

## Management of Library and Info Centers

Summer Session 1

Prof. Stewart

Aimee Norris

06/08/2014

The Johnson County Library is located in northeast Kansas, southwest of Kansas City, and is included in the Kansas City metro area. Johnson County Library has a Central Library Resource and twelve neighborhood libraries county-wide. According to their 2013 Annual Report, JCL's patrons have borrowed more than six million items, downloaded over 77,000 ebooks, 92,000 songs, and 33,000 magazines in 2013, and the library's circulation is on the rise, "proving that the residents of Johnson County value the pleasure and benefits that reading provides" (JCL Annual Report 2013). In JCL's 2014 Strategic Facilities Master Plan, the writers predict that in the next twenty years, Johnson County's population will reach 750,000. The current population is 550,000. Due to the increasing circulation, the changing technology and publishing industries, and the growing population, the JCL have recently rewritten their strategic plan in 2013. They compiled data they received from staff, community, and library board insight through a variety of means, including: community meetings, MindMixer feedback, and staff meetings. Through analyzing this data, they were able to conceive of eight goals for the next five years. These goals were lumped into three major groups: Education, Community Building, and Convenience, which they call the "Portfolio of Services" (JCL Strategic Plan 2013). From there, they plan on using the Balanced Scorecard Method to evaluate the "tactics" of the strategic plan, which are explained as the actual methods they will use to achieve their goals, including the day-to-day activities of the staff members.

Their process for rewriting the strategic plan in 2013 started with the Administrative Team utilizing the *Strategic Planning for Results* planning process written by Sandra Nelson, which, according to the website “focuses on the essential steps to draft a results-driven, strategic planning process that libraries can complete over the course of four months, regardless of organizational structure or size” (ala.org). Using this process for the new strategic plan, Johnson County Library made four key decision points:

1. Keep the planning process “grassroots.”
2. Use the input of the community, library board, and staff.
3. Make sure the process stays “in-house” with little use of external consultants.
4. Keep the plan democratic, allowing the staff to take a leadership role in its creation

Through keeping the process “grassroots,” JCL emphasizes and ensures that its data input on the plan is gathered from *all* levels, “not just managers, administrators, or department heads” (JCL Strategic Plan 2014 pg. 5) As stated on their website and annual report, the vision of the Johnson County Library is to create “an environment for people to learn, to explore, to enjoy, to create, and to connect” and their mission is to provide “access to idea, information, experiences, and materials that support and enrich people's lives” (JCL Annual Report 2013). In order to keep to their mission and vision, JCL made sure to focus more intensely on the local perspective: those who work in the library, those who use the library, and those who make decisions for the library. Through this, JCL was able to create plan from the ground up that utilized the deep knowledge and leadership of the staff and the needs of the community, keeping all voices heard.

This is how they did it: after JCL made their key decisions, they set up community meetings in April and May 2013 where certain representative members of the community gave input on library priorities. In May and June 2013, JCL held staff meetings scheduled during non-business hours where all staff members could attend and offer input. Also, throughout this time,

they utilized MindMixer, a website where the general public could give suggestions, prompts, or comments about ideas for library improvement. Once the input was gathered from the meetings and MindMixer, the data was condensed in “digestible trends” for the library Administrative Team. Using these trends, they created the Portfolio of Services, which are: Education, Community Building, and Convenience. From there, all the managers in the library system brainstormed goals to fit within these three portfolios. In September 2013, the Administrative Team took the manager's goals and produced 31 “goal groups” (JCL Strategic Plan 2014 pg 4). Those goal groups were sent back to the managers and they summarized the groups into 31 goals. Finally, a Goal Compilation committee condensed those goals into eight, each categorized under a specific portfolio.

These are the three Portfolios of Services and the eight goals:

Portfolio area: **Education**

Goal 1: Library staff will exemplify the brand promise in their interactions with people.

Goal 2: People will achieve higher levels of personal success through digital literacy.

Goal 3: People with specific educational or informational needs will be supported by the Library.

Portfolio area: **Community Building**

Goal 4: People will connect and interact because of Library partnerships and collaborations.

Goal 5: People will experience a welcoming library environment that meets their needs.

Portfolio area: **Convenience**

Goal 6: People will find Library staff, materials, and services convenient and easy to access.

Goal 7: Library staff will engage in a workforce that is collaborative, connected, efficient, and

effective.

Goal 8: People will experience library services and resources through the innovative use of technology.

