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Extending McKinsey's 7S model to understand strategic alignment in academic libraries

Abstract

Purpose (mandatory)

To conceptualise issues of alignment for changing academic libraries by using and extending McKinsey's 7S model.

Design/methodology/approach (mandatory)

Theoretical work was conducted to consider and extend the 7S model for the situation of academic libraries. Empirical data was then used to confirm the value of these extensions and suggest further changes. The data to support the analysis was drawn from 33 interviews with librarians, library and non-library academics and experts, and a survey of UK library staff.

Findings (mandatory)

In the academic library context, the 7S model can be usefully extended to include three library functions (stuff, space and services) and users. It can also include institutional influences and stakeholders, and aspects of the external environment or situation, including suppliers and allies. The revised model then provides a useful framework within which data about library change can be analysed. Perceived barriers to successful performance fit the model and enable the identification of seven challenges of alignment.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable)

The resulting model has potential applications such as in structuring analysis of academic library performance, mapping future directions of development, and for exploring variations across the sector and internationally.

Practical implications (if applicable)

The revised model can be used by practitioners to think through their own strategic position and to act to shape their future, in the light of seven major areas of alignment.

Originality/value (mandatory)

The paper extends a well-known model used in strategy, to produce a more comprehensive, sector-specific analytic tool.

Introduction

Strategy development and implementation is a key area of leadership, including that of libraries (Bryson, 2011; Corrall, 2000). Developing a direction for the library is a key task of library directors and other senior managers (Matthews, 2005). Indeed, as McNicol (2005) points out, because the role of the library is changing in fundamental ways, so there is a need for a much more strategic approach to considering the role of the library. While strategy is extensively discussed in the library literature, there remains a need for models to help analyse the situation of academic libraries and help develop effective strategies to deal with a seemingly increasingly complex, uncertain future (Bryson, 2016; O'Connor, 2014). Research on management of libraries also has a need for better, sector-specific models that can be used to structure the analysis of change (Pinfield, Cox and Rutter, 2017).

Since it was proposed in the 1980s, McKinsey's 7S model of strategy and change has become an influential approach to analysing strategic change in any type of organisation (Hayes, 2018; Waterman, Peters and Phillips, 1980). It offers a seemingly comprehensive model of the key strategic resources of the organisation that need to be aligned, being notable for its early acknowledgement of 'soft' elements, influenced by organisational culture. There has been some use in library world, notably Corrall's (2000) adaptation of it.

The purpose of this paper is to understand issues of alignment by further developing the 7S model for the academic library context. This is achieved by considering the relevance of the 7S model in the context of academic libraries, including consideration of potential extensions to the model, and then using the revised model as a framework for discussing data from a study of the future of academic libraries (Pinfield, Cox and Rutter, 2017). Inferences drawn from the data then suggest further extensions. The extended model provides a framework to consider strategic shifts that libraries are undertaking and the barriers to performance in this context. The paper begins by reviewing the 7S model, going on to consider how it has been used in the library context, and then proposing some ways it could be potentially extended.

The 7S model

The 7S model offers a resource based view of the strategic assets available to an organisation, specifically identifying seven elements (Waterman, Peters and Phillips, 1980; Peters and Waterman, 1982):

1. Strategy
2. Structure
3. Systems
4. Style (management style)
5. Staff
6. Skills
7. Shared values (culture)

The model was designed to summarise the main factors within an organisation which contribute to it achieving its strategic objectives particularly in relation to change. The first three elements are often regarded as "hard", more concrete and measurable and easier for management to control. The others elements are seen as "soft" because they are more intangible and harder to manage directly. Leadership rather than management is needed to shape them (Watson, 1982). As originally visualised (figure 1) the model gives emphasis to the interconnection of the seven elements to show how changing one requires changes in the others, and resists placing emphasis on one as more important, though Shared values are usually presented at the centre of the diagram. The strength of the model is the weight it gives to alignment of a number of factors underlying corporate performance: "fundamentally, the framework makes the point that effective strategy is more than individual subjects such as strategy development or organisational change – it is the relationship between strategy, structure and systems, coupled with skills, style, staff and superordinate goals." (Lynch, 2006: 792).

Practitioners continue to find the 7S a useful way to analyse an organisation's position and to change it (e.g. UCC, 2013). By examining the seven elements and searching for misalignments they are enabled to determine optimal organisational design, and manage a process organisational change in that direction. It can also be used as a framework for appraising an organisation (Corrall, 2000; 2008).

