



Evidence Summary

Information Literacy Strategy Development: Study Prescribes Strategic Management Framework for Academic Institutions

A Review of:

Corrall, Sheila. "Information Literacy Strategy Development in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study." International Journal of Information Management 28 (2008): 26-37.

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Abstract

Objective – To examine the development of information literacy (IL) strategies in higher education by assessing content and presentation of IL strategy documentation, and to explore the application of corporate strategy concepts and techniques to IL strategy.

Design – Comparative, multi-case study. Qualitative analysis.

Setting – U.K. universities.

Subjects – Twelve information literacy strategy documents from ten institutions.

Methods – Google was searched for IL strategy documents (restricted to the ac.uk domain), the LISINFOLITERACY discussion list was queried, and the Web sites of all U.K. universities were searched for a total sample of 12 documents at 10 institutions. Results of the data capture were discussed in the context of the literature on strategic management.

Main Results – Corporate strategy tools and techniques are extensive in the literature, trending toward an emphasis on holistic thinking and marketing concepts. Many themes identified in the documents were consistent with the literature. While the format and style varied, all documents emphasized the integration of IL into subject

curricula. All stressed the need to build collaborative partnerships between library/information staff and academic staff. Significantly, many strategies aimed to reach the broader institution, although poor articulation undermined this ambitious goal. In three, IL intervention was intended for the whole university community. However, the target audience often was not well defined. Seven of the IL strategies identified additional partnerships to effect change at the policy level. Another key theme was the adoption of recognized IL standards; seven proposed the SCONUL (1999) model. All strategies recognized the importance of learning outcomes; six stated them explicitly. Prominent was the integration of e-learning resources, namely online tutorials. Many strategies recognized the need for marketing and advocacy activities. Half considered professional or staff development issues, as supported in the literature. All strategies explained in detail the context of their IL proposals, citing external challenges (growth of digital information, employer demand), external evidence (official reports, benchmarking statements, studies), and internal evidence (stakeholder concerns, institutional strategies) to support the need for IL. The documents specified a range of teaching modes from informal reference desk encounters to strategic positioning in relation to the broader community. Half defined or described IL. Seven documents were labelled strategies, but many did not comply with content elements defined in the literature. Other features of the literature poorly represented in the documents included: the need for well articulated objectives, mission and vision statements, attendance to broader strategic issues, stakeholder analysis, and the prioritizing of IL activities with portfolio development. Only two had action plans. Seven documents were in the public domain.

Conclusion – Information literacy is recognized as an essential competence for participation in higher education, the workplace and society, and information professionals have long promoted IL. In response to the changing information environment they have sought to formalize policies and strategies to embed IL institutionally, working collaboratively with key stakeholders in the process. In this study of strategic documentation from 10 U.K. universities, IL objectives were consistent although the format and style of documentation varied. The author concludes that one or more strategic management models or tools available could improve IL strategy development, consistency, and coherency. Most importantly, an overarching strategic management framework should be used to resolve ambiguity and inconsistency, improve articulation, and maximize the effectiveness of strategy documents, thus avoiding weaknesses identified in the study. As noted by the author, the library literature has progressed to include strategic management concepts evidenced, in part, by the number of libraries using Kaplan and Norton's scorecard system. But improvements can be made: conforming to strategic planning norms could strengthen IL strategy. Elements of models from the public or private sectors might be tailored to meet the specific needs of IL strategies. Further research could identify suitable strategy models for IL development. The process of implementing IL strategy should also be considered in future research. The author notes it would be interesting to explore the relationship between IL strategies and other organizational strategies and to compare IL strategies in other sectors.

Commentary

The aims of the study were clear: Advance an understanding of IL strategy development by exploring the characteristics of information literacy strategies in U.K. universities from a strategic management perspective, and discuss possible contributions of corporate strategy concepts to IL practice. Without knowing how many universities there are in the U.K. it is unclear whether or not the sample size was large enough to be sufficiently representative. It is also not obvious how the themes were derived from the literature. The method of data collection was clearly described and the results conveyed succinctly with the use of tables. The study is reliable in that it could be reproduced. However, it was confusing that 12 documents were examined while the results were enumerated as 10 institutions. Moreover it seems prudent to consider the question of bias when the reader takes into account the author's leadership roles in academic institutions. What, if any, was the relationship between the researcher and the participants? Did the author influence IL documentation included in the study? Potential conflict of interest is not addressed.

The importance of IL to the individual and to society cannot be overstated. The author rightly points out that, "[f]urther research is needed to review existing strategy models, tools and techniques and assess their suitability for IL strategy development" (Corrall 35). A discussion as to why a strategic management perspective is an appropriate and useful model from which IL practitioners could work would have strengthened the suggestions proposed in the study. As the author suggests, it would be valuable to look at the relationships between IL strategy and other organizational strategies. The results and the author's suggestions will be of interest to

those formulating and implementing IL strategies. The study provides insight into current practice and highlights key themes in the literature that are either covered or absent in the sample of IL strategy documents. It serves to highlight a need for either better strategic management models or greater awareness and adoption of existing tools and techniques. IL practitioners would do well to use this study as a starting point for discussion.

Works Cited

- Corrall, Sheila. "Information literacy strategy development in higher education: An exploratory study." International Journal of Information Management 28 (2008): 26-37.
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