

Title: The Library of the Future: a scenario-based approach

Abstract

The changing dynamics, uncertainties and operating environments of many library services across the globe make it difficult for leadership teams to develop strategic plans. This article presents empirical findings on a scenario-planning project that sought to develop a mission, vision and strategy for the House of Commons Library Service in UK Parliament. Set in the context of a major £6bn Restoration and Renewal programme, it demonstrates how Scenario Planning was used to manage significant levels of uncertainty and develop a long-term strategic direction that sought to deliver high-quality Library Services provision over the next 10 years.

Keywords: Library Leadership, Managing Uncertainty, Scenario Planning, Strategy Development, Strategic Intent.

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Introduction

Against a backdrop of macro-uncertainties that include Covid-19, the Russia-Ukraine War, global economic uncertainty, digitalization and rapid technological developments in AI and VR, the operating environment presents library leadership teams with numerous complex and challenging issues. The impact of these forces are reported by the International Monetary Fund and captured in its World Uncertainty Index (www.imf.org) which reported that global uncertainty reached “unprecedented levels” in recent years, which in turn, has created a dilemma for senior management in terms of developing a long-term strategic direction for library service provision given that the operating environment is both complex and turbulent.

A management tool that enables leadership teams to develop strategy in uncertain operating environments is Scenario Planning. Whilst this instrument has formed part of the strategist’s toolbox for a long time, the increasing level of dynamism and uncertainty in many operating environments has meant that Scenario Planning has seen a resurgence in usage. This paper examines the use of Scenario Planning to develop flexible strategic responses for library services provision in an ever-changing working environment. Whilst previous publications in this journal have provided its readership with information and reflections on how a long-term vision and strategy ‘could’ be developed (Giesecke, 1999; Farrell, 2015; Schlak, 2020), this paper adds to existing knowledge and advances our understanding by providing a detailed narrative on how a scenario planning project led to the ‘*development and implementation*’ of a strategy aimed to provide a high quality library services provision that would be fit for purpose over the long term.

Literature Review

Scenario Planning has been used for decades in many business and non-business contexts and its durability as a management tool is illustrated in Bain & Company's longitudinal survey of 'Management Tools & Trends' which frequently shows that scenario planning has been one of the most popular instruments since the inception of the survey in 1993. So much so, that many leadership teams across the globe consider it to be a high usage 'Power Tool' that delivers significant levels of user satisfaction (Rigby and Bilodeau, 2007; Oliver, 2013) because of its ability to systematically manage dynamic operating environments.

It should be remembered that scenario planning does not predict or forecast future market dynamics. It is a highly structured analytical process that combines rigorous strategic analysis that is underpinned by brainstorming, creative thinking and intuition (Oliver and Parrett, 2018). The outcome of this process is the development of multiple scenarios of the future that can be used to shape strategic thinking, and ultimately, 'mentally prepare' leaders and senior management to address strategic challenges and uncertainties (Walton, 2008; Selsky and McCann, 2008). Furthermore, Schoemaker (2022) noted that the creation of future scenarios enables management teams to challenge existing organizational thinking and develop 'new insights' into future operating dynamics.

The knowledge base on Scenario Planning is extensive and to a large degree highly fragmented as a result of numerous researchers and consultants using different types of scenario-based methodologies across multiple organizational contexts. However, the benefits to leadership teams of using Scenario Planning are well articulated in literature and highlight that the combination of systematic and imaginative thinking can provide significant insights into the future, which in turn, can facilitate the development of organizational strategy (van der Heijden, 2005; Walton, 2008; Selsky and McCann, 2008). It is a process of that encourages leadership teams to escape the annual ritual of strategic planning which supports single pointed

forecasts of the future (Porter, 1985) in favour of developing ‘strategic conversations’ about the long-term drivers of change and how ‘multiple scenarios of the future’ could play out (Grant, 2003; and Bowman et al., 2007). Scoblic (2020, p.40) also argued that imagining multiple futures helps the strategic foresight process by getting leadership teams to “figure out how to think about the future” in a way that simply doesn’t extrapolate from trends in the present. The main benefit of representing the future through a limited number of scenarios is that leadership teams can manage uncertainty by being ‘mentally prepared’ to address the future by evaluating a number of strategic options relevant to each possible future (Wilkinson, 1995; O’Brien et al, 2007; Worthington et al, 2009; Wilburn and Wilburn, 2011). Furthermore, recent research by Abuzaid (2018) found that organizations that used Scenario Planning improved their financial and customer performance, ability to solve complex problems and innovate value driven capabilities.

