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Evaluation of Strategic Plans in Academic Medical Libraries

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Evaluation of strategic plans in academic medical libraries[*] [†]

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Abstract

Objective: Identify the evaluation methods being used in academic medical libraries that are engaged in strategic planning, where in the planning and implementation process evaluation is being incorporated, and how the evaluation data are collected, analyzed, and incorporated into future strategic planning processes.

Methods: Using the multi-case approach (five), data collection included document review (strategic plans, memos, Web sites), and interviews (semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups). John Bryson's process for strategic planning and Margaret Dalrymple's framework for the evaluation of strategic plans are utilized throughout the study.

Results: The strategic planning process used at each institution varied, yet could be mapped to Bryson. Evaluation programs include evaluating the strategic planning and implementation process, individual initiatives, and the outcomes/impact of the plan. Top barriers to incorporating evaluation into initiatives included time, skill level, and fear of the results. The top facilitators identified were including evaluation in the planning process and making evaluation a requirement.

Conclusion: Strategic planning served as management tool to provide libraries in the study with direction and focus; however, there remains a strong need for leaders to communicate the importance of incorporating evaluation into the planning process.

1. Introduction

In this time of rapid change, many libraries rely on strategic planning and identify strategic initiatives as a tool to develop a vision and to serve as a guide to make that future a reality. However, the process of developing and implementing a strategic plan is no guarantee that the desired future will become a reality. Administrators, managers, and leaders must work together to bring about the changes that are mapped out in their plan.[1] Yet there is still a question

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of the value of strategic planning and if it contributes to managing the ever-changing academic library (Brown & Blake Gonzalez, 2007). A deeper understanding of how strategic plans are evaluated is the first step in assessing the value of strategic planning for libraries.

Numerous approaches to strategic planning have been proposed in the management literature for nonprofit organizations (Allison & Kaye, 2005; Bryson, 2004; McNamara, 2007), higher education (Alfred, 2006; Rowley & Sherman, 2001; Tromp & Rubin, 2004), and libraries (Carr, 1992; Corrall, 2003; Jacob, 1990; Johnson, 1994; Matthews, 2005; Nelson, 2008). Each approach highlights the importance of continuous monitoring, and adjusting of the plan to varying degrees in order to stimulate "actions, results, evaluation, and learning" (p. 34). Medical librarians are using evaluation methods to improve services and to run the library effectively and efficiently (Joubert & Lee, 2007; Olney, 2005; Tennant, Cataldo, Sherwill-Navarro, & Jesano, 2006). Putting evaluation theory into practice, however, is time consuming and can seem overwhelming (especially for an entire strategic plan). Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004, p. 27) state the following:

> At the most complex level, evaluation activities can be so technically complicated, sophisticated in conception, costly, and of such long duration that they require the dedicated participation of highly trained specialists at ease with the latest in social science theory, program knowledge, data collection methods, and statistical techniques. Such complex evaluations are usually conducted by specialized evaluation staffs. At the other extreme, there are many evaluation tasks that can be easily carried out by persons of modest expertise and experience. (p. 27)

[1] Strategic planning is defined as a "set of concepts, procedures, and tools designed to assist managers".

Libraries have been trying to determine the level of evaluation skills their staff should have and how much time the library can afford to dedicate to evaluating services and projects. Nonetheless, it is through continuous review and evaluation of programs and services that a strategic plan is transformed from a static document into a relevant and timely action plan.

2. Problem statement

American medical librarians first began developing and implementing strategic plans in the 1980s. Although some libraries have reported on their planning process, goals, and objectives, no study has focused on the systems libraries use to evaluate the planning process or their evaluation methods used to determine the effectiveness of a strategic plan. The purpose of this study is to fill that void by identifying the evaluation methods used by libraries doing strategic planning, where in the planning and implementation process evaluation is done, and how the evaluation data are collected, analyzed, and incorporated into future strategic planning processes.

Strategic planning is a time consuming and expensive process. Just as libraries have relied on one another to learn how to perform strategic planning, through this study they can learn the methods and tools that can be used to evaluate the process and the plans they create. At the same time, this study highlights the fact that evaluation is a key step in the strategic planning process and, even if planning for and carrying out the evaluation requires a change in culture, it is not something to be overlooked. Matthews (2005) stated, "the majority of statistics and performance measures historically collected by libraries have little to do with measuring the success of achieving a strategic plan" (p. 58).

3. Literature review

Strategic planning was first developed and used in the for-profit realm; as a result, early research studies took place in business-related firms and used evaluation methods that were meaningful to firms whose primary goal was to increase profits (Chakravathy, 1987; Ramanujam, Venkatraman, & Camillus, 1986). The most common research method used was to survey senior managers about whether they thought the planning process was effective and if the plan met the objectives the firm laid out. At the same time, researchers compared previously published financial ratios (prestrategic plan) with the most recent ratios (annual reports, publicly available Securities and Exchange documents) to determine if the firm showed an increase in profits. The shortcoming of this method is that strategic plans looked at a minimum three to five years in the future. Looking for immediate results in financial numbers may be misleading or inadequate because they are only one possible indicator of continued success.

