

Macroenvironmental Analysis for Strategic Management: Stakeholders' View of Ghana's University Libraries

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This article assesses some political, cultural, technological and international issues believed to affect strategic management in Ghanaian university libraries. The external environment of Ghana is perceived by some major stakeholders of

the libraries to be highly uncertain. The macroenvironmental analysis of the strategic positions of the libraries is developed through the identification of opportunities and threats in the political and economic environments.

Introduction

Pearce and Robinson (1991) have defined strategic management as “the set of decisions and actions that result in the formulation and implementation of plans designed to achieve a company's objectives”. It comprises nine critical tasks:

- Formulate the company's mission, including broad statements about its purpose;
- Develop a company profile that reflects its internal conditions and capabilities;
- Assess the company's retrieval environment including the competitive and general contextual factors;
- Analyse the company's options by matching the resources with the external environment;
- Identify the most desirable options, by evaluating each option in light of the company's mission;
- Select a set of long-term objectives and grand strategies that will achieve the most desirable options;
- Develop annual objectives and short-term strategies that are compatible with the selected set of long-term objectives and grand strategies;
- Implement strategic links by means of budgeted resource allocations in which the matching of tasks, peo-

ple, structures, technologies and reward systems is emphasised;

- Evaluate the success of the strategic process as an impact of future decision-making.

As the nine tasks indicate, strategic management involves the planning, directing, organising and controlling of a company's strategic-related decisions and actions. An important aspect of the controlling function of a company's strategy is the fourth task, analysing the company's options by matching its resources with the external environment. Macroenvironmental analysis is therefore an integral part of systematic strategic management.

For many of today's organisations, success or failure, profit or loss, growth or decline, depends on how well they respond to macro social economic, technological or political/regulatory changes – the external macroenvironment.

This study assesses the key issues in Ghana's macroenvironment that affect strategic management in university libraries from the point of view of stakeholders and decision makers of the university libraries.

Methodology

A total of five university libraries belonging to the five main well-established universities in Ghana participated in the study. The libraries are represented by UnivA, UnivB, UnivC, UnivD and UnivE. Data concerning the external (macro) environment of Ghana in relation to the strategic planning process were collected from key decision-makers (stakeholders) of the university libraries in 1996. Selection of subjects for the interviews was made by preparing a list of potential interviewees that cut across every discipline and administrative position in the universities as part of the case study protocol. The list also provided an appropriate representation of decision-makers with range of views relevant to achieving the objectives of the study. Two representatives each were therefore selected from deans of faculties, heads of departments, lecturers, planning officers, librarians, registrars finance officers, university strategic planning committee members, and civil servants for Ministries of Education and Finance. A total sample of 85 major stakeholders was selected. The selection was in strict conformity to Cresswell's (1994) suggestion that in qualitative research selection of subjects should be purposeful and informants should be subjects who will best answer the research questions but no attempt should be made to randomly select informants. Sixty-three of them were interviewed. The 22 who were not interviewed were not available at the time of interviewing.

Results

Political issues

Some of the most significant aspects of the external library environments identified were central government policies, university policies/faculty relations, pressure/interest groups and competitors.

Government regulation and intervention in the Ghanaian higher education system is not new. However, the scale of these interventions, the unpredictability of government policies and the degree of uncertainty were cited by the majority of the respondents across all the libraries as having dominated the political scene, for example, one stakeholder from UnivC made the following remark:

All universities in Ghana are state owned and so the government dictates to us what we should do. In fact these days government tells us who we can employ and what projects we can carry out. These situations have increased over the years and we do not know what is going to happen next. Most of these rampant interventions are unnecessary and are forced on us unexpectedly.

The impact of recent government educational policies on strategy was assessed by the interviewees as having been very negative. Most of them commented on the government's lack of consultation with senior university staff on matters that directly affected the universities and the lack of participation of university staff in government decision-making on higher education. In UnivB and UnivD and UnivE a highly significant number perceived that government disregarded university education because its educational development policies were directly in favour of non-university education. The following statement made by a stakeholder at UnivD illustrates this point:

Government has no goodwill for university education. All its policies are towards (Junior and senior secondary schools) JSS and SSS. If it really cared about us it would have seen to our demands for better university development. So this political aspect does not promote university growth.