Essentially, what management literature tells us is that organizations need to respond to a dynamic operating environment by strategizing in a way that allows them to prepare for multiple futures, with multiple strategies that reduces the impact of future uncertainties (Lew et al, 2018). As such, Scenario Planning provides leadership teams with an opportunity to explore the business environment holistically by generating a substantial amount of dialogue, creative thinking, brainstorming, and intuition in order to build alternative futures in which statistical forecasting techniques are deemed inadequate due to the extent of environmental uncertainty. On the downside, there is a small amount of literature that alerts us to the shortcomings of using Scenario Planning. This includes Oliver (2013), Augier et al, (2018) and Spaniol & Rowland (2018) who argued that the plethora of Scenario Planning methods available to leadership teams lead to confusion and issues of competency when using this management tool. Additionally, a consistent argument suggests that the scenario process is

fundamentally flawed by participant subjectivity (Goodwin & Wright, 2001; Mietzner & Reger, 2005; Amer et al, 2013; Schoemaker, 2022).

Method

The longevity of Scenario Planning as a management tool has given rise to many methodological versions and practices. The approach used in this project was originally conceived by Garvin and Levesque (2006) at the Harvard Business School. It offers a clear, simple, and structured approach with a logical progression in the analytical process which provided multiple views and ‘visual representations’ of the future. Whilst this approach is highly prescriptive it allows for a large degree of creative thinking, where multiple views and strategic options for the future result in a less deterministic way to undertake strategic development. The process involves identifying the macro and micro forces that are creating the most uncertainty in relation to a critical strategic choice referred to as the *Key Focal Issue* for an organization. These *Driving Forces* are then reduced to just two and are referred to as *Critical Uncertainties*. This provides the basis of a scenario framework where each critical uncertainty is presented within a 2×2 matrix, with four different quadrants of low and high degrees of uncertainty in the future.

In essence, this framework forces leadership teams to consider clearly contrasting scenarios, and in doing so, enables them to reflect on how they would manage the organization in the most uncertain of operating conditions. In each scenario, a ‘headline’ is used to capture the fundamental nature of a supporting narrative that fleshes out the detail in each future world. Following this, leadership teams identify the ‘implications’ of each scenario in relation to the ‘Key Focal Issue’ and the most appropriate strategic responses (options) to deal with each scenario. Finally, ‘Early Warning Signals’ are developed in order to monitor and evaluate the emergence of one scenario over another and are used to initiate a strategic re-evaluation of the scenario plan.

Scenario planning in action

The House of Commons Library (HoCL) provides research and information services to the lower house of the UK Parliament, publishing high quality, politically impartial policy analysis and statistical research for MPs and their staff to enable them to make well informed decisions and to support a healthy democracy. Dating from 1818, the HoCL has 180 staff working as researchers, librarians, indexers and statisticians. The library holds around 500,000 print items, including books, journals, grey literature and briefing papers and provides extensive online resources. It receives approximately 18,000 enquiries per annum and is a trusted and impartial service which is highly valued by users whose customer satisfaction ratings consistently reach 95%.

A complex and challenging management issue

A major £6bn Restoration and Renewal (R&R) programme is planned for the Palace of Westminster, which is where the main HoCL services are based. There is considerable uncertainty regarding exactly how R&R will be undertaken, and the associated impact of that on the physical library and its range of services. This uncertainty is likely to continue into the 2030s as the programme of works are undertaken. What the leadership team did know for certain was that the restoration works had to be undertaken and the library would have to move out its current location to enable those works to take place. This would mean the relocation of nearly all of the physical library collection off the parliamentary estate and the relocation of face-to-face services to parliamentary members to an unknown destination. Essentially, the leadership team faced two key challenges in developing a future strategic direction:

- A longer planning horizon than it would normally consider.
- Significant levels of uncertainty in the operating environment during the Restoration and Renewal Programme.

