

*Review*

## Strategic Planning for improved Agricultural information transformation in Nigeria: an Essay

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Strategic planning is an important management tool in achieving a set goal especially for the library director/manager who contends with demand for improved services in the face of reduced funding. Strategic planning is useful in driving improved agricultural information management needed for agricultural transformation in Nigeria. It will assist the library director/manager in re-invigorating services rendered to the clients. Applying strategic planning in library management will re-position the staff and require the involvement of every staff within an organization to make it work. Strategic planning flows from an analysis of both the internal and external environment of the organization for the library director/manager to be able to assess its workability, risks, time of implementation and availability of resources. The library director/manager must consider the various types of strategic planning which ranges from organizational, personnel, growth, financial, opportunities, innovation and retrenchment. Working along-side total quality management, strategic planning can help the library director/manager deliver improved qualitative agricultural information needed for sustainable agricultural transformation in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Strategic Management, Strategic Planning, Information Management, Agricultural Information, Library director, Library Management

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### INTRODUCTION

To plan strategically implies devising a method to carry out something, a process to achieve a particular purpose or set of goals. It is a skillfully planned procedure of putting a plan into operation in order to achieve a goal. Strategic planning means setting out programme of action aimed at achieving something over a given time period.

The various agricultural research institutes in Nigeria

(NRCRI, Umudike inclusive) generate a lot of information that require effective wide spread dissemination. However, the continued dramatic reduction in fiscal support, staff reduction or static in staff real numbers coupled with the library's experience in continued demand for improved and expanding services is a challenging reason for the library director/administrator to seek for better ways to improve on the services delivered

to the users. While productivity is expected to continue to increase, human and material resources have continued to dwindle in real terms

The importance of the various research activities of the institutes over the years cannot be over emphasized. The agricultural system has over the decade's generated data that must be processed into useful information for planning and execution of government agricultural policies and the stakeholders alike. The stakeholder simply require agricultural information to enable him solve a given agricultural problem. Research results, therefore, must of necessity be made available to the stakeholder. This will help in the design of programmes and policies that will help in using agriculture to create jobs, increase food production to feed the teeming population and improve the standard of living of the people.

### **AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION**

Agricultural information are those information that are critical to the development and improvement of the agricultural sector of the economy. These cover a wide range of areas and they include market information on crops for sale, labour requirements, employment potentials, weather information, plant protection and disease control, irrigation, land preparation, planting, harvesting, soil/fertilizer application, crops to cultivate, sources of purchase of pesticides/herbicides, farmers health and education, extension services, processing and an overall economic potential of crops. These are some of the information which an information facility established to serve an agriculture- based institution must endeavour to acquire or generate process, store and disseminate to its users. Nigeria has the potential to produce sufficient food for its citizens for sustainable development and poverty alleviation; however, new strategies must be evolved. To achieve a transformation that will guarantee availability of food to all Nigerians must be supported with published literature for sustainability through scholarship, Odebola (2003).

### **CHALLENGES TO AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria's agricultural information has not been effectively and efficiently managed largely as a result of inadequate human and material resources and an uncoordinated information management system. The various stakeholders in the system must, therefore, brace up to the challenges and work toward designing policies and programmes that will encompass the different segments in the sector toward a common front. This will galvanize the sector and deepen the overall appreciation of the untapped potential which a well co-ordinated strategic

agricultural information management will unleash on Nigeria's agricultural sector (Arokoyo et al., 1994).

### **THE CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Strategic planning is a strong management tool. Strong because it can assist managers including library directors to forge ahead with vigor in the ever-challenging and changing environment within which they operate. Strategic planning gained impetus in commerce and industry in the 1980s and has since been applied in librarianship just as in war too. Ever since it emerged on the management scene, strategic planning has become useful and is today applied in corporate planning.

Strategic planning and total quality management have become planning tools or processes used in driving the attainment of corporate goals. Thus, corporate strategic planning is an important management tool for the information manager and this must be appreciated by the funding agencies. It provides a new direction for libraries as focus of their service. It provides alternative to many decisions that the library director/manager needs to make.