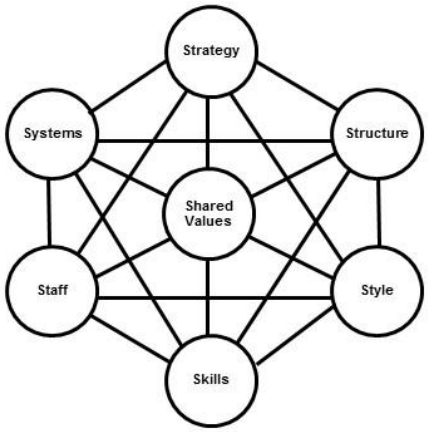

Figure 1 the 7S model

Since it was first proposed the 7S model has also been widely used in a number of research contexts, including Information Systems alignment, for example (Ward, 2012). It has been combined with other models, e.g. Kaplan (2005) integrates it with the Balanced Scorecard. Inevitably also, there have been numerous adaptions of the model, for example, Higgins (2005) proposes that Skills be replaced by the broader category of reSources, which includes staff skills, but also technology and money. Actually, we might consider that Staff already encompasses skills, and the category of reSources overlaps with this too, however it does draw attention to an important apparently missing element of resources within the organisation. Higgins (2005) also proposes that a derivative outcome of the 7Ss is an eighth S, Strategic performance. He argues that the key contributor to Strategic performance is aligning the different 7Ss, showing how in a number of case studies in the corporate sector, that CEO's successful alignment of the 7 elements was the key to organisational success. To represent this visually he pictures each S as a circle with an arrow inside. If the arrows point in the same direction it indicates alignment with each other.

For library strategy purposes we might also wish to add library-specific elements to the 7Ss, since as Corrall (2000) argues it does not identify some of the characteristic features of information services, particularly in the digital era. Corrall (2000) has proposed her own adaptation of the model introducing, Seeker, Sources, Space, Service and Security and retaining just Systems and Skills from the original 7Ss. The service, implying the service as a whole and its constituent services is placed at the centre. This revision is useful in identifying the centrality of the user to libraries – be that Students or Staff[i] in the case of academic libraries – though this term ('uSer') rather than "Seeker" reflects dominant ways of talking in library work and so is preferred here. It is also useful to identify Sources, Space and Services as what libraries offer. Security has traditionally been a concern of

libraries, but that has diminished in its centrality in recent years. However, so including these elements does remove Style, Strategy etc from the model, and these remain important, as for any organisation. Thus, we suggest another approach would be to retain the universal 7S model to describe the resources available to the organisation and to represent those whom the library serves (uSers), and the functions it performs (Stock/Sources, Space, Services) separately. In addition, in an increasingly digital information environment, it may be preferable to refer to a shift towards "Stuff" rather than Stock or Sources.

Figure 2 seeks to capture a starting point for thinking about these elements and some of their relationships.

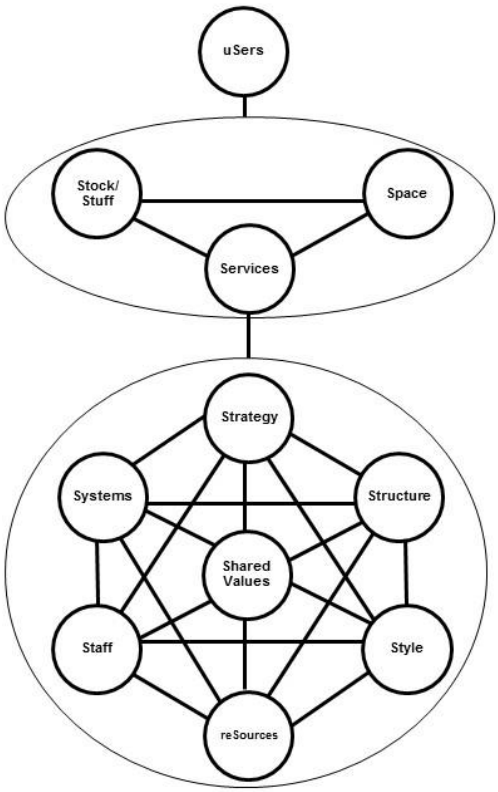

Figure 2: An adaptation of the S model for academic libraries

Method

In order to develop and extend the model the paper draws on a body of empirical data. This was derived from a mixed method study of the future of academic libraries (Pinfield, Cox and Rutter, 2017). A major part of the data was interviews with leading experts both from within and outside the library community. These participants were categorised into three groups: "Library Managers", comprising (mostly) library directors; "Library Commentators", such as academics, consultants or other experts in the field; and "Non-Library Participants", a variety of influential figures in higher education and technology-related or learning-related organisations. In total, 33 participants were interviewed: 23 from the UK, 10 international; 15 were women, 18 men. With their permission, the interviewees are listed in Appendix 2 of Pinfield, Cox and Rutter (2017), however quotations have

been anonymised here using the three categories described above. Such categorisation was not always straightforward. For example, some commentators had in the past been a senior librarian; some managed both library and other services. However, the categories are included to give some context to the remarks reported. The interviews were wide-ranging and dealt with high level and long-term trends rather than immediate concerns. The authors were aware of the 7S model but this did not frame interview questions. Rather Interviewees were asked much more specifically about the changing nature of the academic library. Views were captured by asking about such questions as whether books might ever disappear from library collections and about the long term role of space in library services. The questions thus revolved around the changing function of the academic library and so with stock, space and services. In the course of the interviews beliefs about the key drivers for change and the library's ability to respond emerged. Interviews were conducted between May and July 2017 with each typically lasting around one hour. Voluntary, informed consent was gained from participants, and the whole research approach had gained ethical approval from the University of Sheffield formal research ethics process.