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The scenario planning work aimed to help the leadership team to think strategically about a ‘new vision’ for Library Services and how to deliver future high quality service provision that was fit for purpose over the long term.

The objectives of the scenario planning project were:

- To create a scenario plan that developed future scenarios of high quality Library Services provision over the next 10 years.
- To equip the Library Services team with scenario planning knowledge and skills in order to manage the uncertainty caused by future macro and micro forces and issues.

The *Key Focal Issue* involves the identification of a critical issue or strategic uncertainty that has significant long-term implications for the organization. The process of identifying this issue involved numerous meetings with staff working in different operational functions within the HoCL. The outcome of these meetings identified a number of potential Key Focal Issues that ranged from: the future size and shape of library services provision; to how would Library Services maintain a ‘relationship’ with its users during R&R; and how would MPs working habits change over time. However, in discussions with the Library Services Leadership Group and staff, the Key Focal Issue that was most pressing was decided as:

‘What will high quality House of Commons Library services look like in 10 years?’

Pre-workshop preparation: engaging staff and stimulating creative thinking

Scenario Planning is a creative process that aims to stimulate imaginative thinking, manage uncertainty and prepare an organization for the future. As part of the project, a ‘speaker series’ of two one-hour sessions with four external speakers preceded the scenario planning workshop. These sessions were designed to stimulate creative thinking and pull staff away from day-to-day, business as usual considerations, and to start thinking differently and challenge existing

assumptions and perspectives. The external speaker sessions included two award winning senior executives from the UK Media Industry, a service excellence consultant and the Chief Executive of a national UK library. Whilst the key messages from the speakers were to ‘be bold in setting a new vision’ and that ‘complacency will kill libraries’ the library staff commented that the speakers were “*absolutely fascinating and thought-provoking*” and that the speakers urged everyone to be “*innovative, creative, open-minded whilst being focused on your objective*”.

Identifying Driving Forces

The Scenario Planning Project Team undertook an extensive study of secondary sources of the macro and micro themes and trends (*Driving Forces*) that were likely to affect and influence the Key Focal Issue over the next 10 years. This analysis resulted in the identification of 49 forces which were used in a survey to HoCL services staff in order to assess the areas that were considered to be creating the most uncertainty. The intention of the survey was to further engage staff in the scenario planning process by asking them to identify those forces that were ‘certain’ or ‘uncertain’. The survey also provided a practical outcome as far as it allowed more time in the workshop to focus on issues that were creating the most uncertainty in the operating environment.

Workshop Participants were drawn from a variety of operational areas within the HoCL and selected on the basis of having experience and expert knowledge of library services provision. As such, 21 participants were drawn from the: Library Services Leadership Group (7), Library Services staff (4), Customer Services (3), Library Service Development and Strategy (2), and Library Services customers and partners (5).

Scenario planning is often regarded as a ‘subjective’ process often based on an extrapolation of participant experiences and knowledge. In order to overcome this inherent problem, an ‘independent auditor’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in the form of a highly

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experienced science and technology expert from the Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology was used to validate the proceedings and ensure that all participants' views were fully explored, and that the scenarios were both realistic and plausible.

The Scenario Planning Workshop was held in a Committee Room at the Palace of Westminster over the course of a day in July 2021. After welcoming the participants and providing them with an outline of the workshop, the *Key Focal Issue* was re-stated, and the participants were asked to rank the *Driving Forces* in terms of the levels of uncertainty over the next 10 years. This part of the process lasted 90 minutes and involved reducing the 49 forces to initially 11, before agreeing on the two most uncertain driving forces that were most likely to define or significantly change the way the future emerges and influences the Key Focal Issue. There were a number of more dominant personalities who were clear on which were the most pertinent driving forces (from their perspective) and subsequently tried to influence the group. It was the role of the scenario planning project lead and the independent auditor to ensure that every member of the group had their opinion heard and genuine group consensus was reached. The most uncertain driving forces that are likely to influence the Key Focal Issue are known as *Critical Uncertainties*. Agreeing on just two Critical Uncertainties resulted in much debate over the uncertainty of some driving forces. Following extensive discussion, two Critical Uncertainties were identified as:

1. The value customers place on an impartial library service

The HoCL has a distinguished reputation for providing a quality and trusted service built on providing Members of Parliament (MPs) and their staff with timely, authoritative and above all impartial policy analysis and statistical research to help them scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents. Crucially, it is the political impartiality of library staff and the equitable, fair and unbiased service they provide that retains the confidence of MPs, their staff, and other House of Commons staff.