(JCL Strategic Planning 2014 pg 6)

Looking firstly at the three portfolios: Education, Community Building, and Convenience, we have the central themes of the strategic plan. Education goes back to the vision and mission of Johnson County Library: to learn. Within that portfolio, each of the goals stresses the importance of library as a *tool* for its patrons and their achievements, whether through digital literacy or specific informational needs. The first goal is interesting, however, as it emphasizes the necessity of effective customer service from the staff, which, out of context, seems to have little to do with education. However, I find this to very appropriate, since it is usually through the help of the library staff that the patrons find their information or learn how to use materials, technology, or online databases. In order to be an effective advocate of education, the library staff must be exemplar in their customer service skills and provide the patrons the help and the encouragement they deserve.

With Community Building, we see the Johnson Public Library fulfilling its vision and mission to provide patrons a place to connect. By partnering and collaborating with businesses, groups, and non-profits in the community, JPL is able to create programs and offer space for the community to enrich their lives, make connections, and grow. Connecting back to the “customer service” aspect of the first goal, the fifth goal also insists that the library be a welcoming place—not just through the actions of the staff, but in the layout and space of the buildings and the creation of meeting rooms and activity spaces.

In JCL's 2014 Strategic Facilities Master Plan, the Library Board and Board of County Commissioners reviewed the previous 2009 Facilities Master Plan and found, through

benchmark comparisons with other libraries, that the JCL's libraries were too cramped and in poor locations, unable to meet the demands of Johnson County's growing, mobile, and highly educated patrons (JCL Strategic Facilities Master Plan 2014). The new Strategic Facilities Master Plan now connects back the 2014 Strategic Plan, so that the new libraries, more accessibly located, will have more space, better technology, and layouts that best fit a welcoming atmosphere for learning and community building with a great deal more physical space. While there is no particular emphasis in this strategic plan for marketing, it is clear that the Johnson County Library hopes to connect to its community mostly through partnerships and collaborations, opening its doors as a place for the community to use.

In the third portfolio area, Convenience, the importance of the goals lies in speed and accessibility. For the patrons to thoroughly enjoy all that the library has to offer, JCL must make sure that its staff, its technology, and services are all up-to-date, efficient, and accessible. Keeping relevant and the staff well-trained is essential for the library to combat competition and provide the best services possible for their patrons.

At the end of the strategic plan, JCL states that it will use the Portfolio of Services to create “tactics” which will be the actual methods to achieve the goals. These tactics will be used to create staff work plans to ensure that the activities of the staff are geared around accomplishing the goals of the strategic plan. Once they create the tactics, the Administrative Team will use the Balanced Scorecard Method of assessment and use the tactics as guidelines when they create the annual budget (JCL Strategic Plan 2014 pg. 7). I believe this process will be very effective and great for documentation and future reviews, as everything from the day-to-day tasks to the overarching goals will be clearly assigned with this plan. While, overall, I feel that the goals as they are written in the strategic plan are somewhat too broad—and thus seem hard to measure and assess—they all look doable and I am confident that JCL will create more definitive examples of measurement and assessment in their “tactics” to show fulfillment of

these goals. For instance, they may measure success of the first goal, which is based around customer service, on staff reviews, patron surveys, and observations.

