

# PLANNING FOR QUALITY IN BALME LIBRARY : THE NEED AND CHALLENGE

**PERPETUA S. DADZIE**

*Librarian, Ashesi University College, Accra, Ghana.*

## **Abstract**

*Although the University of Ghana, Legon has a corporate strategic plan, the Balme Library does not have a formal strategic plan. The main processes which may help the Library to develop such a plan, however, exist. This study identified the need and challenges affecting the development of a strategic plan and also makes recommendations that would assist the Balme Library contribute to the achievement of the mission of the university.*

## **introduction**

Global changes in the economy has been one of the compelling reasons for the University of Ghana, Legon to launch its 10 year Corporate Strategic Plan. Changes in markets, technology, competitive forces and government policies, among others, have necessitated a critical review of the University's core functions to enable it achieve academic excellence. One area which supports the core functions of the University (that is, teaching, research and extension services) is the Balme Library which is the main University Library of the University. As part of its corporate strategy, the University envisages to have "a modern, well-stocked, user friendly library with up-to-date publications, journals and reference materials" in order to fulfill the mission of the institution. The mission, as quoted in the strategic plan is to "develop world-class human resources and capabilities to meet national developmental needs and global challenges through quality teaching, learning, research and knowledge dissemination". This mission, however, requires sufficient funds to be provided for its proper execution. With dwindling budgets, the University and the Balme Library are compelled to "do more with less"

by effectively planning strategies and policies, delivery systems, etc. to accomplish their objectives. The question which is being asked is which plans are in place to enable the Balme Library contribute to the mission of the University of Ghana?

Previous studies by Badu (1997; 2001) have examined the various factors such as cultural, financial, social and technological issues affecting strategic planning in Ghanaian university libraries. This study seeks to explore the extent to which the necessary steps in formulating a strategic plan are available in the Balme Library. It will examine its adequacy, its shortfalls and the requirements needed to help the Balme Library meet the vision of the University of Ghana.

## **Literature Review**

Planning has been defined as "the process of identifying organizational goals and objectives, developing programmes or services to accomplish those objectives and evaluating success of those programs vis-a vis the stated objectives"(McClure 1978). Oakland (1993) also mentions that planning begins with developing and publishing clear, documented corporate beliefs and objectives usually known as the mission statement, developing clear and effective

strategies and supporting plans for achieving the mission and objectives, identifying the critical success factors and critical processes, reviewing the management structure and having an organizational assessment of the cultural environment to determine whether it is compatible with quality management. This view is shared by W. Edwards Deming (1986) in his 14 points to management whereby he urges the creation of "constancy of purpose" for the improvement of product and service. For the library as with other organizations, "constancy of purpose" is embodied in its mission statement. The mission statement should be understood, shared and accepted by all those associated with the organization and all employees should work towards its achievement.

Similar views were expressed by Thiagarajan (1997) who indicated that for any organization to succeed with its planning and organizational strategy, it needed to ensure that it was a corporate-wide process; focused on the vital few; built contributions from all levels into the planning; approached deployment through consensus; was accessible to everyone and open to challenge; ensured everyone understood and was committed to it; kept it a live document by regular review and adjustment.

Once an organization's mission, vision and values have been articulated, strategic planning then becomes a natural and necessary activity for an organization to pursue.

According to Riggs (1984), one purpose of strategic planning is to determine future areas of activity and decide future courses of action that will result in a high degree of achievement of the library's goals and objectives. Viljoen (1991) expresses similar views when he indicated that strategic

planning enables libraries to be proactive rather than reactive with respect to environmental change. Another benefit of strategic planning is that it involves a people dimension. This people dimension involves complexities, risk and is concerned with power and politics (Riggs, 1984). Viljoen (1991) confirms this people dimension and states that strategic planning provides all staff in the organization with a strong concept of exactly what the library is trying to achieve. Smith (1992) mentions that strategic planning gives the library staff a sense of direction and a feeling of momentum, while helping to communicate with clients and management.

Strategic planning is essential to guarantee a future library service for its clients. When it is carried out correctly, it provides a set of realistic measurable objectives and motivate staff into helping the service to achieve these objectives. Good planning should result in a satisfactory library service for those who use it and for those who provide it (Johnson, 1994).