Any change in the 'value' which MPs place on impartiality would consequently have a major impact on the library. For this reason, workshop participants saw it as a critical area to explore, although it is important to appreciate participants did not think or have evidence that this was happening, rather they were concerned it was a possible effect of some of the trends identified among the Driving Forces. For example, a changing age profile of MPs and their staff with a younger and more 'tech savvy' group being used to access to quick and unverified sources of information via the likes of Google and that in a world of 'alternative facts' and 'polarised politics' MPs could come to prefer information to help support and advance their political arguments rather than impartial analysis. Participants also noted the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted MPs relationship with the library, with them becoming less reliant on library services and recording a 90% drop off in face-to face enquiries during that period.

2. The amount of physical space available for use by library services

The R&R programme was still at the stage of developmental discussions and planning at the time of the scenario project. There was considerable uncertainty regarding exactly how the restoration and renewal works would be undertaken and the associated impact of that on the HoCL. This uncertainty was likely to continue for some years to come with the relocation of much of the library collection off the parliamentary estate and the relocation of face-to-face services to MPs and their staff to a currently unknown provision. This level of uncertainty was further underpinned by not knowing how long the works would take, which in turn, resulted in a high degree of staff concern particularly around the value of the HoCL physical collection. Also, with a new and remote physical location for library services provision, MPs and their staff may change their behaviour to a digital only requirement and see no value in the physical collection.

Developing the scenario framework

The group was then asked to develop a scenario framework where each critical uncertainty was presented within a 2×2 matrix, with four different quadrants of low and high degrees of uncertainty in the future. This resulted in the following four contrasting scenarios:

- Scenario A: Low value customers place on an impartial library service and Low amount of physical space available for use by library services.
- Scenario B: Low amount of physical space available for use by library services and High value customers place on an impartial library service.
- Scenario C: Low value customers place on an impartial library service and High amount of physical space available for use by library services.
- Scenario D: High value customers place on an impartial library service and High amount of physical space available for use by library services.

The participants were then asked to generate a ‘news headline’ and ‘narrative’ to flesh out the nature and implications for the HoCL in each scenario. Schoemaker (2002, p. 38) argued that these scenarios and narratives tend to be more closely aligned to “good story-telling” rather than producing multivariate forecasts and relationships. Lastly, the group was asked to identify the *Early Warning Signals* for each scenario and the *Strategic Options* that the HoCL could adopt if these future scenarios were to emerge (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Scenario A: Are we Vivian Westwood or Primark?

Narrative: in this scenario HoCL customers do not value its impartial library service and R&R programme mean that is there a reduced amount of physical space available for use by library services. MPs and their staff still use the library, but they are much more interested in getting partial information that confirms their existing bias and supports their own political arguments.

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Only a small number of MPs will use the face-to-face service because the provision is both limited and located far from where they normally congregate.

The loss of value in providing an impartial service undermines trust and MPs can no longer say “this is from the library, therefore, it’s good”. The library is faced with a significant choice – does it become a low-quality, high-volume service akin to the discount fashion chain Primark, or a high quality, low volume information service that the participants described as Vivian Westwood – the independent global luxury fashion house?

Early Warning Signals: a fall in enquiries; more questions where MPs want a predetermined answer; more frequent challenges/complaints.

Implications

MPs will use ‘alternative facts’ sourced from less impartial sources to support their arguments. As a result, the demand for HoCL services will fall, particularly from face-to-face enquiries, and it will be difficult for the leadership team to justify a high-quality service provision. As a consequence, there will be fewer library services staff, less resource investment made in services and the more experienced staff will leave, resulting in a smaller and less skilled library services provision.