Evaluating strategic planning to foster economic development serves as a bridge between the for-profit and the not-for-profit realm. The methods of evaluation currently used by researchers include the types of traditional financial indicators associated with business as well as new methods to assess impact on the surrounding community as part of the evaluation process. In order to be ready for a final evaluation, Edmondson (1990) and Blair (1998) proposed models of planning that ensure evaluation data will be available when needed. However, when it comes to assessing the effectiveness of strategic planning, Preissing (2006) reminded us that not everyone will take the same view. In a multiple case study that compared the perceptions of success between those leading the planning process (local leaders) and those participating in the planning (community members), Preissing demonstrated that local leaders focused on the success of the planning process, whereas community members focused on outcome measures. This study's findings serve as a good summary of the research that has been done in the business

and economic disciplines. Leaders and planners tend to measure success by quantifiable measures such as profits and improved efficiency. Those who are said to benefit from the services provided tend to focus on outcomes that are sometimes more difficult to quantify such as an improvement in quality of life.

In education, strategic planning researchers have focused on two areas. The first area harkens back to the business world and focuses on perceptions of the effectiveness of the planning process (Gehrking, 1996; Hambright, 1999; Moxley, 2003). Each of these studies has relied on surveying key administrators who were involved in the planning process in order to gauge the perceived value of particular stages of planning. The second area includes techniques used in the area of economic development; research has looked to outcomes to gauge effectiveness (Dalrymple, 2007; Golofski, 2003; Rivera Torres, 2002; Steel, 1994). The primary research design in these instances has been the case study in which an examination of archival documents, interviews, and, in some cases, surveys were used to compile the case.

3.1. Research in library and information science

Childers and Van House (1993) identified two steps in the evaluation process for strategic plans in libraries. First, information is collected about outputs (measures that quantify the amount, quality, or volume of use) and then that information is compared against a set of predetermined goals or expected outcomes (change in behavior, attitude, skills, or knowledge). Second, judgment is exercised to determine if the expected outcomes are still applicable to the organization; if the answer is "yes," the expected outcomes will be compared against the actual outcomes. If the comparison is positive, the evaluation will deem the program, plan or process to be effective. These outcomes will be reported through progress reports, financial reports, and annual reports. However, as Porter (1996) wrote, operational efficiency (outputs) should not be

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confused with strategy (outcomes). Operational efficiency is easily imitated through "the rapid diffusion of best practices and competitive convergence" (p. 64). Strategy, Porter wrote, looks 10 years out and strives to define a unique position; achieving the strategy demands discipline and continuity.

The majority of research about strategic planning in libraries has been communicated through case studies and has focused on the process used (Dewey, 1991; Ladwig, 2005; "Saint Paul's strategic plan," 2005; Shoaf, 2001). However, within these case studies there was no mention of an evaluation of the planning/implementation process or how the plan's goals and objectives would be measured in the future. Once libraries moved beyond reporting processes used, researchers started to report on results of strategic plans they developed. Many focused on outputs (McClamroch, Byrd, & Sowell, 2001). Concrete measurable outcomes take time to emerge. Gratch and Wood (1991), writing at the end of one year of strategic planning, spent equal time reviewing the planning process and acknowledging the impact of implementing the first year of the plan. However, at the end of year one, it was still too early for them to determine outcomes associated with the implementation of the strategic plan.

Through the use of document analysis, interviews with library directors, and a survey, McNicol (2005) investigated how closely library strategic plans are aligned with institutional plans. She stated that outcome measures are an indicator of how well the two plans are aligned. She also found there was no consistency among directors interviewed on the distinction between outputs and outcomes. McNicol did not report specific numbers; instead, she reported that a "few" directors believed it was "self-evident" that the library had met targets, whereas others relied on more structured data gathering methods (p. 507). One director stated that the "library was good at counting things …but has not really done anything to [show] the value of those

things" (p. 505). McNicol (2005) summarized her findings by stating, "the majority of library directors felt that they would be called on to adopt more rigorous approaches to measuring outcomes in the future" (p. 507), and further stated that, as strategic planning becomes embedded in the culture of academic libraries, the need for ongoing evaluation becomes evident.

In academic medical libraries in particular, strategic planning evaluation is taking a path similar to that of general academic libraries: The focus initially is on the planning process and who to involve. Case study is the primary research design (Higa-Moore, Bunnett, Mayo, & Olney, 2003; Johnson Kuntz, Tennant, Case, & Meakin, 2003). Beyond lessons learned, Johnson Kuntz et al. (2003) provided both tangible outputs (creation of standing committees and short-term working groups, changes to infrastructure, and redesign of positions) and intangible outcomes (greater awareness of staff duties, better understanding of primary clientele, sense of being part of something larger), all of which are associated with the strategic planning process. The outcomes in this case study are associated with the impact the strategic plan has on library staff; there is no indication whether or not the outputs were translated to show a direct impact on user services.