Several respondents particularly, those from UnivA, UnivC and UnivE, commented that government policies usually did not balance the national interest with university interest and described policies as more security-centred and bad for universities. They expressed the view that recent funding policies for universities often threw their plans in disarray. Universities' autonomy in strategic decision making has been eroded over the recent years as central government has assumed full control over the operations and management of the universities and other tertiary institutions. The universities are now under the general supervision, co-ordination and direction of the Ministry of Education. Central government now expects to play a leading role in policy formulation for what were once regarded as university led operations. Tensions often occur between university political culture and government policies. There is therefore the need for university librarians to constantly monitor and manage their relationships with government officials as was argued by one University Librarian:

You have to know what government expects. You have to consult the Ministry on decisions you intend to take even library acquisitions. The universities have a co-ordinator at the Ministry acting between the two institutions and you always need a nod from him to carry out any project.

The lack of effective opposition to the government's policies was expressed by several interview respondents as a setback in turning the strategy process to suit the external environment.

Further central government decisions have made a direct impact on library development; throughout the universities, the effect of the Educational Reform of 1990 has been felt through the implementation of increased enrolment without a corresponding increase in university funding nor the expansion of library facilities on the requisite scale. One effect of this has been the mistrust that university management has for government policy makers and vice versa as was expressed by one government official:

... there is an uneasy relationship between government and the universities. There is a lot of mistrust and not until the right political atmosphere is created can government work hand in hand with the universities.

Certainly, the evidence from the present study suggests that the Education Reform Act is likely to further alter the already the dwindling financial positions of the libraries and also alter the tenuous relationship between universities' management and the Ministry of Education authorities. Library services are now, more than ever, subject to the vagaries of central government direction. The form that strategic planning for university libraries take will depend on how effectively the librarians interpret the implications of these policies when they are fully implemented.

Corporate politicisation

Whatever the structural affiliation of the university services, it was felt by almost all the interviewees across all case study institutions that librarians had to be able to 'fight their own battles' in the corporate political environment. The general perception of the interviewees was that faculties' attitudes towards libraries were those of contempt, disinterestedness and apathy. The following remark made by a stakeholder at UnivA explains this issue:

You see some faculty members have funny ideas about libraries and this clouds their attitudes towards the library. They think they are better off. They do not show any interest in library activities. They believe libraries are not worth considering in anything and they stay away from the library.

Corporate funding of university libraries has been one activity that has always come under attack by central universities' administration and by their Finance Officers. Whilst central government recommends that quite a substantial proportion of the universities' budgets should be allocated to library service developments the local corporate view is that the funding of faculty operations must take precedence over library funding. One University Librarian argued the need for university libraries to manipulate their relationships with corporate power brokers constantly:

When the subvention is received I have to move immediately to strike the necessary connections to see if we can get something a bit more than the previous month's. This I do regularly.

Competitors

It is unusual to think in terms of competition for libraries but in the content of strategic planning two primary competitors were identified by most of the respondents across all the five Ghanaian case studies. The libraries of peer institutions, department libraries and some special libraries were cited as competing for clientele, products and services. The respondents however believed that interactions and alliance selection of some of these competitors could play a more central role in strategic decision-making, for example, the following statement was made by one librarian at UnivA.

We do compete with all departmental libraries on campus. We compete with libraries of Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the other research libraries and Atomic Energy libraries. Our students go there. We compare with the Agric. stations too resources they all go there. We believe that these are healthy rivalries and we hope to reach agreement with a selected number of them to strengthen our collections. If you read the proposal I gave you it is all there.

Other competitors were identified as faculties of the universities, central administration and

computer centres. The interviewed respondents from the libraries stated that they competed for finance and technical equipment. The system of allocation of university funds by competition was considered as a threat because the respondents felt that other competitors from the central administration were also key players in allocation university funds. Many from UnivA, UnivD and UnivE commented that it was very difficult and to some extent impossible to influence the decision processes of these competitors which eventually affects the libraries' financial plans. The following statement that was made by a stakeholder illustrates this:

I think the registry poses our biggest threat. They take every equipment that is meant for us. For instance take our e-mail. It is in the central administration building not in the library though it was originally meant to be placed here. When it comes to distribution of subvention, those who have the final say are all in management positions at the central administration who are also fighting to get a big share. We try to lobby to overcome some of these things but like the e-mail and funds we have been unsuccessful and this equally affects our plans, I mean financial planning.