Strategic Options

- Reset the mission, vision and strategic direction
- Market research to establish what customers value
- Innovate a limited range of new ‘valued’ services
- Recruit/re-train staff for appropriate low level service provision
- Proactive marketing of the brand and service provision
- Cuts costs to ensure financial viability

Scenario B: Small Library, Big Voice

Narrative: HoCL services has been moved into a new and smaller space as a result of the R&R programme, however, customers value an impartial library service. The staff are highly skilled and provide the majority of service provision through online face-to-face interaction to a smaller number of MPs and their staff. The breadth and technical capability of information resources and tools is overwhelming to its users. As such, HoCL staff not only provide value to users through high quality and impartial information, but as trainers, navigators and curators in a complex information world.

Early Warning Signals: Research and Information Management Board confirms the relocation of Library Services; other libraries' investment in new technologies; increased usage of online HoCL Services; increased number of requests for library resources training.

Implications

HoCL services are valued for its impartiality. Space restrictions will limit face-to-face interaction and access to physical services and holdings. Whilst, the remote location and lack of technical skills will alienate some customers, this scenario provides the library leadership team with the stimulus to move the core service provision online and across multiple channels. In addition, library staff will need to be (re)trained as highly skilled trainers and technologists.

Strategic Options

- Proactive marketing of the brand and service provision
- Innovate a range of new revolutionary online and multi-channel services
- Recruit/re-train staff for online face-to-face service provision
- Offer MPs and their staff training services for library use
- Develop high quality remote storage and retrieval capabilities
- MPs and their staff are ignorant of information possibilities

Scenario C: Are we the next Debenhams?

Narrative: The once illustrious reputation of the HoCL services has been consigned to history and its services are now regarded by customers as irrelevant. As with the UK department store Debenhams, its market leading position was eroded by changing consumer and technological trends and its ability to adapt ultimately resulted in its demise.

In a world of alternative facts, MPs and their staff choose ‘quick access’ information sources like Google and are not concerned by the lack of rigour and impartiality of these data sources. With a decline in information requests library staffing and budgets are significantly reduced. The once highly skilled staff base has left, leaving behind a less capable and demoralised work force.

Early Warning Signals: a decline in information requests; increased usage of alternative facts by MPs; high staff turnover; increase staff sickness; decline in the reputation of the HoCL services.

Implications

With MPs and their staff using ‘alternative facts’ and sources to support their arguments, there will be a reduction in library services usage and in particular, face-to-face enquiries. It becomes increasingly difficult for the library leadership team to justify high quality service provision and a reduction in staffing and resourcing will be inevitable. Experienced staff leave and will result in a skills gap amongst remaining staff.

Strategic Options

- Reset the mission, vision and strategic direction
- Market research to establish what customers value
- Innovate a limited range of new ‘valued’ services
- Recruit/re-train staff for appropriate low level service provision
- Proactive marketing of the brand and service provision

- Cuts costs to ensure financial viability

Scenario D: Library Nirvana

Narrative: HoCL services is widely regarded as a trusted and authoritative information source which enables it to secure a high amount of physical space during the R&R programme. Its high-class reputation is built on not only knowing and understanding user needs but anticipating them. Library Services staff are highly skilled, ethically aware, well-resourced and valued as curators of complex information.

In an increasingly technologically driven information world, the HoCL services can leverage its reputation to draw on resources to keep pace with technology and provide innovative services that incorporate data visualisation, Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality.

Early Warning Signals: positive word of mouth; increasing demand for services; increasing space requirements; increased budget; delivering service innovation; ability to demonstrate the impact of its work.

Implications

The HoCL services should leverage its brand and reputation to secure additional resources which enables it to keep pace with technological innovation. It must change its culture toward taking risks that support innovation and learning and continue to adapt its service provision to meet changing customer needs. The recruitment and (re)training of highly skilled staff is essential to delivering a high-quality service.