### **Methodology**

Twelve (12) out of the fourteen (14) professional librarians in the Balme Library were interviewed in 2002. These librarians are part of the Library's top management team. The interview questions sought to find out the views of librarians in relation to the knowledge level and acceptance of the mission statement by staff, strategies/policies in place to support the mission statement, the management style, the organizational culture of the Library to ascertain its readiness to achieve the vision of the University's corporate strategic plan. Interview findings were content analyzed and separated into various response categories. Their corresponding percentages and frequency distributions were then given.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Mission Statement***

This part of the interview sought to find out related issues on the mission statement including its availability, its knowledge and acceptance by all and its publicity.

All twelve interviewees mentioned that they knew about the existence of the mission statement of the Library. The mission statement as quoted from the "Balme Library Staff Manual" (1999) states that the library "is to play its full part in support of the academic functions of the University, namely, teaching, learning and research." It was therefore not surprising for the librarians to know about the mission statement since they are part of management. However, a greater number of interviewees, 9 out of 12 were not sure if all staff knew about the mission statement, especially the junior staff. On the other hand, 3 (25%) of the interviewees felt that everyone intuitively knew about the mission statement. All interviewees conceded that staff members should be reminded from time to time about the mission statement as this would help them to remain focused as to the direction in which the Library was proceeding.

The librarians went ahead to make a number of suggestions in which the mission statement could be publicized to all. Four (33.3%) out of twelve of the interviewees mentioned that new members of staff should be told about it when they were employed. Three interviewees (25%) also indicated that the mission statement should be boldly displayed in the library, on notice boards, walkways, and every conceivable open space. Three (25%) also suggested that staff should be reminded about the mission statement at durbars and big fora, and Heads of Department should remind their subordinates every now and then. Three (25%) also mentioned that copies of the mission statement should be given to each staff member.

Responses from the librarians showed a lack of knowledge of the mission statement by most staff. This meant that some employees would not be focused since they were not aware of what the library sought to achieve. It is important for the mission statement to be publicized and the number of ways suggested by the librarians should be adopted.

### ***Strategies/policies to support the mission statement***

All the 12 librarians interviewed mentioned that there were strategies outlined to enable the Library achieve its mission statement. The "Balme Library Staff Manual, 1999" enumerated the six strategies as follows:

- i. Acquiring, organizing and disseminating information in the form of books, journals, CDs, films, etc needed for academic work;
- ii. Instructing readers (especially students) in the effective and efficient use of the library and its resources;
- iii. Providing the physical facilities and equipment needed for the purposeful use of the resources;
- iv. Assisting and cooperating with faculty members in their academic programmes;
- v. Cooperating with other libraries in building total library resources, through inter-library cooperation; and
- vi. Making materials available to government agencies on request and the wider Ghanaian public selectively.

This part of the interview sought to find out if all the strategies listed were being fulfilled or not.

All twelve librarians mentioned that the first four strategies were being actively pursued.

Eight (66.7%) interviewees mentioned the provision of IT services and its publicity. Five (41.7%) out of twelve (12) also mentioned

the acquisition of books and journals though they added that this service was seriously hampered due to inadequate funds. Training of students was another strategy being effectively used especially with the new ICT technology to achieve the mission statement and this was mentioned by four (33.3%) of the interviewees. The provision of physical facilities and equipment was also mentioned by two (16.7%) of the interviewees. The last two strategies were not mentioned by any of the interviewees.

Some strategies and policies were not being implemented owing to the lack of financial and human resources. This is not surprising in view of the dwindling funds coming from the central government. Badu (1997) confirms this when he mentioned that the delay in releasing government subvention to the universities makes long term planning difficult. The researcher contends that since students are now paying academic facility user fees (AFUF), it would help if the University released the 10% of the AFUF to the Library as planned to enable the latter execute most of its strategies and policies. In addition, there is the need for the library to initiate a vigorous donor drive to help support some of its projects.

The last two strategies were not being carried out due to insufficient staffing levels. The current staff members are simply overwhelmed with the growing number of students they have to serve that they are unable to take on the added responsibility of catering for the needs of other libraries. Moreover, the materials available are insufficient for the current students use and thus cannot be stretched so far to cover the needs of other libraries or agencies.

For strategic planning to be effective, there is the need for strategies to be defined in terms of a particular result that will be accomplished by a specified date (Riggs, 1984). This is clearly absent in the library's staff manual and this could probably be

attributed to the erratic and unpredictable manner in which funds are provided for the running of the Library.

