

Chapter XLVII

The Strategic Plan of Digital Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This abstract describes the networked cooperation of the academic libraries and the consortium of the digital libraries of the Finnish universities of applied sciences and their strategic plan for the Web service. It argues that it is reasonable to plan the strategies for the network, because no single library has complete control over all the aspects that are necessary to develop the cooperation between the libraries. The strategy is the basis for a cooperation enabling electronic services for the libraries. The findings of this study are useful to the administrators of educational institutions aiming to plan a networked strategy and improve the cost-efficient cooperation of otherwise independent organisations.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic management builds bridges between the perceived present situation and the desired future position described by the vision (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Fidler, 2002; Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Higher education institutions adapt their strategies to the education policy and changing environment. Strategic planning has an important role in academic libraries (Adeyoyin, 2005; Huotari & Iivonen, 2005; Decker & Höppner, 2006).

The networked cooperation of the academic libraries has been playing an increasingly im-

portant role in the universities. The planning of a networked strategy is different from the planning of a single library strategy, because there is no single organisational unit who owns the strategy or is responsible for its implementation. The network strategy aims to gain commitment to a systematic cooperation and achieve strategic objectives that cannot be achieved by any single library alone.

The purpose of this article is to describe the consortium of the digital libraries of 29 Finnish universities of applied sciences and their strategic plan for the Web service. The strategic plan was made in 2006 jointly for the network of libraries

to promote their electronic services. The strategy is the basis for a cost-efficient cooperation enabling electronic services for the libraries. The strategy of digital libraries is also an example of the fruitful cooperation of the Finnish universities of applied sciences.

This article is organised as follows: The background section introduces first the main characteristics of the consortium of the libraries of the Finnish universities of applied sciences and their shared strategic outlines. The main attention of the article is focused on the strategy for the Web service of digital libraries. Thereafter some future trends are presented. Finally, the results of the article are summarized in the concluding section.

BACKGROUND

The Consortium of Libraries

The consortium of the libraries of the Finnish universities of applied sciences (Amkit Consortium) was founded in 2001. The purpose of the consortium is to coordinate cooperation between the respective libraries of the institutions. In Finland there are 29 universities of applied sciences, which are professionally-oriented higher education institutions. The libraries cooperate actively with the libraries of the 20 traditional universities, the libraries of vocational institutions and other libraries. The result of the Google search engine indicates that there are many other consortia of digital libraries, but they take different forms.

The number of personnel is nearly 500 in the libraries of the universities of applied sciences. They are located in 80 towns and at 200 locations. This reflects the remotely located branches of the institutions. The development of the libraries was rapid during the 1990s when the Finnish Polytechnics were established in higher education. At the beginning of 2006 the polytechnics adopted the new English translation “university of applied

sciences,” which reflects the English names of the professionally-oriented higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area. The European area has defined in the Bologna Process by the European Ministers responsible for higher education (Berlin Communiqué, 2003; Kettunen & Kantola, 2006b, 2007).

The consortium of libraries is a typical network to exchange information and cooperate. It is also a network to gain commitment to a joint strategy of the libraries. The presence of network suggests that much of the success of libraries lies outside a given library residing in the cooperative network.

The networks, work groups and informal communities of practice have an essential role in the exchange of information and knowledge (Kettunen, 2004a; Kettunen & Kantola, 2006a).

Academic libraries seek efficient ways to produce high quality output given the limited financial resources (Brooks, Revill, & Shelton, 1997). Cost-efficiency is a natural choice for strategy in the public sector, where primary management emphasise desired outputs and cost reduction. Typically, taxpayers provide the financial resources for libraries, which have limited annual budgets for activities and investments. Cost-efficiency can be achieved by increasing cooperation between the libraries and taking advantage of the economy of scale across the physical and intellectual assets of the libraries.

Strategic Plan of the Consortium

The network strategy of libraries defines the outlines for the activities required by the network. The network strategy provides the insight and direction to guide the libraries and their cooperation. Each library is then able to define its own strategic themes and implement them. Each library has a responsibility to develop its own action plan describing how development work and processes will deliver the output to implement the network strategy. The additional funding provided by the

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