Strategic options

- Innovate a range of technologically driven information services
- Continuous market research to identify changing technology trends, customer needs, skills and service gaps
- Recruit/re-train staff for adaptable service provision

- Proactive marketing to leverage the brand and impact

Developing a Strategic Direction

Scenario Planning is a useful management tool that enables library leadership teams to consider how changing operating dynamics will affect their organizations. It also provides a platform on which to develop a strategic discussion about a *vision for the future* and to consider how different scenarios may “change or obstruct the pathway to success” (Farrell, 2015, p.124). Once established, a long-term vision will provide leadership teams and staff with an organizational focus and help direct resource allocations and manage change (Buck, 2016). So how did we move from a scenario planning project to developing a long-term vision and strategy for library services provision?

The concept of ‘Strategic Intent’ (Hamel & Prahalad, 1989; O’Shannassy, 2016) provided a useful platform on which to answer this question. Strategic Intent argues that organisations needed to create an obsession with winning in tough, fast changing and unpredictable markets, and should not content themselves with simply fitting in with their current environment. The scenario planning project forced the library leadership and staff to consider the most uncertain operating environment possible, and yet, within this context there were some ‘commonalities’ in the strategic options that could be applied within each scenario. The common strategic options were:

Market Research: track emerging trends to identify innovative services (gaps)/and stakeholder views on value.

Innovation: supporting innovation in services and processes.

Staff Development: (re)training, upskilling for a changing world.

Reputation Management: continual communication that re-enforces the message of HoCL brand and services.

It was these commonalities that underpinned the development of a strategic intent for the HoCL Services.

Strategic implementation

The process of developing a long-term vision and strategy for HoCL Services involved building on the insights and strategic intent generated by the July workshop through a series of follow-up workshops held by the Library Services Leadership Group during September and October 2021. These took the form of four hour long structured discussions within the team each focused on one of the scenarios produced by the original workshop. The objective was to review and sense check the narratives along with the early warning signs and implications, testing the degree to which the group agreed with the conclusions and whether anything had been missed. In order to ensure the discussions informed the development of a mission, vision and strategy for Library Services the sessions were framed around a series of questions, including:

- What clear themes can we identify which can be embedded in our strategy?
- What are our priorities?
- How do we fit these themes into a development plan?

As Library Services is the directorate in the House of Commons Library that deals with the supply of information resources and services and is not responsible for the production of analysis and briefings, which is handled by the separate Research directorate, the Leadership Group decided at an early point it was more useful to reframe the critical uncertainty of *value placed on an impartial Library service* as the more general *value customers place on Library services as a whole*. This enabled the group to concentrate on themes it felt were of most relevance to it.

The key themes which emerged from the follow-up workshops were:

Scenario A: how to define quality; the need to adapt to changing user needs; the importance of engagement and communication with users

Scenario B: training for staff and the need to identify the expertise or specialisms that will be required in the future

Scenario C: staff morale and the need to improve confidence and the ability to be assertive about professional expertise; importance of the articulation of a clear identity and the benefits we provide to different user groups

Scenario D: how to innovate and stay at the leading edge; how to redevelop space and blend heritage and modern aspects.

The results of the follow-up workshops were then used to create a mission and strategy document which was presented to staff and the Research & Information Management Board as a *Manifesto for Library Services* in November 2021. This articulates the identity of the directorate ('the House of Commons experts in information resources') and sets out its priorities for development. These were:

- Build closer relationships with users to understand their needs and ways of working better
- Engage with the wider library and information profession to identify emerging trends and adopt best practice
- Identify skills gaps and support colleagues with training to develop existing expertise and acquire the new skills necessary to support the innovation required to meet users' changing needs
- Develop the confidence and morale of our staff to enable them to communicate with colleagues more effectively and be recognised as trusted professional partners
- Review collections to ensure we have the right material in the appropriate formats and locations to meet users' changing needs as well as custodial responsibilities
- Expand the training and support to our users to increase the impact of collections, tools and services
- Identify gaps in provision for existing users and fill them by developing appropriate facilities and services
- Learn lessons from other renovation and relocation programmes to enhance preparation for Restoration & Renewal, build resilience, reduce risk and manage change effectively
- Engage with the R&R Programme and stakeholders to ensure the Library's requirements are fully developed, understood, documented and incorporated into the programme's plans

The Manifesto priorities were then used to inform the Library Services directorate's input into the annual Research & Information business plan and as the basis of its own Action Plan, setting objectives for the following year, with each of the priorities having one or more actions associated with it.