As a result, appropriate courses of action must be taken in order to deliver the required goals or objectives which the overall improvement of agricultural information dissemination entails. It is like the vision which the information manager wants to realize. It is the long term means of achieving the objectives of the information provider, the tactics and operations of the organization. Strategic planning in information service will consider the present position of the library to its anticipated future position bearing in mind the changing environment in which it operates. It is like fitting an idea into a given opportunity and circumstance. Strategic planning is a general plan of action to achieve a set of goals and objectives ( Nickols, 2008).

Strategic planning is the determination of the basic long term goals and objectives of an enterprise and adoption of courses of action and allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals. Strategic planning is the attempt the management makes at securing the future of a business. It is the match an organization seeks to achieve with its environment.

And all embracing definition of strategic planning will simply mean when the decision pattern a company seeks to reveal objectives, purposes, goals, principal policies and plans to achieve them. It defines its range of business to be pursued, kind of economic and human it is or intends to be and the economic and non- economic contributions it wants to make to the shareholders and stakeholders. The above definition fits into the paradigm shift which the library must make to achieve an improved management approach that can enable it to deliver the much needed agricultural information transformation in

this millennium. It will only take the drive and initiative of the library director/manager to internalize and operationalize these ideals. Strategic planning has been described as a disciplined process for making key decisions to shape and guide to realize its set objectives. It is a general plan of action involving a set of activities that are recognizable. These activities cut across enterprise level, business unit level and functional level. However, defining strategic planning can be a complex exercise involving different processes and activities ( Nickols, 2008)

Strategic planning is an important business activity just as it is for the library. Strategy in business is the long term objective and general means by which it is intended to be achieved. It must be an achievable and transferable action plan. Therefore, in strategizing, the library director/manager must bear in mind the possible reactions of interest groups such as trade groups or unions, national, state and local and regulating agencies, religious groups, political units, cultural issues and all that. The success recorded in the past result from experience and intuition and not necessarily from analysis. Success can also result simply from no explicit strategy at all. It is important to point out, though, that success or failure of any strategic plan depend on whether the idea filled a given opportunity or circumstance and not as a result of how the strategy was conceived.

From comprehensive plan, entire aspect of a business (library) to the long term strategy to the present emphasis on an organization's response to the ever- changing environment are all efforts at strategic planning. Strategy is as the basic characteristics of the match an organization achieves with its environment. For the library director/manager, the support of management of the parent organisation, even government support in very important because strategic planning cuts across too many interests that ranges from shareholders, management, employees, customers, bankers, insurance, suppliers, governments, pressure groups, etc

Strategic planning enables the organization (library) to be able to allocate its resources decisively. To be able to strategize, the current position of the organization must first be understood and an avenue to forge ahead identified. It involves the best of what is to be done, for whom and how to excel. It entails vision, mission, values and strategies adopted to achieve them. In some instances, this will cover a period of a year, three – five years or even twenty years depending on what is to be achieved.

Strategic planning sets the agenda for where an organization wants to be. It is a broader road map like a path chosen by an organization towards achieving a goal. It will take the library director/manager/administrator from a vision and mission of what agricultural information transformation is to what it will be seen as and the future

prospect; its like a long term view.

Consequently, agricultural information transformation will define the basic reasons it has come to be and how the library head and his workforce intend to drive the vision. To be able to achieve this, the library director must embrace the common values shared by the stakeholders in the agricultural information transformation chain. For the library, these values are based on the age- long culture of the library as a service institution. Library culture as used here means the assumed corporate culture of librarianship which is service to users: its like an ideology or how library work ought to be seen by the public (Ritson, 2011).

Library culture as we know it is that of provision of quality agricultural information and maintaining the processes that will lead to an enhanced service. To achieve this means an in-depth understanding and managing of all the inter-related processes as a system. It will also entail an appreciation of both the internal and external stakeholders of the organization (library). These are the end-users of agricultural information and they include policy makers, farmers, researchers and students, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses, etc. To drive agricultural information transformation, both the providers and users of agricultural information need to court a mutual relationship. This can only be realized with a blend of planning management and quality control strategies to achieve the desired goal(s).

## TYPES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Certain types of strategy has been identified and adopted by organizations over the years. No doubt, library as an organization in its own right have also adopted some of these strategies in its human and material resources planning and management effort. These strategies are:

- \* Organizational
- \* Personnel
- \* Growth
- \* Financial
- \* Opportunities
- \* Innovation
- \* Retrenchment

These strategies are often adopted using certain criteria as a measure of the successes of the chosen strategies or tactics in achieving the desired goals or to see if they are effective. These criteria are used to measure the success or failure of chosen strategies:

- \* Internal consistency
- \* Consistency with the external environment
- \* Appropriateness in consideration of available

## Resources

- \* Acceptable degree of risk
- \* Appropriate time table
- \* Workability

## AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENT

An effective, efficient and successful agricultural information transformation strategy (AITS) will benefit immensely from strategic operational decisions. The library manager/director must be able to take advantage of this management tool to set out his long and short term goals or visions and objectives especially in the face of competing demands on available meager human and material resources. That library remains an appendage of a parent institution structurally means that the top echelon of the organization must support the library director/manager to achieve the success of any strategic plan. This is because the objectives of the library no doubt will naturally flow or derive from the broad objectives of the parent institution which the library is a part. A case in point is libraries in a university and that in a research institution.

A strategic planning document will seek to describe as it were in the case of agricultural information, what agricultural information services has been and what it intends to be in the future. It will also show the difference between what has been and what will be. The operational environment must be thoroughly analysed by the library manager/director and the capabilities and capacities of the library considered. This will take into consideration the broad objective of the parent institution, the human and material resources, the environment which includes the stakeholders and other competing institutions or in the present library situation, the issue of ICT and its implications on the adopted library strategic plan.

Naturally, results that are mostly surprising are chosen and selected in strategic planning. Current and future prospect of agricultural information service must be considered. Choices are made and reasons for making those choices are enumerated and must be based on competitive advantage over other options. This must be related to the general capabilities of the government at driving its present agricultural transformation. Besides, the overall goals to realize the library intent using measurable parameters should be adopted; it should not be based on financial considerations. Instead, it must meet the government nature and intent, users and stakeholder's needs or interest being the major considerations. This document will progress from objectives to be realized to tactics and actions, programmes and rules. The objectives are the expected end results to be accomplished. It is often a general

broader areas of the enterprise and actions needed to be taken as a team in the working environment (Ritson, 2011).

## STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

It is the competitive and complex environment which an (Library) finds itself that creates opportunity for greater need for strategic planning as a management tool as was illustrated by Martin Gomez, Executive Director, Brooklyn Public Library (Mittenthal, 2002). Strategic agricultural information management must embrace both the principles of strategic management and the concept of total quality management to provide a strong management tool. Old and new ideas must be put together, integrated and attention paid to systematic thinking, statistical process control, and theories on human behaviour and leadership transformation or leadership change management.

For successful strategic agricultural information management, there must be a commitment from the funding agency and the library director / library manager must equally be committed to the plan as this is very important. If top management hierarchy fails to embrace the project, other staff members will also back out. Therefore, the entire system and not necessarily the library director/library manager will be on focus in any strategic plan initiative or process aimed at the improvement of agricultural information management. Therefore, the top – bottom and bottom – top approach must be embraced to enable the Library manager to achieve the desired goals and objectives.

The top to bottom approach to the success of strategic planning is very important because problems associated with quality are often inter-departmental running across various segments of an organisation. Therein lies the concept of quality culture. This entails the involvement of everyone concerned in the provision of agricultural information in actualizing the desired goal. As a result, there is need for conformity to the requirements of management culture.

The success of any organization (Library) is gauged by the satisfaction which its clients /users derive from its products or services. As a service organization, strategic/ total quality management is very imperative to the library since service delivery and user satisfaction remains its watch- word. Librarians as providers of agricultural information must understand and embrace the dynamics of human cognitive learning and the interaction between human and machine. This is a complex endeavour which demands better understanding with the advent of computers in the work place.

Information is meant for the users and not for those who generate them. Libraries are for the information seeker

and not for those who work in them.

Strategic planning is necessary for transformation in agricultural information management because it will provide opportunity for possible future alternative decisions in driving a policy of better service delivery. However, too many alternatives might not provide solutions to identified problems; instead the appropriate alternative courses of action must be taken. Emphasis must be on what alternative action or actions will produce the best results. The reprieve, though, is for the library director /manager to adopt a properly and well articulated vision statement of the funding agency on agricultural information. For the federal government, strategic agricultural information provision is a sine qua non in its agricultural transformation initiative.