In summary, research on the evaluation of strategic planning has been limited. In the work that has been reported in the literature, three methods of evaluation emerge: using ratios or output measures, asking stakeholders their perceptions, and measuring and assessing outcomes. Looking at financial indicators in the business realm occurs today in libraries in the form of output measures. The research conducted in the area of economic development and education is the most comprehensive and has tried to include all three of these evaluation areas. Libraries have yet to report on including stakeholders in their evaluation process.

4. Theoretical framework

Dalrymple (2007) proposed a conceptual model for strategic planning/implementation evaluation. This study did not assume that libraries had implemented her model; however, I used the model as a comparison to evaluation methods identified by librarians. Dalrymple (2007) was comprehensive and systematic in her approach to evaluating the planning/implementation process and strategic plan as a whole. She identified several key factors associated with evaluation of strategic planning initiatives: communication, leadership, culture, budget, and planning. From these factors, she developed a conceptual model that can be used for future evaluations of strategic plans.

Dalrymple's (2007) evaluation model incorporates the logic model, which is a visual tool to record inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact. In a logic model, inputs are resources (money, staff, facilities, technology, policy statements, and regulations) used to plan and provide a service. Activities are actions that are a planned part of programs/processes that are intended to provide benefits to the end user of the services. Activities can be subdivided into tasks and steps. Outputs are the results of the activities, and they often can be quantified. Desired outcomes are assumed to benefit the user of the services and include a change in knowledge, skills, behavior, attitude, or condition. Outcomes can be short- or long-term (Hernon & Dugan, 2002); the desired outcome may or may not be realized.

5. Research questions

1. What strategic planning processes are being used by academic medical libraries?

    a. Do they follow a published/formal process like Bryson (2004) (see Figure 1)?

2. Who is participating in the strategic planning process?

3. Is strategic planning important for the library, and why?

4. What methods are being used to evaluate strategic plans and when in the planning process (planning/implementation processes, outputs, outcomes, impact)?

   a. Does a culture of evaluation/assessment exist, i.e., are decisions based on facts, research, and analysis, and are processes in place to collect the needed data?

5. How has the strategic plan been (or will a future strategic plan be) changed as a result of evaluation?

6. What are the barriers and facilitators to incorporating evaluation into strategic planning?

Figure 1: The Strategy Cycle*
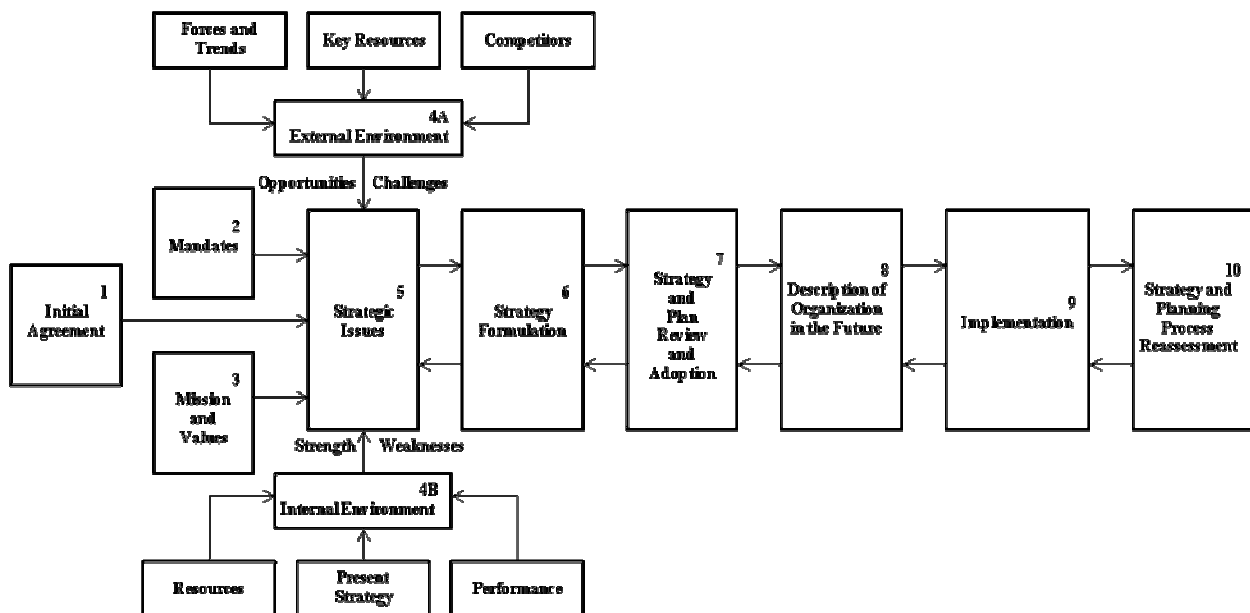
*Based on Bryson (2004, pg. 33).

6. Research design

This study uses a multicase study approach. Yin (1984) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when

the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Martin (2004) identifies four instances in which to use a multicase study: (a) when studying a modern management problem, (b) when a variety of data collection methods are used, (c) when the focus is asking how something worked, and (d) when there is a need to gain varied and complementary insights into the research questions. This study fits these parameters. Strategic planning is a modern management tool, and the goal of the study is to ask how it is used and evaluated and to determine if it is an effective tool for medical libraries. In the multicase study approach, each individual case plays a supporting role as the larger question is explored. Through replication across cases, themes and patterns may emerge which will result in a more holistic answer to the research questions.

7. Methodology

7.1. Sample selection and recruiting

In November 2008, I queried subscribers of a mailing list of the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) to solicit volunteers who had a strategic plan that was between two and three years into implementation and who were interested in participating in a multiple case study for research purposes. Nine librarians out of 125 responded. I contacted them via e-mail and asked them to respond to a short set of questions to further narrow the pool; librarians from eight libraries responded.

Five libraries, hereafter referred to as Libraries A-E, were selected based on the number of years they had used strategic planning and also based on them self-identifying as having a formal evaluation process in place to determine whether the goals, objectives, and targets identified in their strategic plan were being met. Two libraries (A, B) were midsize with fewer than 45 full-time employees (FTE) and an annual budget under $4 million. Three libraries (C, D, and E) had over 50 FTE and an annual budget over $4 million.

All data collection for the cases occurred between April and June 2009. The methods of data collection included document review (strategic plans, memos, Web sites), and interviews (semistructured

individual interviews and focus groups). Prior to visiting the library, the researcher requested strategic planning documents in order to conduct a content analysis for any specific mention of evaluation methods or plans to be used to evaluate inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

Based on Dalrymple's (2007) five elements of strategic planning/implementation evaluation, one-on-one semistructured interview questions were developed for the leader(s) of the strategic planning process in order to collect detailed data about the process. The interview sessions took approximately 90 minutes. In addition to the individual interview(s), a focus group interview was conducted with six to eight members who were involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation process of the strategic plan. The purpose was to uncover factors that influenced opinions of the effectiveness of strategic planning as well as recall any events that may add to or take away from the perceived success or failure of the strategic plan. The focus group members specifically inquired about stakeholders' involvement in both the planning and evaluation processes, about planned implementation activities, and about the specifics of the evaluation process and evaluation measures used related to inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Additionally, interviewees were asked to discuss how well the evaluation process worked in order to assess whether the strategic planning process achieved its goals and objectives.

All interviews followed the same format; they were conducted by the researcher in person and each was recorded, then the conversations were transcribed and summarized.   Research participants received a copy of the summarized transcripts and had the opportunity to add to, subtract from, or clarify any statements. The full transcripts were analyzed for common themes across libraries and were compared to Dalrymple's five elements; these data were the basis for the case reports.

7.2. Quality of data

The researcher solicited one pilot site through the New England Chapter of the Association of College and Research Libraries electronic mailing list and requested strategic planning documents for examination and for content analysis prior to visiting the library. At the pilot site, the researcher pre-tested the interview questions and the interview script to ensure

questions were understood by pilot participants as the researcher intended. Based on feedback from the pilot site regarding the interview and focus group questions, suggested edits were incorporated prior to visiting the libraries selected for the study. A second researcher working independently reviewed the full transcripts and performed a content analysis looking for details related to Dalrymple's (2007) five elements. Results of the two parallel content analyses were in agreement for 95% of the coding. For the remaining 5%, data were compared and differences resolved.

7.3. Limitations

The primary limitation to this study is that Dalrymple's (2007) conceptual model had not previously been tested. The model was developed for academic institutions but not the library specifically; this is the first application of the model. The data collected and analyzed throughout the study were self-reported and based on recall. Since the plans included in the study were developed in the past, staff recall of the planning process or facts may be incomplete. I assumed that the fact that evaluation was ongoing was not a limitation of the study. Due to financial limits and time constraints, this study was limited to five of the 125 members of the Association of Academic Health Science Libraries; a wider pool of libraries may have produced new data.

8. Findings

8.1. Planning and implementation processes used

The five libraries in this study had been engaged in strategic planning for at least 15 years and used a formal process adhering to a regular schedule. Library D intentionally used the process outline by Bryson (2004) in Figure 1 (Bryson, 2004). Libraries A and C did not refer to Bryson, yet the description of the process used maps to each of Bryson's steps. Libraries B and E did not include step eight in Bryson's process, description of the organization in the future once the strategic plan is completed. Bryson stated this is an optional step in the planning process. The libraries did include all of the other

steps in Bryson's process. None of the libraries was following a larger university process; however, Library B ran its process in parallel with the larger university and provided continuous updates as goals and objectives were being formulated.