By July 2022 significant progress had been achieved in implementing these initiatives, specifically:

- Build closer relationships with users: adoption of a liaison librarian model for the librarians embedded with Research teams, involving an explicit focus on developing a deeper understanding of teams' working methods and priorities and participation in user inductions and Customer Services led check-ins with MPs and their staff
- Engage with the wider library and information profession: creation of an Academic Librarians Parliamentary network to connect with the university sector plus discussions with Research Libraries UK about collaboration with UK academic and national libraries, as well as development of specific plans for co-operation with the London School of Economics Library
- Build skills and knowledge: commissioning a skills survey of Library Services staff by the UK industry body, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, to inform the creation of a professional development programme for teams
- Develop confidence and communication: set up of a network of champions across the group to lead communication and advocacy work and apply the communications guidance which had been developed as well as the production of a *'What we do'* document explaining the purpose and priorities of each Library Service team
- Review the collection: completion of an 18 month collection evaluation project clarifying the collection's purpose and priorities
- Expand training and support for users: creation of a user education group to develop a user education and support strategy plus development of a suite of online resource guides using a template developed by an external consultant
- Prepare for Restoration & Renewal: creation of a programme of work to develop strategic operating principles for delivery of services during removal from and subsequent reoccupation of the Palace of Westminster, including holding horizon scanning workshops with stakeholders and connecting with colleagues in the Library of the Canadian Parliament which is going through a similar extensive restoration project involving decant and relocation of collection and services from historic buildings.

Conclusion

The level of uncertainty for the HoCL as a result of the planned long-term Restoration and Renewal programme of the Palace of Westminster is significant. Given this context, Scenario Planning seemed an appropriate management tool to employ because of its ability to develop strategic insight into the long-term direction of library services provision.

The outcomes of the project enabled the leadership team to have a different perspective on how to 'manage' strategic uncertainty by considering how each scenario changed operating dynamics and the implications for library services provision. This change in perspective meant that what was previously considered to be 'uncontrollable' in the operating environment provided an opportunity to adapt service provision and consolidate recurring strategic options from each scenario under the broad banner of a 'strategic intent'. This encompassed a focus on market research, innovation, staff development and reputation management as fundamental tenants of future high quality service provision over the long term and provided a platform for strategic discussion and action that resulted in the *Manifesto for Library Services*.

There is no doubt that the scenario-based approach to developing the 'library of the future' has enabled the leadership team to take a proactive approach to managing the uncertainty surrounding the Restoration and Renewal programme of the Palace of Westminster. In essence, this project has not only prepared the leadership team to plan for the future, it enabled them to 'make their own future' in the face of extraordinary levels of uncertainty. It has also equipped the HoCL services team with scenario planning knowledge and skills in order to manage the uncertainty caused by future macro and micro forces and issues.

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Appendix 1. Scenario planning: headlines, narratives, and early warning signals

Key Focal Issue: What will high quality House of Commons Library services look like in 10 years?