The interviews were recorded and then fully transcribed. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) was systematically applied to the interview transcripts, including a process of detailed coding, from which the major themes in the data were identified. In seeking to organise the data the authors returned to the 7S model as a useful starting point for organising thoughts about the strategic context, particularly because of its emphasis on alignment, which was also a strong theme in the data. However, it emerged that further adjustments and elaboration were needed for it to fully organise the findings. In this way, there was a dialogue between the empirical data and theory, and the paper should be seen as the outcome of this process, rather than a simple reporting of the data.

In addition, the study included a web-based survey carried out in July and August 2017 (Pinfield, Cox and Rutter, 2017). The target respondents were UK academic library staff, at all levels of seniority. The survey was distributed by SCONUL to its closed lists but also made available more widely on open lists, including LIS-Link. 261 usable responses were received. The survey asked further about a number of issues arising from the literature and already emerging from the interview data. Descriptive data analysis was conducted, including tests for differences of perception across the sector, but for the purposes of this paper results are reported from responses as a whole.

Findings

Strategic shifts in library functions

Much of the data in the study related to the rebalancing of Stuff, Space and Services, and, therefore, debate over the very nature of the library itself. A number of major on-going but incomplete strategic shifts were identified, namely:

1. The increasing dominance of digital Stuff over print Stock, though without the likelihood of complete disappearance of print in the foreseeable future. Digital was increasingly important, meaning that prestige was no longer based purely on the physical collections. Although there was agreement that the balance between physical and digital resources was shifting in favour of the digital, there was disagreement about where the balance was likely to be in 10-years' time. Most participants in the survey disagreed with the statement that "apart from special collections, printed books will be an insignificant part of a collection that is largely digital" – see figure 3. A further implication of this shift is the issue of whether there is a need for Space to house such material.

