



Strategic facility planning for museums

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Abstract

Organizations must think and act strategically if they are going to survive and thrive within uncertain and changing political, economic and technological contexts. The strategic level of planning is a tool to help clarify what is really important and to help individuals within organizations to identify reasonable goals rather than those that may be vague, unrealistic or impossible. The strategic plan and its subset, long-range facilities plan, should summarize a pattern of possibilities across programs, projects, policies and resource allocations.

This paper describes modern management philosophies, barriers to change, then presents strategic directions and an analysis with recommendations specific to museum facility management. Future directions for museums are also presented to enable a long-term view and support to strategic plans for museums.

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1. Introduction

A strategic plan for an organization is similar to designing a bridge that will take an organization from where it is now to where it aspires to be. Most strategic plans have 3–5 year time horizons that incorporate a vision for the organization, an analysis of the current environment, an analysis of the organization, strategic objectives and an action plan (although detailed implementation plans are usually separate documents that are developed after the strategic plan has been adopted).

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Organizations must think and act strategically if they are going to survive and thrive within uncertain and changing political, economic and technological contexts. This level of planning is a tool to help clarify what is really important and to help individuals within organizations to identify reasonable goals rather than those that may be vague, unrealistic or impossible. The strategic plan and its subset, long-range facilities plan, should summarize a pattern of possibilities across programs, projects, policies and resource allocations (Wallace, 1998).

2. Organizational formats and management philosophies are changing: modern economies and organizational transformation

Expanding technological capabilities and the drive for economic efficiency within capitalistic societies are two engines of change impacting organizations globally. The forces for change are strong and complicated. Change is required, in part, due to informed customers who can find what they want on the Internet. Customers are no longer simply relying on local services and goods providers within the range of the municipal or county telephone book. Competition is no longer the person who opens a store across the street; now competition is someone who establishes himself or herself in cyberspace before you do (Teicholz, 2001a). A few of the methods for handling this transformation by private business, government agencies and non-profits include adjusting to upsizing and downsizing staff, outsourcing to contractors, focusing on broader customer needs and making internal changes to find competitive advantages.

Museum organizations are being buffeted by these winds of change, and their prognosis is in many ways more acute than governmental and private entities, because their revenue streams are not usually regularized and predictable (except in cases where large endowments have been built in previous years). Managing organizational changes within the museum world requires that the ‘dusty attics’ be visited, the skeletons be brought to light and the closely held assumptions be confronted and denounced, if necessary, to create a new direction (Phillips, 1998).

3. Barriers to change

Organizations that recognize the necessity for long-range and strategic planning have the imagination to create a different future for their employees and the customers. These initiatives have to overcome hurdles found in all operations, including lack of time and cultural barriers. People are too busy to think about the future when day-to-day work pressures keep them focused on specific tasks or providing services. Embedded cultures restrict individuals from acting in the best interest of the overall organization and its future (Teicholz, 2001b).

Non-profit museum organizations have a unique set of issues to confront when thinking about their future operations. These public-oriented institutions have been confronted with two related phenomena during the past decade: a relatively low engagement of visitors with objects within the museum setting, and a falling number of repeat visitors.

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