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# Science Reference Strategic Planning Process (University Libraries)

Edward J. Eckel, Engineering and Applied Sciences Librarian

In collaboration with Linda Rolls (Head) and Carrie Leatherman (Natural Science Librarian)

GRAB THE REINS.

## Problem Statement

### Science Reference serves:

College of Engineering and Applied Sciences  
College of Health and Human Services  
College of Arts and Sciences

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Environmental Studies
- Geosciences
- Mathematics
- Physics
- Statistics

We are a small department - three full-time librarians and one full-time evening coordinator.

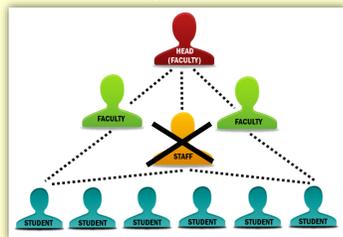


Figure 1: Science Reference Organizational Chart. (Haq 2013).

### Changing information world and student/faculty body

- More reference questions via email and chat
- Fewer in-person reference questions
- More librarian time spent on rich activities:
  - Information Literacy instruction
  - Committee and taskforce work
  - Consultations/collaborations with faculty, staff, administrators
- Difficult to maintain librarian staffing on Science Reference desk due to other responsibilities

We began to ask ourselves: Is our current service model effectively meeting the needs of our students and faculty?

We needed a methodology to guide our exploration.



## Strategic Action Planning – Peter Dams

### The Total Performance System – Peter Dams

- Review what an organization does and why (Figure 2)
- Ask questions:
  - Why does the organization exist in the first place?
  - Who does it serve?
  - What are the main products or services?

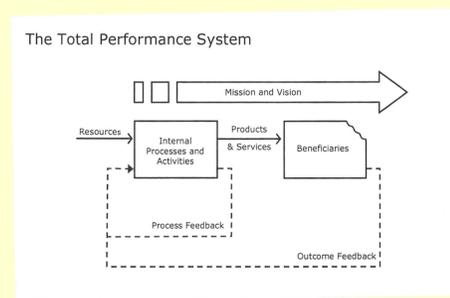


Figure 2: Dams Total Performance System (Dams & Associates 2013)

### Next Steps

- Develop mission and vision statement
  - Mission – What you are and do NOW
  - Vision – What do you want to be and do
- Find gaps between what organization is and what it wants to be
- Develop goals
- Develop action plan for achieving the vision (Figure 3)



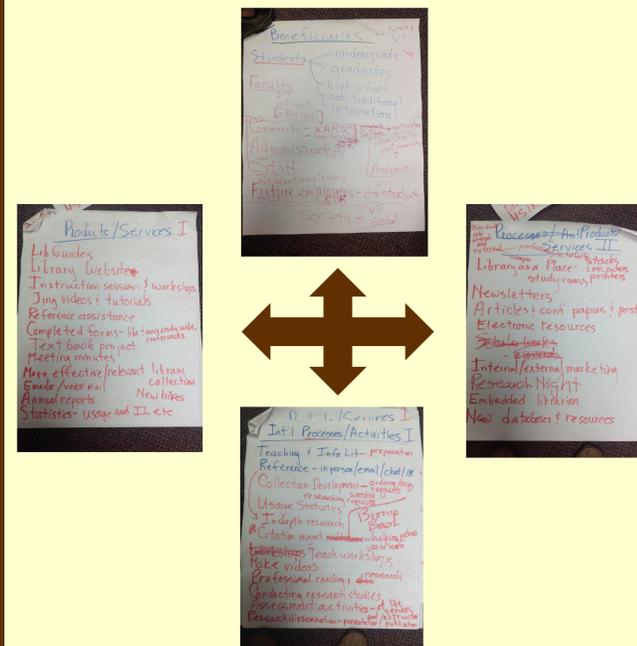
Figure 3: Dams Strategic Action Planning (Dams & Associates 2013)

## Step One: Reviewing What We Do and Why

### Brainstorming sessions revolved around our

- **Resources** (information, technology, material for internal processes)
- **Internal Processes** – To generate valued outputs
- **Products and Services**
- **Beneficiaries of our services** (customers, stakeholders)
- **Feedback (outcome and process)**

## Brainstorming Sessions - A Messy Process



## Unexpected Complication

During the second month of our strategic planning process, our long-time Science Reference coordinator Faizan Haq left his position. There has been lingering uncertainty about whether the position would be filled, or revised in some fashion. This has led to some delays in the process of working on our plan. However, we decided to keep going, regardless of the uncertainties we faced. Indeed, **continuing our planning process seemed to be the best way to handle the sudden panic we felt.**

## Step Two: Drafting a Mission Statement

In June, we drafted the following mission statement, based on our discussions and brainstorming sessions.

**The Science Reference department serves the applied, health and natural sciences at Western Michigan University. We provide reference and instruction services for students, staff and faculty in those areas. In addition, we maintain and develop print and electronic resources in our areas. We continuously assess the effectiveness of our services.**

## Step Three: Drafting a Vision Statement

### Currently drafting a vision, which will answer:

- What would we (ideally) like to be and do?
- What added value can we provide to natural, health and applied sciences on campus?
- **Will dovetail with University Vision:**
  - Learner centered
  - Discovery driven
  - Globally engaged

## The Bigger Picture at Library and WMU

### The bigger picture:

- Other Library units undergoing strategic review.
  - Research and instruction services (2013-2014)
  - Mission and vision of Library due for review (2015)
- Coming changes:
  - Changing staffing
  - Changing user needs – more online, asynchronous learning
  - Budget constraints
- Support Programs Review (Imminent)
- General education review

## Conclusion

This was a frustrating process for a number of reasons. Losing our coordinator meant that my colleagues and I had additional job responsibilities to handle, which contributed to a lack of time to work on our vision statement. However, it also became clear that the big picture issues mentioned above were important to consider. Despite our desire to create a strategic plan for our small department, we came to realize that the **Science Reference department does not work in isolation.** We will need to be mindful of the role of the University Libraries as its own mission and vision evolves. Furthermore, we will need to keep in mind the changing University environment.

**We are in a position of having to accept uncertainty while exploring what we in the Libraries do and why. This is a work-in-progress. Stay tuned!**

## References

Dams & Associates, Inc. (2013). *Systems Thinking Starter Kit*. WMU Academic Leadership Academy. Office of Faculty Development.

Haq, Faizan (2013). *Science Reference Annual Report 2012/13*. University Libraries.

## Acknowledgements

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