All libraries shared their strategic plans with university administrators; two libraries posted the strategic plan to the web for public comment (B, D). Four libraries used teams made up of library staff as part of the library planning process (A, B, C, and D). In two libraries staff voted on priorities (B, E) and they used a consultants early in the process (D, E). Library A intentionally set the plan aside for a period of time and then reviewed it a later date to see if it was still applicable. As a Library A librarian said, "We start to say, ok that's it for now and then come back at a later point. … the crazy thing is that you try to make plans and then tomorrow you come to work and things are totally different."

8.2. Participants in the process

All libraries used a core planning team to develop the plan and work with other participants at various stages in the plan development (see Table 1). The director and deputy director were members of the core group in all libraries. With the exception of Library E, the core planning group reported to the library management team/council; Library E's core group was the management team. Libraries C and D had a dedicated administrative level position responsible for the oversight of the strategic plan and were included in the core planning group. Only Library B included staff representation in the core group. A Library B librarian said, "We decided it would be good to have a smaller group of us leading [the process] because we wanted all the staff involved, but everybody didn't have to be totally involved … so we created a group from leadership, faculty, and classified staff."

The core group consulted with all staff members in every library and, as mentioned above, four libraries used teams (A, B, C, and D). Each library included library stakeholders throughout the process: four used advisory committees (A, C, D, and E), three used library administrators (B, D, and E), and one (D) consulted with a group of library supporters. A librarian from Library D said, "We were looking at external and internal stakeholders in terms of some of their observations, in what they saw as challenges

or advice, and in terms of what needs to change." Each library also stated that the LibQUAL+[TM2] survey

was the primary way in which library stakeholders provided input into the strategic plan. For example,

"We do get input from our clients and I guess LibQUAL+[TM] would be one of the biggest inputs. … We

have gone through and analyzed all of the comments … and that is helping to shape a lot of what we do

(Library C)."

Table 1: Participants

Core Planning Group	Library
Director	A, B, C, D, E
Deputy Director	A, B, C, D, E
Associate Director	E
Director of Planning	C, D
Department Heads	B, E
Staff Representative	B

Participants in the Process	Library
All Staff	A, B, C, D, E
Teams	A, B, C, D
Advisory Committees	A, C, D, E
Library Supports	D
Representatives from University Administration	D, E

8.3. Importance of strategic planning

Leaders of the strategic planning process were in agreement that strategic planning provided

direction, helped to keep the library focused, and was a very important tool to help manage the library.

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[2] LibQUAL+[TM] is a standardized survey that was developed as a project of the Association of Research Libraries
(ARL) in collaboration with the Texas A&M University Libraries to measures users perceptions of service quality.

For example, "I think that a strategic plan helps to lay the foundation of a shared understanding and helps us to be more concerted in a team effort to achieve those goals" (Library D). Other top functions of the process mentioned were: it created discussion (B, D, and E); drew staff together (D and E) (e.g., "It's an important tool for the library. I think it's an icon and a way for us to draw the staff together" (Library E)); and helped staff keep current on trends in education, healthcare, and libraries (D and E). One library (C) stated that strategic planning helped them navigate change (see Table 2).

Table 2: Reasons Strategic Planning is Important (Interview)

Reason	Library
Provides direction	A, B, C, D, E
Keeps library focused	A, B, C, D, E
Creates discussion	B, D, E
Keeps library current on trends	D, E
Draws staff together	D, E
Lays a foundation	D
Identifies values	D
Identifies stakeholders	D
Helps navigate change	C
Enables library to thrive	C
Serves as a symbol for staff	E
Informs staff	E
Tradition	B

8.4. Evaluation methods used

The findings show that there are two types of evaluation occurring in regard to strategic planning. First, libraries are evaluating the strategic planning and implementation process and, second, libraries are evaluating the outcomes/impact of the plan. One library (D) out of the five visited documented and predefined success measures for the strategic planning process and implementation (process and plan effectiveness, content, and cost/benefit). The measures were both qualitative and quantitative and were internally focused. The remaining libraries (A, B, C, and E) commented on how effective their strategic planning was and how it has changed over time, but the evaluation measures used were done informally and were not set ahead of time, and the results were not documented. As one librarian said, "It's informal, but it seems to work. The ways we evaluate. I don't know that you can always quantitatively evaluate things because not everything is numbers and an accurate reflection of how things went or what it really did for the campus" (Library E).