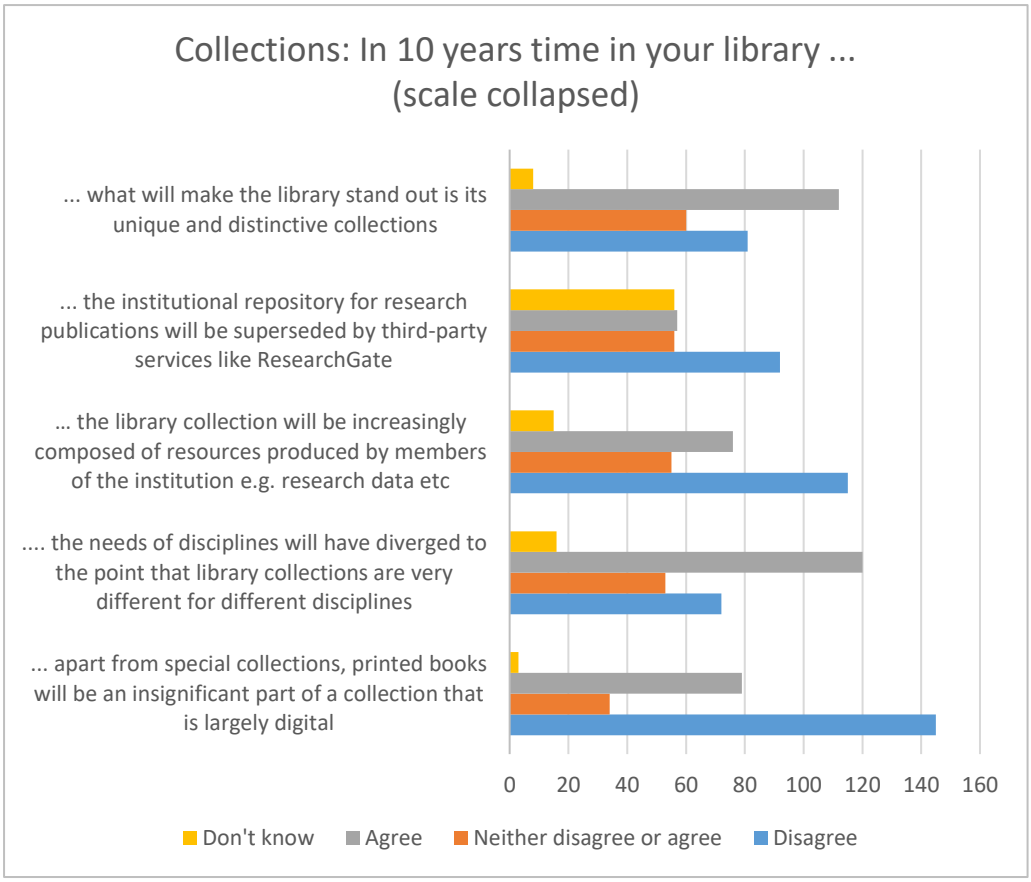

Figure 3 Shifting collections

2. The continuing importance for many libraries of special collections: as part of the book Stock. Nearly 50% of participants in the survey answered that in the future its "unique and distinctive collections" was what "would make the library stand out" (figure 3).
3. A fundamental shift towards open Stuff, because an increasing proportion of content is openly available, with a difficult to discern impact on library collecting and the library role in discovery. "If everything is open access then our library would be pointless because all it is doing is giving direct access to what is behind firewalls." (Non-Library Participant)
4. Linked to 2, a shift in the character of Stuff, from primarily material created beyond the institution and selected for internal communities ("outside in"), to a greater emphasis on the role of stewarding all the outputs of the institution and making them visible ("inside out") (Dempsey 2016). As with the digital shift "inside out" was not seen as likely to entirely supersede the "outside in" role: there was an on-going need to procure third party content. Survey respondents were divided over whether collections would be increasingly based on local content (Figure 3). One interviewee summarised the position neatly: "I believe that research libraries in particular are going to pay a lot more attention to local assets. But you know I don't buy that they are going to get out of the other role. Non-research libraries mostly don't have any content to curate, except for teaching and learning materials." (Library Commentator).
5. Tied to the digital shift, the release of Space from book shelving to allow for more use of Space for uSers had been combined with librarians' success in redesigning Space to meet what uSers – chiefly Students – needed. Thus, there was confidence in the continuing importance of Space. "They are still flocking to our buildings," as one Library Manager

commented. Very few questionnaire respondents thought that there would not be a library building in some form on campus in the future.

6. Some new and innovative Spaces were now being developed that recast the library as a platform for creativity, particularly Makerspaces. Such spaces were arguably the next strategic step with regard to Space beyond the Information/Learning Commons.
7. It was recognised that while library Space offered a compelling value to Student uSers, what was on offer to Staff as researchers in spatial terms was far less appreciated. Researchers do not make much use of the physical library.
8. Further, there did not seem to be a compelling library run digital space for researchers to correspond to the physical space used by students. It was a potential area for new services: "These social networking sites for scholars…clearly scholars are feeling a need to not just post their papers online and pull other papers off of line, they feel the need to create some kind of community. I think the libraries again, because…our goal is to advance knowledge and scholarship and ensure that it is available for the future and so forth…, ours isn't a profit motive, I think that…we would be really smart to become players in that realm, in creating these sort of online communities around the scholarship." (Library Manager).
9. A growing range of Services. "[The library] will have to be much more used to providing a diversity of services based on a variety of contractual arrangements. They will have to see their collections as one service among others" remarked one Library Commentator. Participants in the survey in particular were rather confident about the expansion of the scope of services that the library would lead on or participate in, as presented in figure 4.