### **Management style**

This section sought to question the style of management in the Library. Seven (58.3%) out of the twelve (12) respondents mentioned that it was participative whilst three (25%) mentioned that it was directive. Two (16.7%) out of twelve (12) stated that it was a blend of the two. Those who thought it was participative supported their arguments with the accepted practices of monthly senior member meetings, departmental meetings with heads of department and their subordinates where the latter made valuable contributions for the running of the Library. Those who thought it was directive saw it only as reading memos, circulars and instructions about what staff were expected to do. Those who considered it to be a blend of the two mentioned the contribution of senior members when it came to goal setting in the Library. However, they mentioned that they had no say in financial matters as this was the prerogative of the university administration. Hence, from their perspective this phase of management was directive.

It was encouraging to note that majority of the interviewees viewed the management style in the library as being participative. This was a good sign as planning should involve all stakeholders. Beer et al. (1990); Lewis, (1991); Ulrich and Lake, (1991) have recommended the participative style of management in any organization. This is because it forms one of the key strategies for overcoming resistance to change, building ownership and commitment and motivating people to make the change work.

### **Organizational culture**

The study also sought to find out whether the Library was willing to change its culture to embrace any new changes that would

enhance the fulfillment of the mission statement. Half (50%) of the interviewees mentioned that it was possible for the Library to embrace any new change, though implementation would be difficult.

Three interviewees (25%) mentioned that the culture in the Library was very conducive to change and that there would not be any problem trying to implement new plans. They mentioned the free flow of communication in both ways (top-down, bottom-up) and the spirit of cooperation and teamwork in the Library.

On the other hand, three (25%) of the interviewees mentioned that it was not possible to effect any changes in the library because of the bad organizational practices. Some of the bad practices mentioned were indiscipline on the part of some junior staff, inability of management to instill discipline, poor supervision on the part of management, lackadaisical attitude to work due to poor remuneration and minimal reward system and tardiness.

Linkow (1989) defined culture as "the values and beliefs that most members of the organization share; beliefs are assumptions about what is true while values are assumptions about what is worthwhile or desirable". Certain aspects of the organizational culture and behaviour of the staff in the Library were very likely to endanger the success of the University's corporate strategic plan. Badu (1997; 2001) corroborates these findings of indiscipline, tardiness and lax supervision and also mentions that these were likely to impinge on the success of the corporate strategic plan. It is important for a change agent to assist in addressing the high level of indiscipline in the Library.

### ***Future of the library***

The librarians were also questioned on their aspirations with regard to the future of the Library. Eight (66.7%) interviewees wished

that the Library would be fully automated within the next five years. Three (25%) wished the Library would be financially autonomous; two (16.7%) wished all staff would be properly trained; two (16.7%) wished to have a cleaner environment in the Library and one interviewee (8.3%) wished the Balme Library would become the top Library in the country meeting all the information needs of its customers.

3Expectation for the future by most interviewees was for the completion of the automation process in the Library. This would enhance the search for information in the Library and make it a "modern" library as envisaged by the University's corporate plan.

### **Discussion**

Though there is no formal strategic plan for the Library, the "Balme Library Staff Manual 1999", states that the Library "is to play its full part in support of the academic functions of the University, namely, teaching, learning and research." The mission supports and complements that which is stated in the University's corporate plan.

Responses from the librarians showed that not all the staff were aware of the mission statement of the Library. This meant that some employees would not be focused since they were not aware of what the Library sought to achieve. It is important for the mission statement to be publicized and the number of ways suggested for the successful realisation of the mission by the librarians should be adopted.

Certain aspects of the organizational culture and behaviour of the staff in the Library were likely to endanger the success of the University's corporate strategic plan. Badu (1997; 2001) corroborates these findings of indiscipline, tardiness and lax supervision and also mentions that these were likely to impinge on the success of the corporate strategic plan. It is important for a change

agent to assist in addressing the indiscipline in the Library.

A positive development was the view on management style. It was encouraging to note that majority of the interviewees viewed the management style in the Library as being participative. This was a good sign as planning should involve all stakeholders. A participative style has always been recommended in the literature (Beer et al., 1990; Lewis, 1991; Ulrich and Lake, 1991). This is because it forms one of the key strategies for dealing with resistance to change, building ownership and commitment and motivating people to make the change work.

Expectation for the future by most interviewees was for the completion of the automation process in the Library. This would enhance the search for information in the Library and make it a "modern" library as envisaged by the University's corporate plan. Automation would also free up a lot of space, which has been occupied by the huge catalogue cabinets.

### Conclusion

Though there is no formal strategic plan for the Balme Library, the main steps in the process of creating one exist. The mission statement of the Library is in conformity with that of the University's corporate strategic plan. Strategies to achieve the goals have been outlined. What is lacking, however, is the absence of a specific time within which strategies could be achieved.

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