A considerable number of interviewees working in libraries described their libraries as having very weak power bases (a power base consists of the resources, manager's reputation and relationship with other managers, that gives them the ability to convince others to go along with their ideas) and they believed this inability of their leaders to influence university power brokers and to compete effectively for resources had affected most strategic decisions on library development. One respondent described library leadership as bad and commented that:

If you look at the library at ... it has a strong leader so that library gets what it wants. I think that a university librarian's position and the way he is respected in the entire university has a lot to do with his ability to demand from the authorities what due to the library and this has affected most decisions taken about this library. In fact I will say there is bad leadership.

Economic issues

Ghana's university education and university library services have in the past regarded as models for other African countries. The resource base and governments' support were remarkable. However, times have changed. Following a string

of political upheavals. Ghana has joined the chain of other African countries noted for political instability with their revolutionary changes of government.

Such political activities have had a devastating effect on the economic environment, which the present civilian government is grappling with by adopting a number of economic measures such as a Recovery Programme.

Underdeveloped economy

Though there has been some important in some of Ghana's economic indicators such as an increase in GDP, the economy still bears the hall mark of an underdeveloped nation, with a rise in population, low standard of education, general shortage of transportation and the lack of commercial base and little or no change in the standard of living.

The majority of the major stakeholders remarked that the government's economic measures have not had any significant impact on the way of life of many Ghanaians and that the economic environment continued to be unfavourable to the development of universities and their libraries. The following statement made by a stakeholder explains this issue:

Well, the economy according to the statistician is improving. Rise in GDP and so on but as for the living standards. I don't see any change and as far as the university and the libraries are concerned the impact is still not felt. I think the economy is still not favouring us.

Depreciation of the national currency

A crucial factor in the economic performance of the country and one which was assessed by a considerable number of the interviewees particularly those at UnivA, UnivB, UnivC and UnivE, as making organisation-level strategic decisions subject to great uncertainty is the volatility of foreign exchange rates. The value of the Ghanaian currency relative to other major world currencies was seen as affecting decisions on many business transactions. The daily deterioration of the value of the local currency, the cedi, was remarked on by the respondents as providing less financial incentives for acquisition librarians to purchase from foreign sources and to pay for interlibrary charges, for example, one respondent remarked as follows:

The cedi is depreciating on a daily basis. When our librarians have to order from overseas the exchange rate changes by the time they put their orders through. It is discouraging for orders outside this country. It really [impacts] our orders and the payment of our British library interlibrary loans. Many of our plans have been badly affected because of this.

Low salaries and wages

All the interviewees described salaries and wages as very low. The reasons for this however were mixed. Some interviewees felt the weak base of the country, particularly random inflation, affected their purchasing power considerably. Others considered it more of a social problem whilst several also cited the usual political line attributing poor salaries and wages to the poor government-university relations. Whatever the reason of the stakeholders for poor remuneration in the universities, the effect on work was seen as demoralising and an impediment to effective strategic planning.

The interview respondents who were mainly administrators reiterated further that morale was very low which they attributed to the lack of motivation. They commented that workers put in less effort in their work now than before because the rewards of work no longer satisfied the workers' need for security, social esteem and self-actualisation. The lack of motivation according to all the respondents who were administrators has resulted in undesirable worker behaviour, particularly among the junior staff which they felt had made most of the university staff non-achievers. The following statement made by one of them illustrates this issue:

... in spite of the poor salaries we try to do our best. The salaries are too low and this is not helping workers' morale. So how do you fault someone if he is not giving of his best?... I don't see it as social problem, it is economic and it is no wonder the junior staff in particular and even lecturers cannot afford the basic necessities of life in order to make their families survive and live as respectable human beings ... They have resorted to all kinds of ways to satisfy this psychological need...

The issues discussed so far show that the economic context of the external environment is important. Many of the factors were found to impede organisational performance and hence the strategy process. Library services are vulnerable to economic opportunism and the fluctuations of the

Ghanaian economy have had devastating consequences for university library services and developments.

Socio-cultural issues

According to the major stakeholders, the citizens of the country hold universities in Ghana in high esteem and the populace had always been sympathetic to the causes of universities when they had to resort to confrontation with the government to redress grievances. The recognition of the importance of universities by Ghanaians and the support universities usually get in time of government-university conflicts were remarked on by several of the respondents.

If ... you look at our strike action despite government propaganda against universities the population was behind us. They believe universities are important and we present the hope of this country so they were in agreement with our demands for more money.

University education according to many of the respondents in UnivB, UnivC and UnivD were viewed by many Ghanaians as a social need and the demand for university education had always been on the increase. In the opinion of the respondents, universities in Ghana are considered as elite and reputable institutions with the full goodwill of the civilian population. The librarians amongst the interviewees particularly remarked that this was significant for future income-generating activities, as they would have the public's support.

Several social forces were discussed by the interviewees as a reflection of the growing impact of social pressures on corporate performance. The low status of the library profession in university environments was viewed by most of the respondents who were library workers as having deeper roots in the Ghanaian socio-cultural environment where there is no clearly enunciated definition of the basic purpose of libraries. Public libraries exist because they were established by the former colonial power and continue to exist as symbols of modern society. However the respondents remarked that no attempt had been made to redefine the role of libraries and their functions within the context of an independent Ghana seeking to achieve socio-economic growth. The following remark illustrates this point:

When I use to work in the public library in the old days we had defined roles and things went very well. After independence our public libraries deteriorated and nothing new has been done. Libraries have not been properly defined to reflect the country's attempts at solving socio-economic problems. Most public libraries are empty, no books.

Several of the respondents continued that the infrastructure for library and information work was poorly developed as a result of the poor appreciation of the value of information as a resource by the Ghanaian authorities.

Generally libraries and other information centres are not regarded as important by the powers that be and this has affected the development of library facilities in general. If you go to Britain even tiny villages have libraries. They still have mobile libraries for places where there are not libraries.

A remarkable number of the interviewees also felt that the basic need for housing, good water, roads and educational facilities always took precedence over libraries on the part of government and policy makers, as well as the general Ghanaian public.

Government and all those in positions of authority especially Ministry of Finance and so forth believe providing the basic necessities such as electricity, water, roads and schools are more important than libraries so the libraries remain underdeveloped.

The Ghanaian educational system was also discussed as a social factor by the major stakeholders who were also librarians. They commented that even though the country had university and special libraries, the historical weakness of public and school libraries had meant that the majority of its citizens had not included library use in their educational process. The educational system according to the interviewees affects this reality, making it difficult to distinguish cause from effect; the educational system focuses on instructions rather than formation, a situation that generates students who are more receptive than creative. One university librarian commented that this situation was worsened by the poor reading habits of young people and that the newly admitted undergraduates considered university libraries as corner groceries where they bought what was needed for immediate consumption. She reiterated that the library as an organisation that contributes to re-

flection and self-education must yet be discovered in the country.

... our educational system hasn't helped either, the youth today do not like to read but listen to pop music. They consider libraries as a place just like a corner shop where you go to buy what you need, use it and that is that ... what is lacking in the country is that people do not see the library as a place where one seeks to develop himself. They only see it as a place to pass exams after that no more libraries...

Almost all the respondents who were library staff commented on the impact of the weaknesses of school and college libraries on university library development. The immense impact in their view is in the training of users, which takes up a considerable part of the university libraries' human resources, and in personnel recruitment. Much staff time is spent on user instruction at the expense of more important professional library work.

Our school and college libraries are not strong enough. When the first year students enrol they do not know how to use the facilities here so we have to spend loss of staff time repeatedly to explain our operations and how to use catalogue whilst other more important jobs suffer.

The absence of a national library was also perceived by many of the library staff as a social setback which affects university library development. This, they remarked, affects the strategic alliance of university libraries and other types of libraries as the function of a national library as the coordinator of library co-operative activities is lacking:

We don't have a national library so that motherly functions of co-ordinating all activities of the various libraries is lacking and this affects networking.

Aspects of organisational behaviour of university staff were linked to the external socio-cultural context, especially the beliefs, values and norms, which workers bring with them to the work place. The lack of commitment to work by Ghanaian workers was commented upon particularly by respondents at UnivA, UnivB, UnivC and UnivD. They were of the opinion that most workers in public organisations did not regard work as a central life interest and that their behaviour was in conflict with role expectations. This behaviour, according to some of the interviewees, had be-

come an accepted norm in many organisations whilst a second group linked it with the current economic difficulties in the country:

Workers' attitudes to work in public services is not encouraging but then in Ghana, most public servants believe their work does not pay enough. So many people do not give of their best and it is somewhat accepted and most people are carrying on with it.

Attitude to work, the government sector. In private sector it is quite different. That is the number one factor. We have to change our attitude to work... we seem to believe that government work should be done anyhow. People are not dedicated to what they do. They do not take good care of working materials, they do not do what they are expected to do. Of course it goes back to the economic problems. If people are well paid and their efforts are valued then they will put in a lot. If salaries are not good, they get frustrated and get other incomes at the expense of what they do at their main jobs.

Technology issues

The respondents across all the case study institutions in Ghana recognised the significance of national technology infrastructure to library service development. They expressed various views on the technological changes going on globally and the significant implications for library expansion and growth and the improvement they can make to services. For example, they cited the use of high technology for publishing, Internet, diversity in computer use, the departure from mainframe computers and electronic libraries.

The challenge though, according to the majority of the respondents, lies not only in the pace, diversity and rate of change but also in the scale of corporate and national response needed to keep abreast of these changes:

I believe our institutions have not responded well to these advances in modern technology. Nationally we have not done enough though one may argue that we are better off than some other developing countries. That is not the issue here. We need to develop our technology in order to catch up as these changes are going on fast in the developed countries.

Several interviewees particularly those working in Ghanaian university libraries further remarked that the success of modern libraries lies very much in the networks and the mechanisms to which they have access. In this regard, respondents commented that libraries depend on

the technological infrastructure of their countries but found that of Ghana very poor.

Our technological base is poor. Libraries need to link up with other libraries but this is not a reality here because the national technology infrastructure is weak we don't have enough telephones.

A number of reasons were given as to why there is a low level of technology application in the country. The most frequently cited was ignorance of the suitable technology on the part of the authorities who are responsible for providing it. Also near the top of the list is the traditional under-investment in technology in favour of investment in other sectors of the economy.

From time immemorial, this country has not invested in technology sufficiently. We do not value technology as we do the other sectors such as agriculture and education but if we developed this well, education can be improved.

Several of the respondents also reported on the national electricity supply, which is solely dependent on hydroelectricity. In the dry seasons, the lake dries to low levels and cannot produce the country's supply. This situation has often resulted in the rationing of electricity in the country, which usually results in most organisations not having power for a considerable number of days. One university librarian remarked on its effect on the use of electrical equipment such as computers:

The electricity supply in the country has always been a problem. In the Harmattan season when the Volta Lake dries up, electricity is rationed and this affects the use of our computers and many electrical appliances.

The introduction of Internet was hailed by all the respondents as a national strength because many organisations, particularly private businesses, have joined the information superhighway but its use in universities is hampered by insufficient PCs, as one interviewee commented:

Joining the Internet is remarkable indeed and ideal for work. Its use in business in particular is very good but I'm afraid because we do not have many PCs to go round its use in the university. I must say is very minimal.

On the corporate level, many of the respondents at UnivA, UnivB and UnivE cited institutional

resistance to change in anticipation of any large-scale automation of services. One major stakeholder warned that those employees who were used to performing traditional tasks might feel threatened by the introduction of computers and that any technology strategy must take this into account.

People are used to the way things are done here. They may feel their positions are threatened so if we are planning large-scale automation we have to take all this into account.

It must be mentioned here that it was observed that across all the case study institutions the majority of respondents in Ghana especially the non-library workers, had very few views on the impact of technology on the environment especially in the context of university libraries. Their responses, which are not presented here, did not indicate any depth of understanding of the subject. Undoubtedly though, if university librarians are to plan effectively for the survival of their library services as well as for service development, then monitoring the technology environment, even globally, and adopting an external focus to information gathering to aid strategic management decision-making will become increasingly relevant.

International issues

The activities of international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, embassies, European Union and many other donor agencies were seen by most of the respondents as presenting opportunities and threats to strategic planning in university libraries in Ghana.

The concept of strategic formulation in public organisations was viewed by almost all the interviewees as the brainchild of international organisations. They commented that planning had enabled many organisations, especially universities, for the first time in their histories, to make plans that detailed their medium or long-term objectives; and they were able to assess the impact of achieving those objectives within the context of the development process of the country.

The whole idea of strategic planning in the universities and other institutions was modelled by the donor agencies. This I must say has helped many institutions to set medium and long-term goals and within the national development culture have tried to achieve them.

In UnivA, UnivB and UnivC many of the respondents commended on the activities of foreign consultants for assisting with the country's economic recovery programmes. They remarked that the slight improvement in GDP and other indicators are consequences of international involvement in the country's financial strategies.

The little improvement you see in the economy lately has been a result of the activities of the World Bank consultants. Take GDP and others which is now in positive figures. It is because of the financial activities of these consultants.

In UnivA, UnivC, UnivD and UnivE all the respondents who were library staff reported their reliance on donations of bibliographic materials from international bodies. They found their relationships with these bodies as vital to collection management.

Our association with bodies like British Council, Ranfurly, AAA have helped us to maintain some levels of acquisitions. Just last year when we could only afford to buy a few books we had to rely on British Council donations to keep up.

Despite the contribution to the development of library services, several of the respondents however reported having received materials as donations from some of these international bodies, particularly from the Eastern bloc countries:

The problem with some of these donations is that sometimes they are not relevant to academic work especially books we received in multiple copies on Chairman Mao and others.

Some economic uncertainties were also believed to have been caused by some international bodies as was remarked by many of the respondents. They remarked that some of the changes in economic circumstances of the country, a result of pressure by some international organisation have sometimes created unpredictable situations which affect carefully worked out plans of many organisations in the country. They remarked further that the country is sometimes put under pressure by donor countries to pursue harsh economic measures, which the Ghanaian government is compelled to comply without objection so as to attract more support for development. They cited some of these measures as devaluation of the na-

tional currency and cuts in the budgets of many public organisations such that of universities.

IMF policies such as devaluation and budget cuts for public services such as universities have been forced down the throats of our government which relies on their continuous support to survive. It does whatever IMF says without putting up a fight. Some of these measures bring untold hardships to the people of this country.

Environmental scanning

The issues discussed on the various segments of the external environment reveal a number of warning signals of changes taking place or yet to come in the Ghanaian macro-environment. A careful monitoring of these issues may lead to significant organisational opportunities or the identification of potential threats in time to take action to mitigate the effects on strategic planning in the university libraries. By so doing the libraries can make strategic decisions that keep them in equilibrium with the Ghanaian environment.

A key tool that can help an organisation survive rapid change in the macroenvironment is environmental scanning (also called issues scanning or issues management). Unfortunately, the strategic plans of the university libraries in Ghana are based on the predictive and mathematical models characteristics of the earlier view on long range planning (e.g. Porter 1985). Despite the awareness of the tumultuous uncertainty of social, economic, political, technological and international forces that have changed the game for most organisations in Ghana, the planning efforts of the libraries studied in Ghana have not adapted to deal with these changes. Collectively the impact of these forces do not dominate corporate thinking as the evidence shows that a high percentage of the respondents believe strongly that economic and political issues need to be dealt with mostly in the environment as shown in Table 1. This shows the result when the major stakeholders were asked to indicate how many factors the libraries would need to deal with in the external environment.

The qualitative study indicated the need to explore further the constraints that have prevented the libraries from scanning the environment.

The interviewees were therefore asked why their libraries did not scan the environment. Across the five case study libraries in Ghana,

Table 1. Environmental Factors that should be dealt with.

	Very Few	Between Very Few and About Middle	About Middle	Between About Middle and Very Many	Very Many	Total N=63
Factor	%	%	%	%	%	%
Economic	0.0	0.0	9.8	32.8	57.4	100.0
Political	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	66.7	100.0
Socio-cultural	0.0	13.3	20.0	26.7	40.0	100.0
International	13.3	0.0	46.7	20.0	20.0	100.0
Technological	6.7	20.0	20.0	26.7	26.7	100.0

there were few differences in the responses. However, differences in opinions amongst major stakeholders roles emerged. Those who took part in producing their organisation’s strategic plans presented mixed reasons why environmental scanning was not part of their strategy process. A section of them reported that university libraries in Ghana were relatively small entities within the external environment and therefore felt that forecasting future trends in the environment was appropriate or even feasible. They believed that environmental issues were relatively remote from library development.