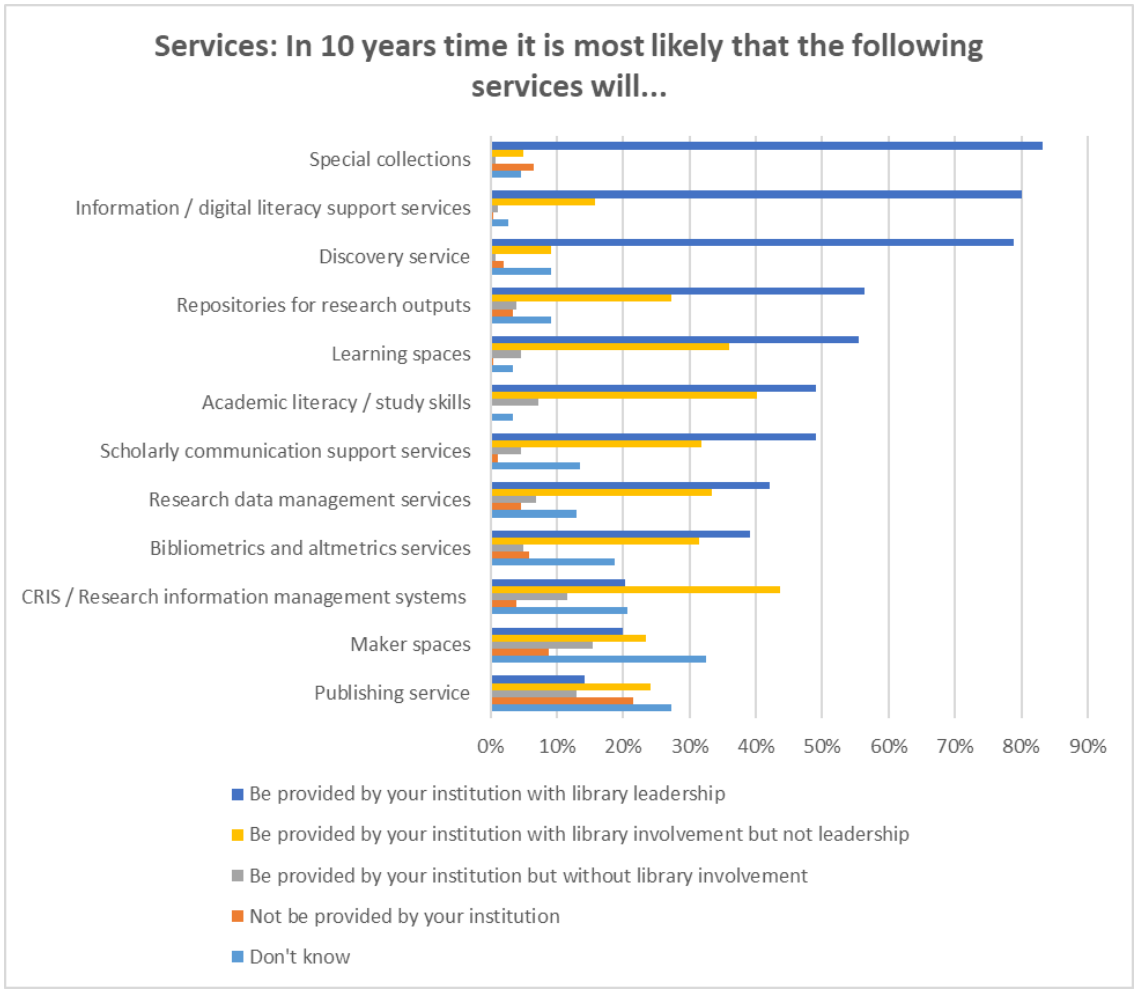

Figure 4 Library involvement in services in the future

10. Critical to this growth in services was relations with other Stakeholders in the institution, such as computing, estates etc. The survey suggested that the library would take a leading role in many cases, but clearly also there was scope for competition or collaboration in these roles.
11. An increasing sense that a library was to be seen a set of Services, not primarily defined by Stuff. Stuff was in essence a Service.

Significantly, these shifts were not seen as happening uniformly across the HEI space. Stuff remained important for older, more research intensive institutions, particularly Special Stock – unique collections that were a distinctive resource for research and teaching, and which represented an institutional unique selling point. In contrast, newer universities placed less onus on Stock, lacking research collections, but were more dynamically widening their range of services to include anything to do with uSer support, especially Student Support, in the pattern of "super-convergence" (Bulpitt, 2012; Heseltine, et al., 2009). The issue of distance between Staff as researchers and the library may also seem less of an issue.

Barriers to strategic performance

It was recognised that there were a number of barriers to successful performance for academic libraries: the value of the model can be further explored by using it to analyse these. Some barriers that were mentioned in the interviews could be located in the area of the 7Ss:

1. Lack of reSources. Budgets were being cut. Immediate pressures meant that there was scarcely space to think about responding to the latest trends, some respondents reported.
2. Lack of Skills in certain areas, though surprisingly it was Soft Skills, rather than technical ones that were seen as key by participants.
3. Failures of Strategy or leadership Style. In particular, there was observed to be a tendency to want to be seen as good institutional citizens and not risk takers.
4. Misaligned Shared cultures, such as ones that were resistant to change. As one interviewee commented: "I think that we are moving too slow… and I think it is both due to the library directors and it is also due to staff that have been working here for 20-25 years. So it is a huge skill change and the mindset change that we need to do – a culture change actually. So that is essential for us and that is going to be really hard. Culture change is the worst." (Library Manager)

Thus the original 7S model offers a starting point for examining the failures of alignment. This appeared to be a mix of both hard and soft factors. For some it was a problem of resources; for others of strategy. But soft elements also appeared to be problematic. In particular, less tangible aspects, particularly shared culture were a barrier to successful performance. Interestingly neither systems or structures were mentioned as significant barriers to performance.

Wider alignments

In line with the emphasis placed on it by Higgins (2005), participants did see alignment as a key aspect of successful performance for academic libraries. However, they saw this not just as about a failure of internal alignment of the 7Ss. An important theme that emerged from the data was alignment with the institution, and its needs. As one non-library participant commented: "So it is about that balance of aligning with institutional objectives and creating a library service that is innovating and is right for today's age…"

Academic libraries, unlike the corporations examined by Higgins (2005), are not free-floating organisations so the inStitution is an important aspect of context. Given the complexity of universities as entities, alignment should itself be recognised to be complex. Universities having multiple and competing objectives, such as to have global and local influence, to undertake education of a wider range of the population, but also make money. Crucially, participants in the study talked about alignment as occurring primarily with uSers, reflecting changing patterns of learning and research behaviours (in turn the outcome of changes in the Situation).

