available to users when needed.

- Digitisation Special Interest Group (to continue in 2000)

- High Use Heaven

Aim: to look at the practices of providing course materials and improve our current procedures

Each taskforce has a sponsor who is one of the six senior managers and headed by a "7-Up" member. Membership of the taskforces is open to all staff. Typically taskforces operate for one year, though some extend to two, as is the case with the Digitisation Special Interest Group. Once improvements have been identified and trialled, they are then implemented and incorporated into the Library's standard operations. One of the most notable improvement achievements has been in the Library's shelving, a very important area when one shelves 2 kilometres of books each week and 3.6 million items per year. Improvements related to a reorganisation of the staff, the development of performance indicators for shelving, the most extraordinary change in culture across all shelving staff and the eradication of shelving backlogs. Satisfied customers are now able to find material. The turnaround time has been significantly reduced. The staff believe their work is valued.

Performance Measurement

Much work is being done on the development of performance measures for libraries - by individual libraries and by national and international bodies. There have been three international conferences on performance measurement in libraries and information services at which discussions have ranged from practical examples to theoretical consideration of issues. Winkworth and Gannon-Leary (1999) note increasing government interest around the world in library performance measurement. In Australia the government is funding a project investigating current "best practice" in Australian University Libraries (Wilson et al, 1999).

The University of Queensland Library utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data to measure its performance. The Operational Plan includes performance indicators for each priority area. The Library uses both external sources of measures and indicators and develops original ones as required. For example, the CAUL (Council of Australian University Librarians) *Materials Availability* indicator has been used without adaptation, while the Library has developed its own shelving indicators, already mentioned.

Performance is measured on an ongoing basis and as required through surveys and snapshot pictures. For example, data on the number of items lent by each branch Library and by particular categories of borrower is collected continuously as part of standard operating procedures. Data regarding client attitudes is monitored through biannual customer surveys, an annual analysis of suggestion boxes and from focus groups on specific issues as required.

Given the challenge of maintaining a quality service in a difficult financial environment, performance measures provide information on the efficiency and effectiveness of services. Indicators that aid in the identification of areas where savings can be made, or the determination of service levels given variations in resources are very important. The Library has monitored for several years the loans for each branch. Staffing levels and rosters are matched with the workload. Universities have peaks and troughs in load. Traditionally, this has been handled badly, with uniform staffing levels across the organisation. Use of casual staff now matches demand. To analyse the activities and costs of each branch/section/service further, ABC (Activity Based Costing) is being trialled in 2000. In particular, the lending activities are being targeted.

Activity Based Costing assigns costs to products/services based on the cost of activities. For example, resource costs (staff costs) are assigned to activities (teaching) on the basis of resources drivers (percentage of time spent), then activity costs are assigned to cost objects

(courses provided to undergraduates) on the basis of activity /cost drivers (number of teaching hours). Activity Based Costing will help the Library understand the costs of activities, products, services and customers and provide information on what causes the costs. With this information the Library will be able to make better informed decisions.

Benchmarking

Performance measures provide the foundation for much of the Library's benchmarking projects. Comparisons are made internally over time and externally with other libraries and other service organisations. Innovative university libraries are targeted as benchmarking partners., and with other innovative sites. The Library has participated in benchmarking projects through "CHEMS" and under the Universitas 21 umbrella.

In 1998 the Commonwealth University Management Benchmarking Club, of which the University of Queensland is a member, reviewed the area of Library and Information Services. The Library was surveyed about many activities in which it participates and then compared with libraries of other Commonwealth Universities by the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS). The survey covered questions on Strategy, Policy, Planning and Management; Library Services; Access; Collections; Support and Training; and Human Resource Management. The Library scored the maximum rating in all categories, and was the only library in the group to do so.

While the result was pleasing, and provided confirmation that the Library's programs are on the right track, the Library found the project useful as the intellectual discipline of, and rigour imposed by, completing the questions caused the Library to reflect on our performance and to do some things differently.

The University of Queensland is one of only three Australian foundation members of the multinational Universitas 21 group of world-class, comprehensive and research-intensive universities, which is committed to benchmarking all aspects of its operations against the highest international standards of practice. The objective of the association, formed in 1997, is to assist its members to become global universities. Since 1998 the University of Queensland Library, with its Australasian partners, the University of Auckland Library, the University of Melbourne Library, and the University of New South Wales Library have undertaken various benchmarking projects.