<p>Are we Vivian Westwood or Primark?</p> <p>Narrative: MPs and their staff still use the HoCL, but they are much more interested in getting partial information that confirms their existing bias and supports their own arguments. Only a small number of MPs will use the face-to-face service because the provision is both limited and located far from where they normally congregate.</p> <p>The loss of value in providing an impartial service undermines trust and MPs can no longer say "this is from the library, therefore, it's good". The library is faced with a significant choice – does it become a low-quality, high-volume service or a high quality, low volume information service?</p> <p>Early Warning Signals: a fall in enquiries; more questions where MPs want a predetermined answer; more frequent challenges/complaints.</p> <p>Low <i>The value customers place on an impartial Library Service</i></p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">The amount of physical space available for use by library services</p>	<p>Small Library, Big Voice</p> <p>Narrative: HoCL services has been moved into a new and smaller space. The staff are highly skilled and provide the majority of service provision through online face-to-face interaction to a smaller number of MPs and their staff. The breadth and technical capability of information resources and tools is overwhelming to its users. As such, HoCL staff not only provide value to users through high quality and impartial information, but as trainers, navigators and curators in a complex information world.</p> <p>Early Warning Signals: Research and Information Management Board confirms the relocation of Library Services; other libraries investment in new technologies; increased usage of online HoCL services; increased number of requests for library resources training.</p> <p><i>The value customers place on an impartial Library Service</i> High</p>
<p>Are we the next Debenhams?</p> <p>Narrative: The once illustrious reputation of the HoCL services has been consigned to history and its services are now regarded by customers as irrelevant. In a world of alternative facts, MPs and their staff choose 'quick access' information sources like Google and are not concerned by the lack of rigour and impartiality of these data sources.</p> <p>With a decline in information requests, library staffing and budgets are significantly reduced. The once highly skilled staff base has left, leaving behind a less capable and demoralised workforce.</p> <p>Early Warning Signals: a decline in information requests; increased usage of alternative facts by MPs; high staff turnover; increase staff sickness; decline in the reputation of the HoCL services.</p> <p>Low <i>The value customers place on an impartial Library Service</i></p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">The amount of physical space available for use by library services</p>	<p>Library Nirvana</p> <p>Narrative: HoCL services is widely regarded as a trusted and authoritative information source which enables it to secure a high amount of physical space during the R&R programme. Its high-class reputation is built on not only knowing and understanding user needs but anticipating them. Library Services staff are highly skilled, ethically aware, well-resourced and valued as curators of complex information.</p> <p>In an increasingly technologically driven information world, the HoCL services can leverage its reputation to draw on resources to keep pace with technology and provide innovative services that incorporate data visualisation, Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality.</p> <p>Early Warning Signals: positive word of mouth; increasing demand for services; increasing space requirements; increased budget; delivering innovative service innovation; ability to demonstrate impact.</p> <p>High</p>

Appendix 2. Scenario planning: implications and strategic options

Key Focal Issue: What will high quality House of Commons Library services look like in 10 years?

<p>Are we Vivian Westwood or Primark?</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MPs will use 'alternative facts' and sources to support their arguments High turnover of experienced staff will result in a skills gap Less face-to-face enquiries Difficult to justify high quality service provision Fewer HoCL services staff and resources required <p>Strategic Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reset the mission, vision and strategic direction Market research to establish what customers value Innovate a limited range of new 'valued' services Recruit/re-train staff for appropriate low level service provision Proactive marketing of the brand and service provision Cuts costs to ensure financial viability <p>Low <i>The value customers place on an impartial Library Service</i></p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">The amount of physical space available for use by library services</p>	<p>Small Library, Big Voice</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HoCL services are valued for its impartiality Space restrictions limits access to physical services and holdings The core service provision is online, face-to-face and multi-channel Remote location and lack of technical skills alienates some customers Staff need to be (re)trained as highly skilled trainers and technologists MPs and their staff are ignorant of information possibilities <p>Strategic Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive marketing of the brand and service provision Innovate a range of new revolutionary online and multi-channel services Recruit/re-train staff for online face-to-face service provision Offer MPs and their staff training services for library use Develop high quality remote storage and retrieval capabilities <p><i>The value customers place on an impartial Library Service</i> High</p>
<p>Are we the next Debenhams?</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A fall in demand will result in the closure of some services Library space will be reallocated to other parliamentary activities Budgets and investment will be significantly reduced Highly skilled staff will leave Fewer and demoralised staff <p>Strategic Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage organisational decline (reduce costs/limit investment) Market research to establish what customers value Innovate a limited range of new 'valued' and 'personalised' services, but fail fast and learn from experimental failures Recruit/re-train staff for low level service provision Proactive marketing of the value of impartiality to MPs and their staff <p>Low <i>The value customers place on an impartial Library Service</i></p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">The amount of physical space available for use by library services</p>	<p>Library Nirvana</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imperative to keep pace with technological innovation A change in culture toward taking risks that support innovation and learning Ability to adapt service provision to meet changing customer needs Recruit and (re)train highly skilled staff A need to leverage the HoCL services brand and reputation <p>Strategic options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovate a range of technologically driven information services Continuous market research to identify changing technology trends, customer needs, skills and service gaps Recruit/re-train staff for adaptable service provision Proactive marketing to leverage the brand and impact <p>High</p>