> *"I mean fundamentally the library should absolutely be supporting and serving the institution, that first and foremost, that is its job, so anything that affects…the way that academics are conducting research, the way that the students are coming into the university, and the way that they are being taught and everything, it all should affect the library and if it doesn't the library isn't doing its [job]" (Library Manager)*

Alignment was then seen primarily about aligning the library offering to the institution through aligning with its user communities.

Some other key factors in strategic failure related to the location within wider institutions – universities – which were seen as typically rather slow moving and conservative. This reduced the library's ability to respond to environmental change quickly. A critical issue was also the library's ability to project to others the sense of its own changing identity from being about print Stock to digital Stuff, Space and Services. It also needed to take its understanding of changing user behaviour and offer leadership to the whole organisation in aligning with them. In particular, there was seen to be poor understanding of the role of the library amongst senior decision makers in institutions. Over 70% of respondents to the questionnaire thought that, "senior institutional decision makers needed to be educated that a library is not all about books". This sits awkwardly in relation to the earlier point of libraries striving to be good citizens – in doing so, there seems to be a danger that the library is reinforcing traditional notions of its role in the institution.

Another major issue was the role of suppliers. Commercial publishers, content aggregators and system suppliers have become very powerful players in the digital landscape for libraries. Libraries have long been reliant on system suppliers (for Integrated Library Systems and other systems) and for content. There seemed to be evidence of increasing dependence. This is particularly where suppliers dominate the marketplace through oligopolistic control over content and vertical integration across content and systems. In some cases, indeed, they might be thinking of disintermediation through direct contact to users, bypassing the library. Examples might be in providing services in workflows such as Mendeley or successful digital spaces to rival the repository, such as ResearchGate. Part of their power lay in Suppliers operating, unlike libraries, at a global level. Thus, while most respondents to the questionnaire saw the role of the library in content discovery as secure (figure 3) some interviewees expressed doubt.

> *If everything is open access, then our online library would be pointless because all it is doing is giving direct access to stuff that is behind firewalls. I mean to be honest, for the last probably 5 or 6 years Google scholar has been my bibliographic, my search database. So, yes I don't go to the library website to search the catalogue. (Non library participant)*

The challenge of Google has existed for some time. But other developments were viewed with concern.

One way of responding to this was through collaborations with stakeholders and allies.

> *"[The library] has to become much more adept at creating internal alliances, internal partnerships, internal divisions of responsibility to move things along and get things done." (Library Commentator)*

> *"I think you will, you will see libraries wanting to procure shared systems, wanting to manage their collections in a shared way, wanting to share expertise,…I think that is much more observable in the US because of consortia nature of things, but you can see it happening in the UK as well." (Library Commentator)*

While libraries saw themselves as good at collaborating within their institution, at on campus collaborations, there was less sense of confidence of collaboration beyond institutions, with non-library partners. Yet it was seen as critical to do this, given the global power of suppliers.

Other challenges to strategic performance were more located in the relation to the Situation:

1. The highly dynamic nature of the environment: the difficulty of identifying key trends to respond to, due to there simply being so many trends.
2. Some trends not being well understood, or the response being slow. Many interviewees picked out AI as one such area where library response was as yet under-developed.
3. A growing sense that the locus of key changes might be the political or economic sphere, largely beyond prediction or influence.

For all this, these areas of doubt there was optimism about the future of academic libraries. Nearly all respondents in the survey agreed with the statement that, "libraries are core to higher education" and nearly 70% with the statement that "libraries have an exciting future". This was dependent on libraries being innovative, indeed in shaping their own context, rather than aligning in a purely reactive way.

> *"I think where you can see libraries that have been successful it is where library directors have adopted that sort of entrepreneurial mindset but have persuaded the institution of the direction. They have brought the institution along with them, they haven't been doing stuff on the side and hoping that the institution will notice." (Library Commentator)*

> *"But it is not just up to librarians to respond, I think librarians need to be driving and pushing these external factors along. So I think we need to be stepping up and making educators, researchers and students want to work in different ways and offer them different ways in which they can work. So I don't think we should be passive in this, because never mind 10 years I mean 6 months something could change … but we really need to be on the front foot I don't think you can be passive in this." (Library Manager)*

Discussion

Reflecting on this analysis we can see that the 7S model (Figure 1) is helpful in analysing some key aspects of the strategic experience of academic libraries. It encompasses many of the factors we have examined, e.g. in relation to the key obstacles to strategic underperformance. But it needs significant expansion to reflect:

1. The library specific functions: Stuff, Space and Service

2. The centrality of the uSers

Much of the interview material related to library functions, as much as strategic resources. It appears to be justified, therefore, to represent Stuff, Space and Service as a discrete entity in the model. This is captured in the adaptation presented in figure 2. However, a revised model also needs to take account of the wider context within which the library operates:

3. The impact of inStitutional context, including internal Stakeholders
4. The impact of relationships beyond the institution with AllieS and Suppliers, as well as the wider Situation as a whole.