Three libraries set specific performance indicators and evaluation methods to be used for each strategic objective (B, C, and D) as part of the planning process. These measures were a mix of internal performance indicators and patron satisfaction (outputs and outcomes). Libraries A and E did not record specific measurements for each objective but during discussions reported on methods used within the plan. See Table 3 for a list of evaluation methods used to measure inputs, outputs, and impact. Libraries are using many formalized methods to measure effectiveness of individual goals and objectives (see Table 3). There is a reliance on LibQUAL+^{TM}, counting outputs, and other familiar methods such as surveys, usability testing and interviews. Strategic planning leaders stated that LibQUAL+^{TM} was used as a primary tool for stakeholder input during the planning process and also as a measure to see if stakeholders perceived that progress was being made on set goals. Every librarian interviewed mentioned using informal communications, such as liaison interaction with faculty, as a method to measure effectiveness.

Table 3: Evaluation Methods/Tools Mentioned

Method	Library
Availability Studies	D

Balanced Scorecard	A
Benchmarks	A, E
Changes in Staff Skills	D
Financial Assessments (cost per use, cost of service)	D, E
Focus Groups	A, C, D
Formal Feedback Forms	C, E, D
(evaluation forms, liaisons, library committee)	
Informal Feedback (word of mouth, e-mail, blog)	A, B, C, D, E
LibQUAL+^{TM}	A, B, C, D, E
Library Use Study	B, E
Logic Model	C, D
Suggestion Box	E
Surveys	C, D, E
Counting Outputs	A, B, C, D, E
Usability	B, C, D

Although no librarian mentioned Dalrymple's (2007) model and only two libraries (C and D) mentioned the use of the Logic Model as part of their evaluation plan, I mapped all library responses to inquiries about evaluation methods used across the strategic planning process to the five evaluation components of Dalrymple's (2007) model. However, as libraries moved across the logic model (inputs, activities, outputs, impact), their evaluation methods became less formal.

In response to questions of whether or not a "culture of assessment" (Lakos & Phipps, 2004) was prevalent, the libraries varied. A culture of assessment was present at Library A primarily due to the need to justify spending, "budget cuts, … are pushing the urgency of evaluating what we are doing." At

Library B the concept of assessment was new, and focus group participants believed they would be better positioned to answer "yes" in a few years as the library was currently focused on whether the data they were collecting was the right data to measure impact. Both libraries C and D had a culture of planning in place, and the libraries were actively striving towards a culture of assessment. Library D was focusing efforts on creating standard definitions and formats for the data being collected. At the time of the interview, Library E did not conduct assessments unless required for specific projects.

8.5. Changes to the process/plan

As a result of evaluation, Library A found that including faculty and students directly in the planning process took too much time to educate them on the library; future plans have relied on LibQUAL+^{TM} data and informal feedback obtained from talking with faculty. Library B indicated that the planning process was adjusted over time to include opportunities for all staff to provide input into the plan. Library C reviewed outcomes from previously set goals to determine if an objective was completed and could be dropped from the plan; if objectives had not been met; corrective actions were taken in the future plan. Library C intended to adjust its participation in the LibQUAL+^{TM} survey so results of the survey would be available at the start of the library's strategic planning cycle and inform the new plan. Library D streamlined processes overall to be shorter and less time consuming; library staff did more prework allowing fellow staff members to react and suggest changes. Library D also planned to incorporate the use of scenarios as part of the brainstorming and visioning process to better understand what the library will look like after the strategic plan in implemented (Step 8 in Bryson's process). Library E over time made the effort to include faculty, staff, students, and administration in the planning process sooner and run formal focus groups to solicit input.

8.6. Facilitators and barriers to incorporating evaluation

Facilitator and barriers were solicited from both the leaders of the strategic planning process (those interviewed) and those charged with implementing the strategic plan (focus group members). Fifteen facilitators and 24 barriers were identified. These were categorized into the five key factors identified by Dalrymple (2007): culture, leadership, communication, the integration of budget, and

planning. The most mentioned facilitators fell into either the planning or culture category. Focus group

participants mentioned including evaluation as part of the planning process to be the most effective. Both

those interviewed and those who participated in the focus groups agreed that making evaluation a

requirement was a factor for incorporating evaluation (see Table 4). Participants more readily identified

barriers (see Table 5). The top barriers they identified were time, skill level, and fear of the results. They

categorized nine barriers as planning, and eight as culture. None of the barriers fell into the category of

leadership.

Table 4: Identified Facilitators Organized by Dalrymple's Five Factors for Incorporating

Evaluation in Strategic Planning and Participating Libraries

Facilitator	Interview	Focus Group	Factor
Having assigned staff	C, D	B, D	Budget
Having necessary skills	D	B, E	Budget
Using liaisons effectively		D	Communication
Knowing it will be used in decision making process	B		Communication
Making it required (funding, administration)	A, B, C, D, E	B, C, D, E	Culture
Profession recognizes it as important	C	B	Culture
Having good working relationships		E	Culture
Tying to annual performance	D	A	Culture
Having Director support (time, money)		B, D	Leadership
Following best practices	C	D	Leadership
Providing oversight of the entire process		C	Leadership
Collecting data in a standardized format		D	Planning

Including it as part of planning process	D	A, B, C, D	Planning
Providing a staff web site for tracking		C	Planning
Incorporating the logic model		D	Planning

Table 5: Identified Barriers Organized by Dalrymple's Five Factors* for Incorporating Evaluation in Strategic Planning and Participating Libraries

		Focus	
Barrier	**Interview**	**Group**	**Factor**
Insufficient skills	C, D	B, C, D, E	Budget
Competition for resources		C	Budget
Costs		B	Budget
Lack of dedicated staff		B	Budget
Not aware of link to funding	C		Communication
Isolating the library in users work		D	Communication
Tracking informal comments		D	Communication
Lack of interest		A, C	Culture
Not seen as important	C, E	C	Culture
Afraid of results	A, B, C	B, C	Culture
Pace at which change occurs		E	Culture
Need to track traditional counts	B		Culture
Respecting user privacy		D	Culture
Fear of the process		A	Culture
Lack of objectivity		B	Culture

Difficult to measure impact	A, B	A, E	Planning
Capturing data	D		Planning
Lack of planning	B, C	A, C	Planning
Obtaining IRB approval		A, E	Planning
Amount of work involved	B	A, C	Planning
Time	A, B, D, E	A, B, C, D, E	Planning
Participant burnout	A	D, E	Planning
Identifying best participants	A		Planning
Tracking users long term		D	Planning

* Leadership was not mentioned as a barrier

9. Discussion

Brown and Blake Gonzalez (2007) questioned the usefulness of strategic planning for academic libraries by stating there was no empirical evidence supporting strategic planning as an effective tool to manage the ever changing library. The findings in this study confirm that some academic medical libraries find strategic planning to be an important management tool and are including evaluation into strategic plans. However, the libraries studied varied in the degree to which they applied evaluation and the stages in which evaluation was planned and executed. With the exception of Library D, sampled libraries relied on informal means to evaluate the planning/implementation process. Since all libraries in this study had been using strategic planning for more than 15 years we must wonder why they have not set more formalized measures to evaluate the planning and implementation process. The most frequently identified barriers (time) and facilitators (making it a requirement) to inclusion of evaluation as part of the strategic plan. As such, it is possible that since the planning process is internal, evaluation is not

being required or that these libraries prefer to use the limited time they have to measure individual goals and objectives in the plan rather than the more formative evaluation of the planning and implementation process. Another possibility is that it is easier for these libraries to implement evaluation at the micro level than at the macro level. The potential pitfall is that libraries could start to use such data collected to support individual initiatives rather than to formally evaluate the actual merit of their planning and implementation processes and overall plan outcomes.

The librarians interviewed in the study believed that they did not have time and training necessary to learn how to apply, develop, and implement complex evaluation studies. All the libraries used LibQUAL+™ as their primary method to gather data from faculty, staff and students. Yet, LibQUAL+™ only measures outputs related to user's perceptions of service quality and somewhat satisfaction. New tools, such as those offered by Counting Opinions[3] address satisfaction more fully and combine outputs with data generated from management information systems. None of these, however, truly address inputs or outcomes. Strategic plans need to address this shift to assessment.

A single method of evaluation applied to the strategic planning and implementation process, to be used by every library, is unlikely since libraries use strategic plans to navigate their unique environment. Dalrymple's (2007) conceptual evaluation model, being based on the Logic Model, provides libraries a comprehensive tool that looks internally and externally at each step of the planning process and, when applied objectively, can help complete the strategic planning cycle.

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[3] Counting Opinions is a commercial service developed to help libraries track customer satisfaction and performance data: http://www.countingopinions.com/

Librarians mentioned Dalrymple's (2007) five key factors that make up the foundation of her conceptual model as facilitators to incorporating evaluation into strategic plans; their absence was viewed as a barrier. However, overall communication was least mentioned; when librarians did mention it, it was mostly as a barrier when not carried out. Examples included not knowing how the data would be used and not knowing why evaluation was important. None of the barriers identified were categorized as leadership. Effective communication is one of the most important responsibilities of leadership.

Dalrymple's (2007) key success factors do not take stakeholders into consideration; rather, stakeholder involvement and perceptions are elements of her evaluation process. Yet some of the barriers identified as planning (respecting user privacy, participant burnout, identifying the best participants, and tracking users long term) could also be categorized as stakeholder participation issues. Dalrymple's model can be strengthened by adding a sixth success factor, stakeholder participation.