Another group of strategists also commented that their libraries lacked the necessary resources to carry out a thorough analysis of the wider environment:

We didn’t scan the environment because it is too broad and we didn’t have e means to do so.

Others who took part in drawing the plans also remarked that their libraries’ strategic plans were based on guidelines, which were handed over to them by the central university administration. They believed that the final document bore the value and perceptions of senior university managers without any assessment of the environment.

Another group of major stakeholders who were not members of the strategic planning committees did not see the usefulness of assessing a wider environment, which they believed they knew little about and also found to be notoriously difficult to try to forecast the future:

The issue we are talking about here is not easy to search. They are very difficult or even notoriously difficult to forecast. These are events that change per minute. It is not easy.

The various views expressed by the different major stakeholders indicate the lack of environmental assessment culture in the university libraries in Ghana. Though it is very difficult to make a comprehensive assessment of the wider environment, the responses suggest that the crux of the problem is the fact that assessment of the external environment has not been considered an essential component of the strategy process. The individual issues in the wider environment are well known to a considerable number of respondents but the methods of understanding the nature of these issues and using them as inputs into management thinking about future strategic decision making is completely non-existent.

Summary

The data on the external context of the Ghanaian environment revealed a tumultuous uncertainty of political, economic, social, technological and international issues. A range of specifics was found to affect the development of strategic planning. Perhaps the only somewhat surprising finding was the relatively low emphasis given technological issues and the relationship between national and university library development by the major stakeholders who were not librarians – surprising, that is, when one considers the now global mantra of ‘technology as the key to development’. Possibly, however this is a change in national emphasis that has yet to be played out.

Some of the findings about the relationship between a university library and its remote environment as revealed in this study support quite a number of past studies, particularly, university libraries in developing countries and also, to a fair extent, corroborate evidence from literature on the Ghanaian macro-environment. For example, Franco (1995) in a study of human resources in the library system of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (SUBC) made several observations that confirm some of the findings in this study. On the socio-cultural dimension she also found out that there was a negative impact of historical weaknesses of public libraries and school libraries on university library development in Chile, exacerbated by poor reading habits of the young. Like this study Franco (1995) also found the positive or negative effects of monetary exchange policies and the markets on the biblio-

graphic materials acquisition budget of her university library. She highlights stringent customs laws and regulations and their negative impact on collection development of SIBUC.

This study has also supported results in research on planning in developing countries, for example as regards several factors that differentiate the planning environment in developing countries from that of developed countries as identified by Flores (1972), Adegbite (1986), Fubara (1986) and Mrema (1987). Such factors include the absence of technology required to systematically monitor the external environment and collect needed data, a highly unstable economic and political environment, the absence of technological infrastructure and the lack of political will for information-related development.

The findings of the present study also support the findings of management research in the transferability of management theory and practices developed in western economies to other countries. The findings of Kiggundu, Jorgensen and Hafsi (1983) that managerial activities concerning how the organisation relates to its environment were difficult to transfer from western economics to developing countries are corroborated by this study. The findings of the survey on the external environment from the major stakeholder perspective developed further the character of strategic decision-making in Ghana and university libraries in particular. It is evident that the economic and political factors were the most dynamic and most hostile of all the five environmental segments of political, economic, socio-cultural, technological and international.

The perceived high level of environmental uncertainty in the political environment in this study is centred primarily on government regulations and interventions. This however has been the norm in the history of the universities in Ghana but the present university workers have always opposed every new policy of the present government. What is new here is the degree of uncertainty that the libraries are encountering in other areas – uncertainty as to closures of libraries because of a striking pressure group, uncertainty as to the future balance between national and university interests as government attempts to revamp the economy, uncertainty as to continuous competition between libraries and other departments of the universities for limited resources and

the gradual erosion of the powerbase of the libraries that prevents them from competing effectively for these resources. Indeed, it is these factors in the political scene that make the environment unstable and unpredictable. The 'power shift' in the relationship between universities and government has been probably the most profound unsettling to universities since it entails simultaneously, the funding regulations, increased interventions and heightened government expectations of corporate performance.