In 1998 partners were profiled, core services were defined and their costs determined, *Materials Availability s*urveys were conducted, and fact finding visits were made to some overseas partners. In 1999 a web site was set up to display comparative data, a discussion list established to encourage communication in various areas and *Client Perception* surveys conducted. This year cooperative efforts are extending internationally with consultancy services, a database of teaching materials for IT and library skills, establishment of a 24x7 reference service and virtual reference collections, and arrangements for staff placements on a semi-formal basis, being made with overseas partners. Within the Australasian partnership group, *Staff Perception* surveys are being completed by members.

Non Universitas 21 continuous improvement / benchmarking projects are also undertaken. In 1999 the Library benchmarked its information skills program with that of the University of Otago Library. New ideas for programs were developed, particularly in relation to interactive

programs on the Web.

Implementation of Quality

The Quality Program is coordinated but it is the involvement of all staff in the process and their recognition of its centrality which ensures quality outcomes. Human resource strategies support the Quality Program. The Library, a service organisation, recognises its key resource is its staff. People with a commitment to customer service are employed and the Library offers its staff a varied program of development opportunities. In 1999 all staff members attended at least one development activity. Briggs and Keogh (1999) note people tend to do those tasks they consider important or enjoy doing, and those tasks that will be checked. The Library, by involving staff in its strategic planning and quality initiatives aligns staff and organisational efforts. The Library's vision, mission and objectives are service related and relevant to employees who provide services, indeed, objectives are developed with the participation of staff.

Through the fostering of an innovative, participative environment both staff and the Library benefit. The experience at the University of Queensland Library is that staff value, for example, their increased participation in strategic planning activities, and opportunities for involvement in cross-sectional initiatives. The Library's customers have benefited from new and improved services.

Amongst other items over the last few years the integrated strategic planning and quality program has resulted in/aided:-
- extension of the virtual library i.e. the cybrary
- development of a strong information skills program
- refurbishment of library buildings and development of a new library (Ipswich)
- improved shelving practices
- improved document delivery services
- new approaches to flexible delivery and service options
- increased outputs in all areas with reduced numbers of staff
- implementation of new services, including *AskIT* and *Ask a Cybrarian*

The Future

This year, the Library is also using the Australian Quality Council's *Business Excellence Framework 2000* to assess the success of its integrated strategic planning and quality program in moving the Library to being a truly quality organisation. The criteria of the Framework allow both assessment of the extent to which organisational practices are aligned with business excellence principles, and planning for improvement in the organisation's leadership and management approaches.

The *Business Excellence Framework* is the Australian equivalent of the criteria by which the three major international quality awards: the Deming prize, the Baldrige Quality Award, and the European Quality Award, are assessed. Johannsen (1996, p.160) notes, "… models such as the American Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the European Quality Award

… allow the organisation to discern clearly its strengths and areas in which improvements can be made".

The Business Excellence Framework has seven categories:
1. leadership and innovation
2. strategy and planning processes
3. data, information and knowledge
4. people
5. customer and market focus
6. processes, products and services
7. business results

Within the categories there are 22 areas. Each area is considered with regard to approach (thinking and planning), deployment (implementing and doing), results (monitoring and evaluating), and improvement (learning and adapting). All categories and areas are related and interlinked.

The Library is finding the Framework an excellent diagnostic tool. It is expected the Library will continue with its use and incorporate it use in its plans for future improvements.

Conclusion

The Library has achieved many successful outcomes to which its strategic planning processes and quality management program have contributed. In 1998 it was joint winner in the Institutional category of the prestigious Australian Awards for University teaching for its *Cybrary* submission. The recent $9.8 million refurbishment of the largest branch of the Library was Highly Commended in the Interiors Category of the RAIA (Royal Australian Institute of Architects - Queensland Branch) Awards in 1999. The University Librarian was named joint winner of the 1999 ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association) Library Manager of the Year.

In 2000 the Library is an efficient and effective provider of information services to the University, respected within the University and considered by the University an essential part of university life and a significant part of the University's marketing edge. The Library has been featured in university advertisements and was the cover story in a recent issue of the magazine the University produces for its graduates.

The customer is the focus of all activities. Usage of services is increasing. Customer satisfaction is rating highly and customers are showing their approval through comments in suggestions boxes, both manual and electronic, in focus groups, and in the usage of services. Within itself the Library is culturally healthy, the majority of staff are committed to the collectively developed organisational mission and supportive of current directions. Quality, as defined by the customer, now is appreciated by library staff as one of the Library's core values. Strategic planning and quality management are integrated operations and programs are in place in which staff from all branches and sections participate.

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