The 7S model was never intended to encompass context - so a limitation of its applicability to the academic libraries which necessarily relate strongly to other parts of the host institution in fulfilling its mission as well as to the wider context beyond the institution. It is not intended to capture the importance of contextual changes, affecting the library directly but also impacting it through its impact on uSers, inStitutions and indeed the 7Ss. Yet in a complex, dynamic environment such institutional and external alignment becomes critical. For this reason, there is potential to add to the model tools such as PEST, PESTLE or SEPTEMBER as a way to structure thinking about Situation (Corrall,2000). These are familiar methods for examining change in the organisational environment. However, it could also be argued from our data that increasingly these tools are inadequate because of the inter-relation of trends working at different levels. Political and economic aspects of context are interwoven with legal or regulatory aspects. In our earlier report we identified five nexuses of change as complex webs of change that operate together (Pinfield, Cox and Rutter, 2017). Alternatively, we could look to a tool such as Causal Layered Analysis (Bishop and Hines, 2012) which prompts us to differentiate problems and driving forces and worldviews.

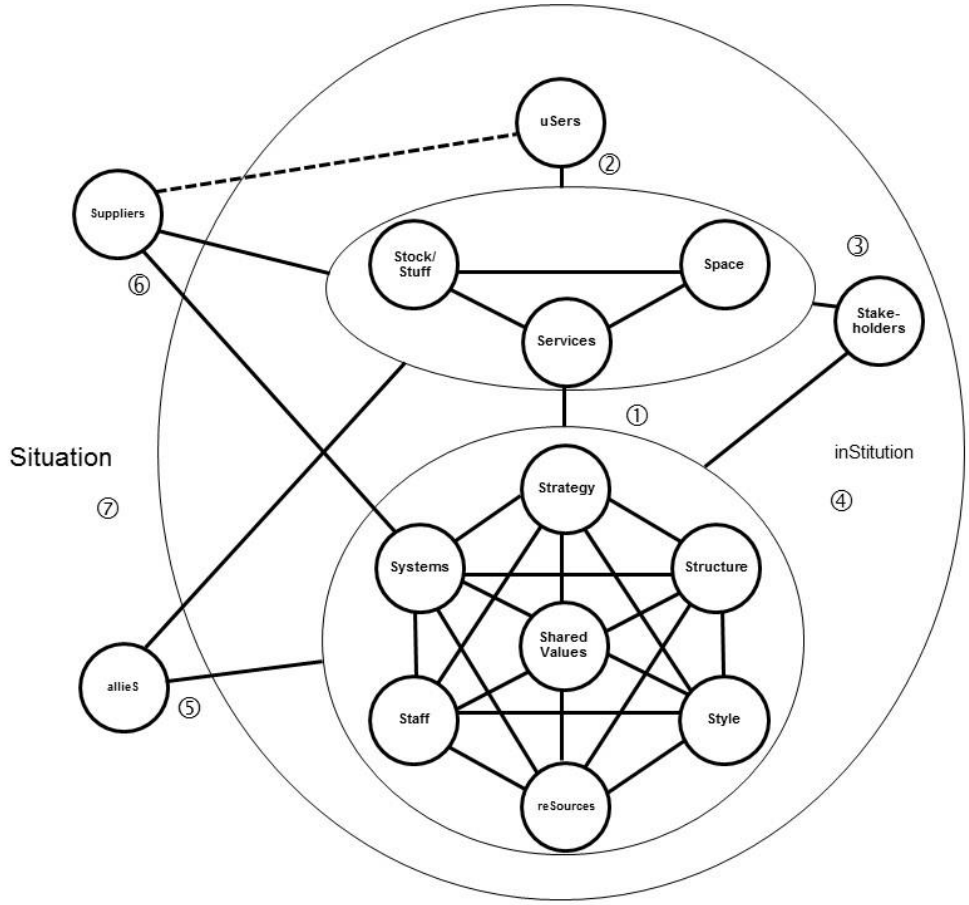

Figure 5 The S model of academic library strategy including challenges to alignment

Figure 5 seeks to offer a visualisation of this analysis in a new S model of academic library strategy. It encompasses the original 7Ss as well as the library functions and role of uSers found in Figure 2. It adds in inStitution, including the organisational as a whole and specific Stakeholders, the relationship with whom is central to library strategy. It also encompasses the wider organisational Situation, differentiating allieS, including individual libraries, consortia, and other bodies that support collaboration and Suppliers of Stuff and Systems. Suppliers could in some sense also be seen as allieS, but given that they typically have rather different drivers it is useful to separate them here. The dashed line between Suppliers and uSers reflects the ability of Suppliers potentially to work directly with users (increasingly important in a digital environment).

