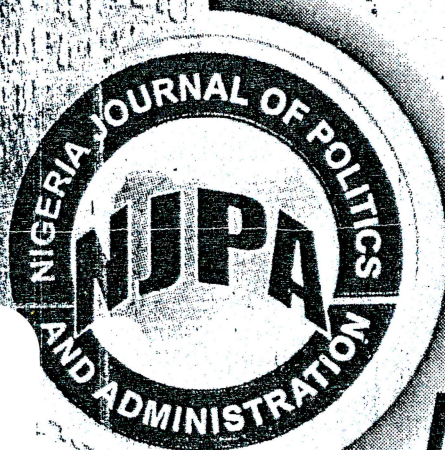


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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Articles

- The Committee System in the legislative Process in Nigerian State legislatures (with lessons from the united states of America).
Fidelis C Okoli 1
- Political Economy of colonialism and its Impact on Nigeria's political and economic landscape. **Austin Okoro** 14
- Local Government system in Nigeria As An instrument For Rural Development: versus Reality **Emmanuel Onyebuchi Ezeani** 29
- Global Terrorism and the challenges of (4)^a Contemporary International Relations **Felix .C. Asogwa** 44
- Capitalist Ethos and counters corruption Policies in Nigeria
Okonette Ekanem 54
- International Donor Agencies and the crisis of Development in Nigeria: A case study of the UNDP **Aloysius- Michsaels, Okolie**
- Elite politics and the marginalization Syndrome in Nigeria: Implications for National Integration and Development
Nkolika E. Obianyo 65
- The Nigerian Civil Service After The structural Adjustment Programme: Some Critical Reminiscences **O.O. Okereke** 87
- The military and Human Rights in Nigeria: Buhari- Abubakar's Regimes **Ifeanyi Chukwu M. Abada** 96
- Good Governance and The Challenges of Developing Democratic Institutions in Nigeria's fourth Republic **Christopher Uche Agalamanyi** 110
- Poor Revenue Base of Local Government in Nigeria: Causes and Remedies **Emmanuel J.C. Duru** 118

- Cooperative Formation and Management: Implications for poverty Alleviation **B. Ajakemo** 12
- Africa and Information Globalization **Ken Ifesinachi** 133
- Human Resources Development and its Implication For National Development **Martin Ifeanyi Okeke** 149
- An Overview of Urban Policies in Nigeria **Emmanuel Onyebuchi Ezeani** 154
- Oil Pipeline Vandalization in Nigeria: An Investigation of Dimensions of Environmental Politics in A Rural state **P.O. Phil – Eze** 162
- Strategic Planning for Academic Libraries in Nigeria: The Experience of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka **C.N. Ezeani** 177
- Anthropology and Human Rights in Africa: The Osu Institution Among The Igbo of Nigeria **E. U. M. Igbo and P. J. Eze** 185
- Geo- Politics And Geo- Strategy on A Global Scale **Chukwudi .S. Osondu**

Strategic Planning For Academic Libraries in Nigeria: The Experience of Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, UNN

Abstract

This article has attempted to discuss strategic planning in academic libraries in Nigeria using the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as a case study. It identifies the benefits as well as the various processes involved in strategic planning. Finally, the article presents and analyses the strategic plan of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library

Introduction

The 21st century has brought with it, so much knowledge explosion through the advent of modern information technology on one part and the growth and expansion of several disciplines on the other

During the last couple of years, the act of communication has also transformed tremendously with the advent of computers, fax machines from where we moved into the era of electronic networking and the information super high way involving Internet surfing and e-mail services available in almost every nook and cranny. All these pose a serious threat to the services rendered by libraries.

In contrast to this growth and knowledge expansion, many libraries especially, libraries in developing countries have experienced dwindling resources. There has been a lot of cash squeeze, budgets have been cut down severely and all of these reflect the general economic depression within the country. The Nation's economy has not been made easier by the stiff economic objectives of finance institutions of the west, e.g. the World Bank, and the International monetary fund. Therefore, for the 21st century libraries to be able to maximise the little resources at their disposal strategic planning has become inevitable. Indeed, for the academic libraries to keep their relevance in this age, they must learn to work in the new electronic environment which they have found themselves. They must as an imperative make plans on how to have a competitive edge over other information centres and still stay forcefully relevant within the academic milieu. This, therefore, has made planning extensively for the future an imperative for the academic libraries in Nigeria.

The academic libraries also have to operate within the mandate of the university which it serves. The University mandates are two fold:

- (1) To produce through relevant course instruction the human capacity for originating, implementing, and managing, the nations socio-economic development and other programmes
- (1) To contribute both meaningfully and effectively to the process of national development through research whose results are relevant to the overall progress of the Nation (Alkali, 1996: 4).