The economic environment was characterised as discouraging any future-oriented and risk-related decisions (Boist and Child 1988). In addition to traditional concerns about the underdeveloped economy of Ghana, the rampant inflation in the last two decades affects the purchase of books and periodicals. Wright, Kroll and Pernell (1996) have highlighted the main constraining effect of high inflation rates on business and the strategy process.

The volatility of foreign exchange rates was also found to affect strategic decisions of the libraries. In a similar study Wilson (1994) also found the negative effect that the volatility of foreign exchange rate has on industry restructuring that requires a shift in strategic management's focus, emphasis and methodologies to speed the process of corporate adaptation to these changes. Ferguson (1992) writes that the daily deterioration of the value of the local currencies of most developing countries against other international currencies makes the future far less predictable and difficult to implement rationale strategic planning. In this study it was revealed that the effect of the depreciation of the local currency has affected university libraries' international orders.

As the political and economic environments have proved in this study to be major sources of uncertainty for the university libraries in Ghana and planners in Ghana at large, future planners must be responsible for identifying external opportunities and threats, implementing strategic changes and achieving the organisation/environment alignment. Miles, Snow and Pfeffer (1974) also theorise that managers respond primarily to what they perceived. Strategic action is dependent upon perceptions and interpretations of the environment (Schneider and DeMeyer 1991).

The perceptions and interpretations are, subject to influences at multiple levels of analysis, e.g. individual

characteristics, group process an environmental context (Hambrick and Mason 1984; Miller 1993). It was found in this study that despite the awareness of the uncertainty that has characterised the strategic decisions of the major stakeholders, a result of environmental turbulence particularly in the economic and political spheres, they have not responded or interpreted these changes in their environment.

The study further revealed that environmental issues are not considered important to organisational performance and university and library management have not shown any interest in them, a situation which itself creates a high perceived environmental uncertainty. Miliken (1987) states that, in practice, perceived environmental uncertainty exists when decision-makers do not feel confident that they care or understand what the major events or trends in an environment are, or when they feel unable to accurately assign probabilities to the likelihood that particular events and/or changes will occur.

Information from important sectors of the environment may become a source of competitive advantage (Dutton and Freedman 1984). In a sector of high performance, external events are also perceived to be directly linked to operational performance. According to Daft, Sormunen and Parks (1988), perceived sector performance translates into strategic uncertainty. In essence, strategic uncertainty reflects the strategic value of environmental information for organisational performance. The combination of perceived environmental uncertainty and sector importance is expected to generate a need for the librarians and to a greater extent the university administrators to scan events in selected environmental sectors – the political and economic. Environmental scanning is the means through which managers perceived external events and trends (Hambrick 1982; Culnan 1983). Following Daft, Sormunen and Parks (1988), top executive scanning frequency is believed to have a positive relationship with perceived strategic uncertainty across environmental sector.

One constraining aspect of environmental scanning as found in this study is that the major stakeholders perceived environmental scanning as a difficult organisational process because the environment is complex and they experience bounded rationality-that is, they cannot comprehensively understand the environment (Cyert and March

1992). Others also claimed that the libraries on their part lacked the capacities to analyse the environment. That is why the findings of this study – the political and economic sector importance in the Ghanaian external environment must be taken seriously as posing the most threat to university library development, so they ought to choose these sectors among scanning alternatives. The selection of a given scanning mode by sector executives however is conceptualised as being critically influenced by perceived strategic uncertainty across sectors (Daft, Sormunen and Parks 1988).

The librarians will have to avoid temporary approaches that postpone the inevitable adjustment needed to gain and keep strategic fit. Hunger and Wheelan (1995) advise against three basic orientations – avoidance (ignore or hide), react (react, reorganise or follow the leader) and influence (advertise, lobby, co-opting). Instead libraries will have to anticipate future developments by planning strategically. This involves the macro-environmental analysis of the strategic position of the libraries through the identification of opportunities and threats in the political and economic environments, particularly government educational reforms, legislation and employment, strength of the Ghanaian currency, import duties etc. The data gained may be considered in conjunction with the internal strategic capabilities of the libraries as a useful input into management thinking about future strategic decision-making.

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