The figure also captures Seven challenges of alignment that need to be addressed by academic libraries to achieve strategic performance:

1. Alignment between the 7Ss. The internal resources of the library need to be correctly directed and coordinated with each other. Using Strategy statements, leadership Style and organisational Structures to shape Shared values are key activities of managers. Gaining reSources and improving Systems and Skills are also important.
2. Alignment between Stuff, Space and Services, and with uSers. The central role of the library in the past was to supply Stock, with Space for that Stock and Services based on it. Now the relation between the elements is in flux. Digital Stuff frees Space for new types of uses, and creates the need for new Services. Critically, these 3Ss need to align to the needs of uSers, both Staff and Students, for both learning and research.
3. Alignment with different institutional Stakeholders. Delivery of services seems increasingly to involve working closely with other institutional service providers or Stakeholders such as computing services, research administrators and student services. This could have elements of both a smooth, fruitful collaboration or a competitive struggle for resources.
4. Alignment with the inStitution as a whole. The library has to align with the inStitution and its strategy. Given the complexity of universities as organisations this cannot be seen as simple. It seems that different types of institution have increasingly different directions of travel.
5. Alignment with allieS. There is a widespread sense that collaboration beyond the institution, be that at a local, national or international level is key to such activities as procuring Stuff and managing Stock, procuring Systems and training Staff.
6. Alignment with Suppliers. Commercial suppliers of Stuff and Systems (increasingly less differentiated from each other) play a pivotal role in library performance. Innovative products such as discovery platforms are key to Services. Yet, there are tensions about how much choice is available, the cost of buying their services and always the potential for Suppliers to begin to seek disintermediated relations with uSers or the institution (a potential represented in the figure by a dotted line).
7. Alignment with the Situation. There was a strong sense that a key factor shaping library strategy performance was the wider Situation or context, the political and economic aspects in particular.

Whereas Higgins (2005) sees the CEO as able to achieve alignment through 1. only, the logic of this paper is to argue that the challenge is complex because of the multiple alignments required, and the way that situational changes in particular are a) complex and unpredictable b) likely to affect the library both directly but also through their effect on other elements, e.g. uSers, inStitutions. Further, whereas we can imagine alignment between libraries in most cases as two-way processes, Situation

is a one way influence. There is limited ability to affect Situation, especially political and economic conditions.

Whereas Situation feels increasingly critical but beyond influence, on the other hand, alignment in other areas will not be passive, as our participants said. Libraries can have a proactive leadership role in influencing Stakeholders, shaping uSers' perceptions of their own needs and even inStitutional direction of travel. They can create new allieS and manage their relation to Suppliers more and more effectively. The data suggested that these relations were particularly critical and that the whole strategic landscape could change as uSers are supported more and more by Stuff, Services and virtual Spaces organised by Suppliers and allieS outside institutions at a cross institutional level.

Conclusion

This paper has worked with the influential 7S model (Figure 1) to produce a new S model of academic library strategy (Figure 5). The strength of the original model, that perhaps explains its longevity, is its focus on the complex inter-relation of elements and the need to seek to align these. Soft elements are by their nature hard to control and bring into alignment. Our revised model has a similar focus on the critical importance of alignment or inter-related elements. It has been adapted to encompass library functions and to represent the internal and external context of the organisation as key elements. The utility of this model was established by using it as a structure within which to reflect on interview and survey data from a study of library futures. The revised model works well to define key elements that were in flux, map the barriers to effective library performance, and to help to identify seven challenges of alignment.

The resulting model is relevant to research and practice. It offers a framework for the analysis of academic library development. It could be used to analyse sector evolution both through its ability to define key elements and to reflect changes in relations of the elements (and so the model) over time. It could be used to compare the strategic position of academic libraries in different countries. At a more micro-level, it could also be used to contextualise studies of particular forms of innovation, such as new technologies or new organisational structures, by offering a way to think through the connections to wider processes and actors. We also suggest that the model could with small adjustments (for example, moving users outside of the institutional boundary) apply in any library, not just the academic context.

Equally, the model offers a high level starting point for the analysis of the strategic position of any particular library: to think through the ramifications of change by considering how it will affect other actors in the network. It could also be used as a basis for reflection of the current state of the library's internal and external alignments, and the challenges it faces in improving these. In this context it could be elaborated by identifying, for example, specific services, stakeholders and suppliers etc.

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[i] In the UK "staff" is used for all university staff, including both faculty and administrative staff.