The academic libraries must ensure that their goals, objectives and mission must be in line with that of the University which they serve. This is because, the research and education mandate of the Universities can only be actualised through the services rendered by their various libraries, which include identifying, selecting, acquiring, processing, storing, and disseminating knowledge and information, through various formats, namely books, journals, and electronic materials. The academic library must of necessity have a clearly defined set of goals and objectives which it must pursue through developing a strategic plan of action which will help in the execution of its mission in the University (Bozemann and Straussman 1990: 54).

What then is Strategic Planning?

Strategy is a military term which refers to the objective of winning a war as opposed to tactics. But the word has over the years become ubiquitous and has crept into every modern organization. Socrates made an analogy between the duties of the general and a businessman and observed that both utilize plans to use resources to meet objectives (Hughes 1998:150).

Every organization therefore must from time to time strategize, that is, taking a look critically at its internal operations, its external environment and making sterling projections about its future or simply put, planning where the organization hopes to be in a specified period. This can simply be a detailed map of direction that the organization presently intends to follow in living out its roles by positioning the organization in the right place at the right time.

Managers awareness of the growing environmental factors- social, economic and the need to balance out between the external factors and an optimum allocation of internal resources is crucial (Pissard 1990). Paine and Anderson (1983) further corroborate this view by asserting that strategic planning determines how an organization will achieve its basic goals, subject to a set of environment and internal constraints.

King and Cleland (1978) observed that strategic planning seeks to answer these questions.

- What has been the organizations purpose?
- What is its present business?
- What should be its business in future
- How does the organization ensure that its business is what it wants it to be?

Strategic planning in the academic library from the above definitions will be seen as a pattern of decision that clearly sets out objectives, purposes or goals and produces the principal policies and plans for achieving those goals by defining the range of activities the library will pursue, the kind of establishment it is or intends to be and the

nature of social or academic services it intends to render to its Clientele (Abubakar 1996:4)

Benefits of Strategic Planning in Libraries

Research has shown that a well articulated strategic plan positively influences the performance of the organization. Thune and House (1970) East lack and McDonald (1970) Academy management Journal (1972).

- (1) A library without planning lacks focus and direction. Everyday functions in any library will never add up to definite goals. First rate strategy planning therefore is used to create consistency and purpose for every library.
- (2) It keeps the library more alert to the changes outside and without the library environment. This can come as new opportunities or threats.
- (3) It provides the library an opportunity to work towards maximization of meagre resources, thereby moving resources only towards strategy supportive ventures.
- (4) Good pro-active strategic plan can initiate better short term and long term performance
- (5) Aggressive strategic plan will make the library have a competitive edge over other information centres.

Strategic Planning in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The Nnamdi Azikiwe Library of the University of Nigeria formulated a strategic plan which would inform the activities of the library within the next 3-5 years. To draw this plan, the library adopted the Bryson model of strategic planning. Bryson (1998) put forward an eight step model as follows.

- (1) Initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process.
- (2) Identifying organization mandates
- (3) Clarifying organization's mission and values
- (4) Assessing the external environment (opportunities and threats)
- (5) assessing the internal environment (Strengths and weakness)
- (6) Identifying the strategic issues facing an organization
- (7) Formulating strategic plan to manage the issues
- (8) Establishing an effective organizational vision for the future.

The library however, did not adhere strictly to this model. Certain aspects of the model were adapted in the strategic planning of the library. Number 1 above i.e. initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process was done by the establishment of the library's strategic planning committee mandated by the University administration and the library management with these terms of reference:

- I. To identify the goals, objectives and mission of the University and to draw a strategic plan in line with these goals.
- II. To identify the present traditional functions of the library and to project within the plan where the library would be in the next three to five years. These should reflect shifting customer needs and changing information trends.

- III. To formulate strategies and action plan for achieving the targeted short-run and long-run results.

The strategic plan of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library is presented as follows:

To Computerize all library activities within the next three years.

Inability to achieve this will prevent the library from:

- playing its role in the global information exchange.
- Enhancing the quality of its operations.
- Improving its knowledge management capability.
- Offering current and timely information to the University community.

Strategies

- Embark on massive procurement of computers for all sections of the library.
- Extend the computer services to both staff and students.
- Initiate the training of students in the use of computers by library staff.
- Develop facilities that would help the maintenance of the computers.