Therefore, for a successful agricultural information transformation management, total quality management and strategic planning must consider the demand for resources in its formulation and implementation. The library director/manager must not forget that strategic planning simply entail an analysis of possible means to achieve set goals/objectives. It is this power of strategic management that was explored, exploited and implemented by the Executive Director of Brooklyn Public Library to achieve a practicable doable and innovative idea which lead to the provision of a multilingual catalog system for his library patrons who are not of English speaking origin. (Mittenthal, 2002). This proactive strategic planning must be become every librarian's check list for response to users demand for improved and enriched library service delivery. This is because it helped the library director in case of Brooklyn Public Library to plan to achieve his desired or stated mission/goal (Gates,2010). The library director must be able to analyze and plan for future scenarios to enable him achieve his set goals which is meeting the need of library patrons. Thus, the important ingredient of strategic planning is its ability to allow the leader or the manager to manage change.

#### **POSITIONING STAFF FOR STRATEGIC AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION TRANSFORMATION SERVICES.**

As pointed out earlier on, strategic planning entails having everyone on board the ship as it sails. From the top echelon of the management down to the other stakeholders to be affected by the plan. Information services rendered to the users come from the library work force and so a high premium must be placed on their quality and quantity. Agricultural information providers must be continuously trained and retrained especially in the face of the ever- changing and challenging work environment spurred by the use of ICT. There must be a total commitment to empower the staff to be able to

perform their duties effectively. The staff must understand the essence of the agricultural information transformation agenda and be able to work for its success.

To achieve a real transformation in agricultural information service delivery, repetitive work roles must be eliminated or reduced to the barest minimum and it must be ensured that the right and appropriate service is given at all times. There is need for team spirit to guide a successful strategic planning in the provision of agricultural information. The team will be effective especially in reference service where the staff must position themselves to take on any question for prompt answer. Users will ask questions regarding the types and quality of services they receive. To position the staff to rightly deliver quality service, there will need for the library director/ manager to delegate certain decisions to those at the lower level who are the real people to deal with the needs of the user.

Barriers must not be erected to deter effective and efficient agricultural information service delivery. Again, the work force must be respected because people are generally known to demand and deserve to be respected especially when doing their work. For example, staff at the levels where the process of information delivery take place will be better placed if they are given greater opportunities to right things they consider as being wrongly done. This is so because they are the people who interact more with information users.

For goal attainment, contribution from staff and job satisfaction will help and at the same time improve the quality of service which the user will get. This will enhance the success of strategic planning and total quality management for agricultural information transformation/revolution to take place in Nigeria.

To guard against a situation whereby the user takes the library staff off guard, there is need for a continuous or periodic review or study of the user population. This will enable the library director/manager to overhaul areas that need improvement or changes. With this, he will be better placed to plan and device tactics that will further enhance the quality of service delivery. To achieve this, total quality management becomes imperative to achieve the desired outcome of the library's strategic plan. To achieve the desired goals and objectives of strategic planning, major key issues on internal and external environment of the organization must be taken into consideration. The library director must be able to identify the organization's strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. This must be analyzed in consonance with the desired goals and objectives driven by the library director/manager. However, there is no specific time and indices to show or to determine when an organization should begin its strategic planning. There is also no single model that fits into the planning matrix. The only antidote is to plan ahead so that as the business scenario unfolds, the

business or the organization will not be caught off-guard (McNamara, 2006). Above all, each objective set out to be achieved must endeavour to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound or time related (SMART) as outlined by Mittenthal (2002) in his ten keys to strategic planning.

## CONCLUSION

The success in achieving the benefits derivable from applying the principles and approaches of strategic planning and total quality management can only be realized when the library director/manager understands, appreciates and implements them as an essential management tool in a holistic manner.

Strategic planning and total quality management when appropriately applied can help the library director/manager to achieve the's long term goals. In so doing, the library director/manager must learn to carry his work force along. He must also bear in mind the need to aim at a continuous improvement in the quality of agricultural information available to the users. Above all, the library director/manager must understand the challenges and opportunities which the internal and external environments pose against an effective and efficient agricultural information transformation /revolution especially in Nigeria.

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