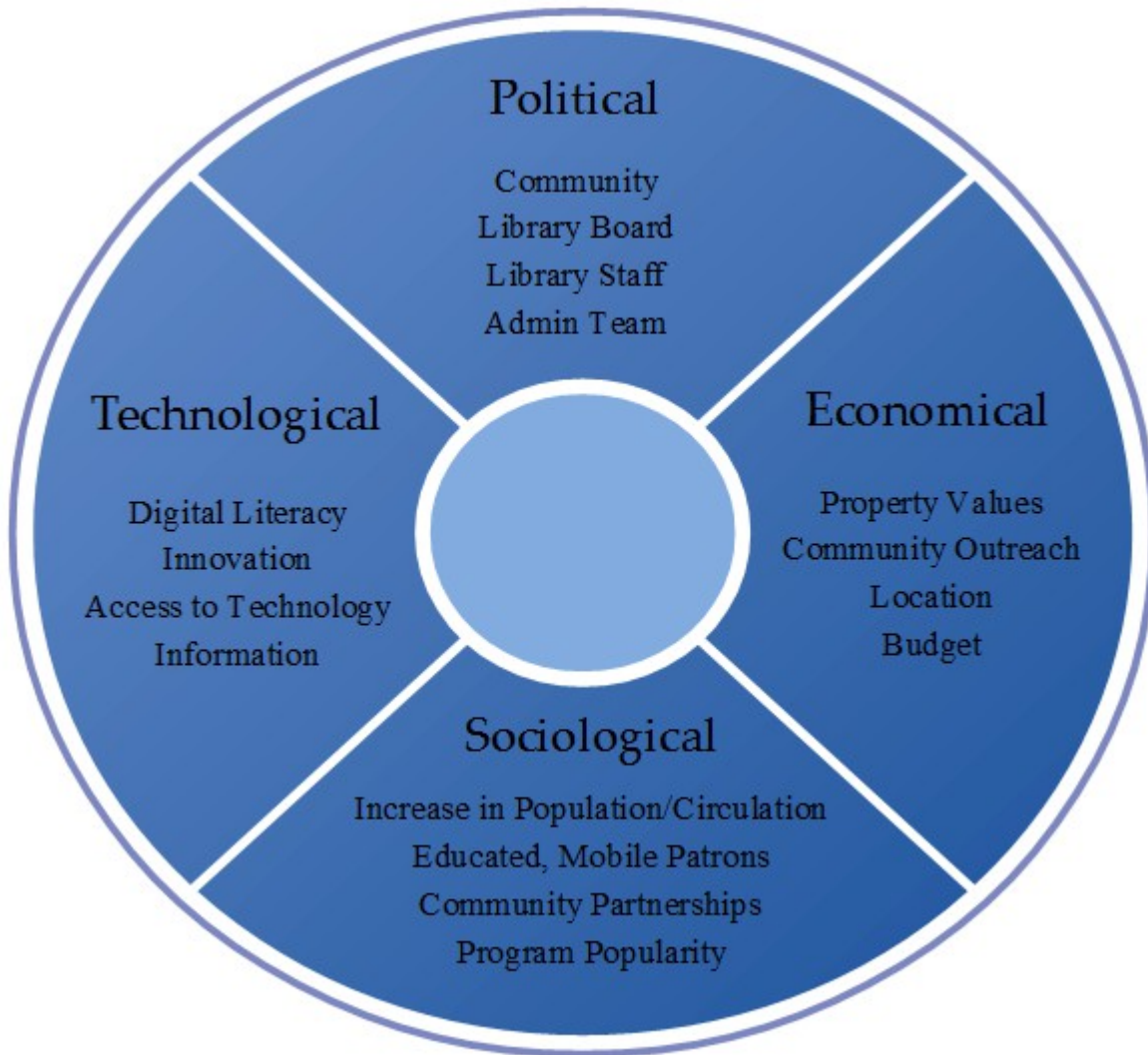


Figure 1.1

If we apply the PEST analysis to Johnson County Library's strategic plan, we can determine the political, economic, sociological, and technological forces influencing the library (Moran, Stueart, and Morner 67). As shown in figure 1.1, the political forces that the JCL must contend with include: the library board, the community, the administrative team, and the library

staff. As seen in the strategic plan, JCL purposefully allowed *everyone* who has a stake in the library to participate and contribute their ideas for the strategic plan. They were able to do this through staff and board meetings and the website MindMixer. While I found the use of the MindMixer website to be a wonderful use of technology as well as a great data collection tool, I do wonder if the library spent any time training the members of the community on how to use the site, or whether some members who may not be technologically savvy, were still able to contribute to the discussion of the strategic plan. Otherwise, I feel that JCL did a great job politically, allowing everyone to have a voice and refraining from bringing in outside consultants, which could potentially cause unrest with the library staff who may have felt jilted or unappreciated.

Under economical forces, the JCL mentioned that they would be using their strategic plan, the tactics, and the Balanced Scorecard Method of assessment in order to create their annual budget. Johnson County is fast growing with rising property rates, which looks good for the library's income, and with their well-documented strategic plan and strategic facilities master plan which both clearly outline the essential qualities of the library, its effectiveness, and its need to stay innovative and relevant, they will be able to make a strong case to the community for their tax money. By creating new, easily accessible libraries with more meeting rooms and space for community events, they will be able to better fulfill their mission and vision and give back to the community.

In terms of sociological, Johnson County, as stated before, is growing and the JCL libraries are seeing a rise in circulation and visits. As the Strategic Facilities Master Plan 2014 argued in their review, the JCL patrons today are educated and mobile, and "The assumption that a library is a building that warehouses books has quickly become outdated. The modern library maintains a unique place within a community, providing a place where people meet, learn, discuss issues they are facing and engage in civic discourse" (Strategic Facilities Master

Plan 2014 pg 5). To keep modern, the JCL must appeal to the changes in society, adding more technology services, placing library in convenient locations, and being open to new opportunities with outreach and partnerships.