Staff at each library interviewed said they rely on informal communications between stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, community leaders, and organizations) to gauge impact. Yet many informal communications go unrecorded and meaning can be lost or changed over time resulting in a poor measure of impact. The question remains of how to effectively turn the informal conversations into a formal statement. Proactively asking stakeholders for their thoughts and analysis, including their satisfaction and knowledge, would take the library one step closer to an evaluation that gauges overall impact. Frequent communication of the outcomes and impact of the strategic plan is one of the easiest ways to promote participation and enthusiasm. Lakos and Phipps (2004) identified four steps to strengthen a culture of assessment: focusing on the customer's needs, including performance measures in planning documents, having leadership

support for assessment activities, and having staff who value assessment (pp. 352-353). These elements are similar to the facilitators identified in this study (Table 5) with the exception of focusing on customer needs. The identified barriers related to culture—staff doesn't believe evaluation is important, they have an inability to be objective, and they lack interest in evaluation—go against the needed elements for a culture of assessment. Some of the reasons for this conflict can be linked to planning. Members of the focus groups indicated that insufficient skills and lack of time made the amount of work needed to carry out an evaluation seem overwhelming. Interestingly, both the leaders who interviewed those responsible for implementing the strategic plan focused on planning-related facilitators. Matthews (2005) suggested that if libraries are able to find the balance between looking inward (process, inputs, and outputs) and looking outward (outcomes and impact), then achieving a culture of assessment is possible. Creating staff buy-in remains a challenge and an issue for leaders to address, not only if they want to move towards of culture of assessment but also if they want to move towards a learning organization on the whole (Senge, 1990).

10. Conclusion

Libraries in this study followed the strategic planning process identified by Bryson (2004); each library adapted the process outlined by Bryson to meet their local needs. One indication of this local adaptation is who the library involved in the planning process and at what stage. All the libraries in the study had a long history of strategic planning and stated the main reasons for continuing to engage in strategic planning was because it provided direction and focus.

If strategic change is needed, then cultural change is needed as well (Lakos & Phipps, 2004). Numerous opportunities for leaders have been identified in this study. There is a greater

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need for communicating the importance of evaluation and for informing staff how data are being used and how evaluation findings are tied to funding. Opportunities also exist for focusing training initiatives on evaluation methods or for inquiring about the level of knowledge for potential employees during the hiring process. This study also demonstrates the important role the leader plays in setting the culture of an institution; if the leader places importance on evaluation, structures and processes are put in place to create the culture of assessment.

Findings in this study indicate that more resources (time, dedicated staff, and increased skills) are needed in order to incorporate evaluation into the strategic plan. But an effective evaluation plan does more than collect, analyze, and provide data; it makes it possible to continually learn about and improve the process, service, or program. Stakeholders have a key role to play in the evaluation process, yet discovering ways to increase stakeholder participation remains a challenge.

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Appendix

Dalrymple's Five Components Used to Evaluate Strategic Plans Effectiveness*

Evaluation of Resources Needed

Evaluation Element	Interrelated with Logic Model	Sample Questions
First element. A summarization of the mission and vision. Exploration of the relational issues of influences and resources, such as the economic, social, or political environment of the community, and the appropriateness and fit of the vision. These types of questions help explain some of the effect of unanticipated and external influences.	Input	*Internal.* Have expectations or opportunities in learning, research, or service been considered? *External.* Have the changes in the local, state, national, or global environment been considered? Has input from the intended services user been considered?
Second element. A review of internal business processes, such as staff resources, operations, activities, and functions. Questions that ask about the extent to which actions were executed as planned.	Activities	*Internal.* Do the internal business processes, such as budgeting or professional development, articulate the values and goals of the plan? Can they demonstrate a link to the strategic plan? *External.* Did the resource development and allocation have enough flexibility to adapt to the conditions yet meet the needs of the services users? How well do the internal processes work to realize the plan and how could they be improved?

Evaluation of Intended Results

Evaluation Element	Interrelated with Logic Model	Sample Questions
Third element. An analysis of the data; goals and objectives in measurable units, which include the internal and external measures. The measures should include financial, equipment and facilities, along with the learning, research, and service data.	Output	If targets were set for the measures, the key question is if those targets were met. *Internal.* Measures that track fundamental data on the institution. *External.* Measures that provide comparisons of fundamental data among similar institutions.
Fourth element. An assessment of the consequence, value added, the outcomes, and/or the effectiveness of the plan. These questions try to document the changes that occur at the institution as an impact of the plan.	Outcomes	*Internal.* To what extent is progress being made toward the desired outcomes? Has a culture of planning developed or evolved? Does the leadership support the core principles? *External.* Are the outcomes and impact of the strategic plan recognized by external agencies and services users?
Fifth element. Stakeholder participation in the evaluation by providing their perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategic plan.	Impact	*Internal.* This would include involvement from stakeholders - students, staff, faculty, regional and state leaders, as well as input from other organizations, by asking about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the plan. *External.* This would include perceptions from external sources that could provide a validation, such as perceptions of university presidents around the world.

* Based on Dalrymple (2007, p. 147-148)