

Environmental Scanning

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental Scanning began with social sciences and emerged as a method for qualitative research. Environmental scanning helps libraries to understand external threats and opportunities leading to change. When the library has undergone significant changes the knowledge discovered by an environment scan is intrinsic. User's needs and the impact on library services must be newly assessed on an ongoing basis.

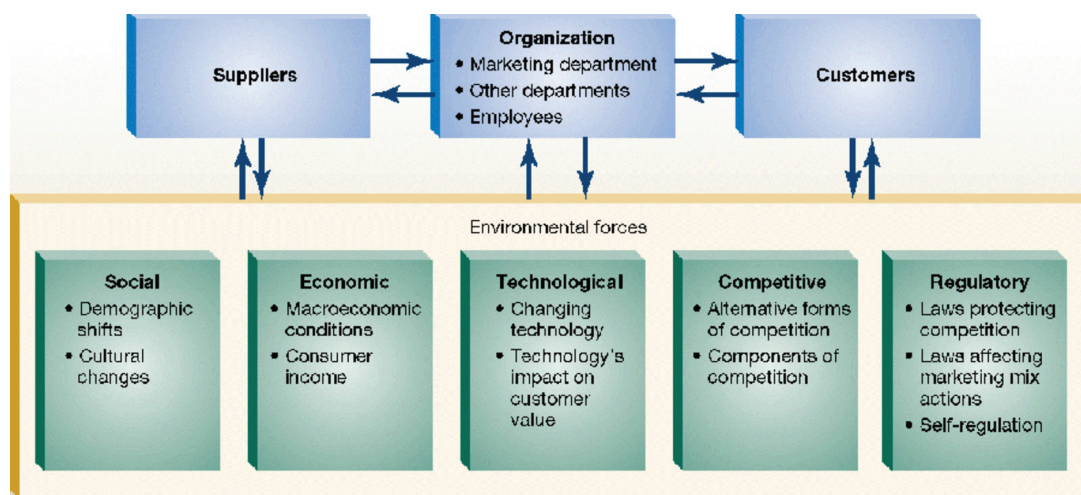
Brown and Weiner (1985) define environmental scanning as “a kind of radar to scan the world systematically and signal the new, the unexpected, the major and the minor” Aguilar (1967), in his study of the information gathering practices of managers, defined scanning as the systematic collection of external information in order to (1) lessen the randomness of information flowing into the organization and (2) provide early warnings for managers of changing external conditions. Organizations scan the environment in order to perceive the external forces of change so

that they can develop effective responses which secure or improve their position in the future. Scannings are conducted in order to avoid surprises, identify threats and opportunities, gain competitive advantage, and improve long-term and short-term planning.

The ability to predict future developments in the last four decades have decreased tremendously. Globalization has increased and abundance of unknown competitors, the emergence of the Internet has created global markets and now serves as a fast and inexpensive marketing and distribution channel, risk capital allows small firms and new ventures to become global players in months, and social networks have the power to turn niche trends into huge markets within weeks. Resulting in firms finding it increasingly difficult to retain their competitive advantage and survive in these dynamic environmental situations.

A full environmental scan can facilitate understanding of the library's relationship of the external environment. The findings when used properly can help

Figure 1. Scanning diagram



Managers improve the library's dependent relationship with the external environment.

A well conducted scan results in a new management and marketing style that is more forward thinking. This article examines environmental scanning and the various types of scanning that can be used as tool for strategic planning, emerging trends beneficial to libraries and organizations.

BACKGROUND

An Environment is the surroundings, conditions, circumstances and influences affecting the development of a library community, group, organization, etc.

Environmental scanning, is the detailed monitoring of an organization's internal and external environments for detecting early signs of opportunities and threats that may influence its current and future plans. In similitude, surveillance is confined to a specific objective or a narrow sector. Furthermore, it is the practice of screening external

Demographic, social, cultural, political, technological, and legal trends in order to anticipate and meet the user's needs in the future. Used heavily in the corporate world, helps organizations, "assess and respond to external environmental change that may have a decisive impact on strategic business decisions, performance and viability"(Castiglione, 2008). Environmental scanning is a strategic planning technique for monitoring trends in the external environment. Changes in the social, technological, economic, environmental, and political (STEEP) sectors affect organizations directly and indirectly. For example, a national or global recession increases the probability of budget cuts in state government and, publicly supported colleges and universities. A well conducted scan on an ongoing basis helps the organization to "maintain a preparative stance" as the environmental circumstances change (Albright, 2004). Fahey and Narayanan (1986) identified three levels of environment for scanning: The task, industry, and macro environments. Aguilar (1967) identified four types of scanning. Undirected viewing consists of reading a variety of publications just to be informed. Conditioned viewing consists of responding to this information in terms of evaluating its relevance to the organization.

Informal searching consists of actively seeking specific information but doing it in a relatively unstruc-

tured way. These activities are in contrast to formal searching, a proactive mode of scanning entailing formal methodologies for obtaining information for specific purposes.

Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher (1984) simplified Aguilar's four scanning types as either passive or active scanning.

Passive scanning is what most of us do when we read journals and newspapers. We tend to read the same kinds of materials--our local newspaper, perhaps a national newspaper like *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*, or an industry newspaper like *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Active scanning focuses attention on information resources that span the task and industry environments as well as the macro environment. In active scanning, it is important to include information resources that represent different views of each STEEP sector.

Managers who detect the environment to be more uncertain will tend to scan more. Detecting environmental uncertainty is indicated by the complexity, pace of change, and importance of the sectors comprising the external environment.

An organization's general strategy is related to the sophistication and scope of its scanning activities. Scanning must be able to provide the information and information processing needed to formulate and pursue the elected strategy. Furthermore, if the perceived importance of the environment is included in a measure of perceived strategic uncertainty, the association between environmental uncertainty and scanning is even stronger (Daft et al., 1988; Boyd, 1989; Auster & Choo, 1993; Elenkov, 1997).

Early work was primarily using the term environmental scanning emphasizing the need for active search and the environment as the search target. Under the term futures research scholars build primarily on the logic that the future is and will remain uncertain, thus future oriented planning should aim to explore possible futures rather than trying to predict the one future. Hambrick proposes that environmental scanning activities should be employed to focus more attention on trends and changes in the firms environment in order to learn from these events. In the 2000s there was also some research under the term peripheral vision, emphasizing similarly to environmental scanning, that signals on discontinuous change need to be spotted outside the current business and that firms need to build specific sensors to detect it (Day & Schoemaker, 2004). In

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