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

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**Abstract**

Strategic planning in academic libraries enables librarians to plan for the delivery of services that meet university foci and patron needs.  In creating a strategic plan, it is helpful to have an overall view of the strategic plan and a view that allows planners to focus on more narrow aspects.  A library impact map is designed to provide these perspectives.  This article describes how a library impact map can be created and may be used in the strategic planning process.

**Introduction**

One of the certainties of life is that things will change.  The pace and degree of change depends on a variety of factors, some within our control (e.g., environment and attitude) and many outside of our control (e.g., economic changes and migration into or out of an area). Strategic planning in libraries provides a method of monitoring, controlling and dealing with change in an effective manner.[1, 2]  The process of strategic planning examines what has happened in the past and matches it with what is currently happening to plan for what may happen in the future.  In this sense strategic planning becomes an evaluative process that enables libraries to deal with the current exigencies and chart a course whereby any difficulties might be solved.[3] Strategic planning may also be used to prepare for the changing needs of patrons so that libraries and their services remain valued and relevant.

Several factors need to be considered when engaging in strategic planning.  First, planners need relevant data to inform decisions.  Data collection has a dual role in strategic planning.  Lag data provides measures of events that have already occurred to provide a picture of what has happened.[4, 5, 6]  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 indicates past and present trends and patterns within the organization.  These trends and patterns help librarians and institutional officials adjust to changing patterns and envision the future potential of libraries.

A companion to lag measures is lead measures.  When specific initiatives are undertaken, lead measures are used to determine if the change had the intended effect and if the degree of the change desire was achieved.[7, 8, 9, 10, 11]  An example of a narrowly focused project is the implementation of Web 2.0 technologies to build collections and assist in discoverability.[12] Broader project examples may include the realignment of library services to changing university

foci and goals.[13]  Regardless of the initiative, lead measures 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.

Second, those engaged in strategic planning need to examine the environment of the organization.[14, 15, 16]  Strategic planners should become aware of what makes up the organization's ecosystem and determine how well the parts of the ecosystem function to together.  The organization's ecosystem includes the strengths of personnel and resources within the organization that facilitate the planning and implementation process.  In this step, librarians evaluate how well library services meet patron needs and university foci.  It also includes resources outside of the organization that may be accessed to support the strategic plan.  A final activity in this step identifies the organization's weak points or stressors.  These aspects of the library's environment enable planners to build on strengths while planning for areas of weakness.

Third, the culture of the environment and the engagement of personnel within the organization and their attitude toward change should be identified and quantified.[17, 18]  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.  Tom Bielavitz[19] describes a rating tool used to identify the scope, resources needed and timeline for each proposed project.  By rating each project, committee members not only gain a broader understanding of what is needed for the change to occur, but are also able to represent the change to other library personnel and why the change is needed. Martyn Wade[20] supports such an approach in his description of changes made in the National Library of Scotland as it reworked and reformed its strategic plan to meet the mandates issued by the government.  In

this case a series of three-year strategic plans engaged the participation of trustees and staff alike to not only collect data but to use the collected data to scan the horizon for ideas and projects that caused the library to have an outward focus and to become more agile in its delivery of services. The library personnel developed a culture of exploration, trust and change by engaging with one another in the planning and implementation of the strategic plan.

Finally, the strategic plan should clearly outline a vision of the future potential of the library.[21, 22, 23] This vision brings what has and is happening into focus in a way that describes why a change is needed for the library to remain vital and relevant. The establishment of and focus on the library's vision and goals is not a one-time activity but becomes an iterative process ingrained in the culture of the library. In this way the vision and goals direct the organization's efforts toward a common purpose and the 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.

These steps in the strategic planning process are not mutually exclusive of each other, 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. To foster this process, a mechanism is needed that enables strategic planners to see the relationships between the services library personnel provide and the foci of the university or institution the library serves. Such a mechanism should have the ability to provide a broad description of the relationships key to strategic planning and also facilitate strategic planners' focus on specific levels of service. The library impact map (LIM) is such an

instrument.[24] The LIM provides a vision of the interplay between library services and institutional foci by indicating where impactful relationships occur.

**Creation of a LIM**

Megan Oakleaf[25] describes the LIM as the intersection of library services and institutional foci. The LIM is formatted as a table in which library services are listed in column headers and the institutional foci are listed as row headers. Each library would adjust the library services and institutional foci to describe those unique to their academic library and university. The intersection of each library service and institutional foci is rated on a five-point scale to indicate the impact of each relationship on the library's strategic plan. The five rating codes include:

- $Y^{++}$ = Yes, there is an impact with evidence/data and it is communicated to the stakeholders.

- $Y^{+}$ = 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 specific levels to inform and adjust strategic plans. Locating each library service within the department and division provides an intermediate level of analysis that facilitates discussion on library impact and actions. Library planners may examine which services are meeting or could meet the needs of institutional foci. Similarly, placing each institutional focus within the specific library goal set to address that focus provides a secondary review of the library's impact on institutional priorities. Figure 1 provides a partial example (not all library services are listed) of the LIM with impact codings.

| 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 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **AUL** / Department Head | | | | | **Public Services** / Subject Librarians* | | | Library Access Services (Circulation, ILL, Holds & Deliveries, Course Reserve) | | |
| **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 Facilitates** | 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++ = Yes, there is an impact with evidence/data and it is communicated to the stakeholders. Y+ = 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.

**Figure 1**. A partial LIM template. Not all library services are shown.

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 and it may be difficult to find a single person who has a broad

understanding of all library services and all institutional foci.   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 of the institutional foci.  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 base line for further discussions.  Finally, each department can 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 (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 help to strengthen and broaden the coding and planning processes.

As a final step, it is recommended that each rating is 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 addressed in this article, color-coding in the LIM identifies key patterns and relationships and facilitates further exploration of these patterns.

It is important to note that as library services and university foci are identified and each relationship impact is coded, there may be considerable frustration on the part of the coders. It may be difficult to identify lag or potential lead measures and how library services may impact university foci. Each label of library service and each university foci should be clearly named and include a brief description to assist raters in the coding of the impact. As clarification 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 map of library services. This map enables librarians to identify areas of 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 may assist librarians with necessary realignments. The trends and patterns within departments, divisions and goals may provide insights about what can be done to support and successfully implement strategic plans. The LIM also provides insights about potential collaborations between library services, departments and divisions. Such collaborations should reduce redundancies and increase fiscal effectiveness.

The strongest feature of the LIM is that it promotes discussion among librarians. This discussion may focus on the actual rating given to a relationship. The initial raters may not be aware of any current data collection or dissemination efforts. In viewing the LIM, another librarian may be able to update the LIM with knowledge of such impacts. This discussion helps

to clarify ratings and increase the understanding of librarians. Another discussion may focus on how a library service can achieve a higher rating on the scale. For example, librarians can discuss what additional efforts or actions would move a lower rating to "Yes[++]" rating. The discussion would identify lead measures that would facilitate movement toward an outward, patron-focused library. As mentioned earlier, a third discussion may occur between librarians in different departments or divisions who have a common impact rating for a university focus. These discussions would identify commonalities between the services meeting the needs of the university focus. This discussion would lead to decisions regarding who should offer what service and where services complement or overlap one another. In this way librarians can identify revamped or 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. The end result is an increase in the efficient delivery of library and patron services.

The LIM also serves as a foundation for additional layering. Just as the divisions of goals and services allows for increased scrutiny of services, additional initiatives could be layered on the impact ratings. For example, if a library developed personas (user group descriptions) of patrons, 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 patrons. This additional layer increases the outward thinking and planning of libraries to meet patron needs. Another example 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 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.[26, 27, 28]

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 unfold, a greater understanding of

the value of library services within the university community is provided. Ultimately, the LIM

assists library administration and personnel to communicate the value of libraries to others.

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