2. Hook on the library to the internet.

Inability to achieve this will prevent the library from:

- Becoming a center of excellence for the support of learning and research.
- Competing favourably nationally and internationally with other university libraries/information centers.
- Meeting current information needs of both staff and students.

Strategies.

- Install a computer network in the library.
- Embark on massive computer training for both staff and students.
- Undertake a computer capacity building programme for all library staff both professional and nonprofessional.
- Provide not less than 1000 personal computers to meet the needs of both staff and students.

3. To ensure that 90% of staff are computer literate within the next two years.

Inability to achieve this will prevent the library from:

- Having staff with computer skills and competencies.
- Having staff that are effective and relevant in modern library services.
- Maintaining desirable leadership in the global information exchange within the university.

Strategies

- Embark on a massive computer literacy programme for all staff.
- Provide enough computers to meet the training needs of staff.
- Develop the facilities that would help the maintenance of computers.

4. **To provide books and journals which fully support current and changing teaching and research needs of the various departments of the university in accessible variety of formats, within three years.**

Inability to achieve this will prevent:

- The library from meeting the current information needs of the various departments within the university.
- the library from supporting staff and student learning and research through a variety of formats e.g CDROMS, e-Journals Power point conferencing etc.

Strategies

- Getting enough fund allocation for books and journals.
- Obtaining the library allocation of 10% of the university annual budget for the purchase of e-Journals CDROMS computers etc.

5. **To effect some traditional functions of the library on-line within the next three years.**

Inability to achieve this will prevent the library from

- performing it's traditional functions effectively and efficiently.

Strategies

- Using the fund allocation of the library to achieve the following:
- Selection of materials, books, journals; etc online
- placement of all library orders for books and journals in their various formats on-li.
- Payment of all acquired materials online.

To undertake a comprehensive staff development programme for academic librarians and other support staff representing diversity in all regards within the next three years.

Inability to achieve this will prevent the library from:

- Maintaining high professional standards.
- Realizing the mission, aims and objectives of the library.
- Developing the man power capacity to transform the library into a center of excellence
- Improving it's knowledge management and information capability.
- Producing quality professionals
- Competing favourably with other university libraries in terms of human resources.

Strategies

- Develop a result oriented manpower development policy.
- Train and retrain staff based on identified training needs.
- Upgrading and maintaing existing facilities for training and staff development.

7. **To improve existing infrastructure within the next four years.**

Inability to achieve this will prevent the library from:

- Providing staff and students a conducive work and study environment.
- Will stifle job satisfaction and productivity of workers.
- will prevent the library from competing favourably with university librarians in other parts of the world.

Strategies

Update the status of existing infrastructure.

- Procure modern processing tools in the technical areas i.e audiovisual and bindery sections.
- Procure power generating sets.

8 Undertake the teaching of the use of the library to all students.

Inability to address this will prevent:

- The students from maximum utilization of the resources within the library.
- The students from knowing how to locate relevant materials in the library.
- The library from serving the university effectively as a depository library for UNO, UNESCO etc.
- The library from being the heart of the university.

Strategies

- Teaching the use of the library by qualified library staff.
- Expand the SDI area of the library.

In Summary, certain critical aspects of the above plan which also hold true for other universities include:

1. Establishment and maintenance of contact between libraries and individuals/organizations, and solicitation of donations of materials through them to the library.
2. The need to establish co-operation between libraries, thereby promoting exchange schemes and exchange programs for staff.
3. Establishment of systematic and organized training/retraining of library staff to keep them abreast of latest information techniques and to update the skills of librarians, thereby preparing them to assume and sustain their new responsibility in the technological world
4. Computerization of libraries i.e equipping the libraries with modern up to date hardware, software systems with CD ROMS CD RAMS, Local Area Network (LAN) wide Area Network (WAN) facilities, Electronic-mail (e-mail) and INTERNET facilities and connection to the world wide web (www) information super highway.
- 5 Provision of modern infrastructure like the Guillotine for the bindery modern audio-visual equipment, air conditioners and split units for the preservation of all materials in their various formats.
- 6 Provision of comfortable reading space for our materials and patrons through completion of our new and state of the Art Library. Strategic planning is not a once and for all affair and the library committee on strategic planning which the

writer is a member of is charged with the mandate of ensuring the execution of the strategic plan of the library within the specified period.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to discuss strategic planning in academic libraries in Nigeria using the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Strategic planning was defined and its benefits in organizations, the library inclusive was elucidated. The various processes involved in the planning of any good strategic plan was enumerated. The Bryson model used by the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library was discussed and the work ended with the analysis of the strategic plan of the Nnamdi Azikiwe library, University of Nigeria.

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