Lastly, with technology, we see much of the same reoccurring theme: innovation and change. In its mission, the Johnson County Library says that it provides access to ideas, information, experiences, and materials to support and enrich people's lives. All of this is possible through technology and digital literacy. In their strategic plan, they list improving digital literacy as one of the goals, as well as innovative use of technology for library resources and services (JCL Strategic Plan 2014). As technology and media changes each year, it is important for libraries to stay as up-to-date as possible and make sure that its staff is trained in its use and prepared to provide help for patrons.





Figure 1.2

Now we will analyze Johnson County Library through its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Some of the strengths I found in JCL's strategic plan were: the leadership opportunities it gave to not just the library staff but also to the community. In creating the strategic plan, the administrative team made sure to weigh in everyone's opinion so that all voices were heard. They could have easily kept the entire process at the library board and administrative level and hired an outside consultant, but they chose to keep their perspective local, which leads to the next strength. With a local perspective, JCL was able to focus its goals primarily on its own patrons and staff and how to best serve their needs. Also, through their painstaking and well-documented planning process and its eventual "tactics," I feel JCL has created a very firm foundation of planning for the next five years. As for weaknesses,

the JCL listed a few in their Strategic Facilities Master Plan, namely: outdated and small buildings, lack of meeting rooms, and outdated technology. In order to combat this, they are already making plans to build new libraries with much larger space, more meeting and community rooms, and with updated technology. I am a little concerned, as I said before, about the JCL relying too much on technology. They must make sure to cater to those in their community who may not be as well-educated and need proper training.

There are, thankfully, many opportunities for JCL: a growing population, new city developments, and potential partnerships and collaborations with the community. As the population rises, new developments arrive in the growing cities like Olathe, and property tax increases, the library benefits not only monetarily but also in terms of potential new patrons and circulation. For partnerships and collaboration: as shown in the 2013 Annual Report, the JCL has already become involved with Head Start of Shawnee Mission, which helps coordinate early literacy activities, Latino Fest, Positive Aging Coalition (PAC), and Tutor.com, among others (JCL Annual Report 2013). These collaborations and partnerships provide marketing, increase participation, and creates a bond between the Johnson County Library and its community.

However, there are threats that the JCL faces. One of the biggest threats is the Kansas City Public Library which shares the same jurisdiction as well as other areas in the Kansas City Metro area. The two libraries compete over patrons and JCL does this by, again, keeping its perspective local and appealing to the needs of its suburban patrons, providing them with convenience, community building, and education as seen in their Portfolio of Services. All their goals are centered around their mission and vision: to provide their patrons with access to information and a place to enjoy, create, learn, and grow. Another threat, however, that is out of their control is the lack of public transportation. Unfortunately, in Johnson County, there is only a bus system with very limited bus routes and times, and for the under-served and poor, getting to

a library can be challenging. Hopefully, in the new building locations, JCL will be able to better cater to some of these patrons.

As a whole, I felt that Johnson County Library's Strategic Plan was enlightening and well-structured. While they provided no budget and the majority of the plan was a discussion of how the plan was created rather than the exact details of how the plan will play out, I felt confident that JCL would be able to utilize this five-year strategic plan to its utmost potential.

## Works Cited

Johnson County Library. *Annual Report: Education, Community Building, Convenience*. 2013.

Date of Access: 06/06/2014.

<http://www.jocolibrary.org/upload/library/docs/pdf/AR2013.pdf>

Johnson County Library. *JCL Strategic Plan Summary*. 2014. Date of Access: 06/06/2014.

[http://www.jocolibrary.org/upload/library/docs/pdf/JCL\\_2014\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.jocolibrary.org/upload/library/docs/pdf/JCL_2014_Strategic_Plan.pdf)

Johnson County Library. *Library Facilities Master Plan*. March 2014. Date of Access:

06/06/2014. <http://www.jocolibrary.org/upload/library/docs/pdf/2014%20Strategic>

[%20Facilities%20Master%20Plan.pdf](http://www.jocolibrary.org/upload/library/docs/pdf/2014%20Strategic%20Facilities%20Master%20Plan.pdf)

Moran, Barbara B., Claudia J. Morner, and Robert D. Stueart. *Library and Information Center*

*Management*. Eighth Edition. 2013. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited.