Chapter 4

Enabling Scholarship in the Digital Age: A Case for Libraries Creating Value at HBS

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ABSTRACT

With the ubiquitous digital ecosystem providing information to faculty and students in real time via a myriad of channels, does an academic research library continue to provide real value to faculty’s research and teaching as well as students’ learning? Or, has the academic research library become irrelevant to twenty-first century scholarship? Describing a variation on information literacy and research skills development approaches, this chapter makes a case for embedding good information practice into a library’s products and self-service tools rather than investing in standalone instruction. Close alignment with institutional priorities, the application of user-centric product and service design principles, and a commitment to innovation in information management practices and platforms are cornerstones of this strategy in a graduate business school library. Loosely based on Harvard Business School’s case method, this chapter details two frameworks used by HBS’s Baker Library, and provides examples of information products created to enable student learning.

INTRODUCTION

A Harvard Business School (HBS) case typically begins with a standard story opener. The protagonist is introduced, contemplating his or her leadership challenge or opportunity. The weather or a current event—often described in an informal, if not chatty way—helps set the scene. Facts about the organization, the industry context, the cast of characters, or an interesting geographic feature follow next—all the salient points woven together to fuel the learning objectives, sprinkled with a red herring or two that cause the students to pause and sharpen their analytical skills. The facts are presented, the dilemma restated, and the baton passed to the reader for reflection in preparation for a study group before class the next morning. What is your assessment of the challenge? How would you handle the situation? What parallels do you see from other cases? What is your advice to the protagonist?

Supplementary information is found at the end of the case—exhibits that quantify the narrative’s key messages include additional data that may or may not help the reader make an informed decision. Of course the real value of the case study is the discussion with 90 students awaiting the infamous cold call, the opportunity to open the case and lay out the facts in a way that leads to a compelling resolution (“The HBS Case Method,” n.d.).

Many HBS cases also have an accompanying teaching note—a resource for the case discussion leader on how to make the most of the learning opportunity. The teaching note is not a step by step teaching plan, but an overview of key points, how to position the material to maximize the learning outcome, background on frameworks or approaches, additional industry or sector information, and often the back-story to the case development. (Wallace, 2014, pp. 11-27)

Some cases are followed by a “B” case, an alternative look at the original challenge outlined in the “A” case based on new or additional information or a change in the protagonist’s environment. Time may have passed, the players may have changed, but the challenge or opportunity remains to be discussed, albeit from a different perspective.

This chapter is framed by components of these two HBS learning materials—the case (A and B) and the teaching note. An overview of the challenge academic libraries are facing to remain relevant, to create value in the digital age within the context of one organization’s environment, and a description of Baker Library’s innovation challenge and opportunity management frameworks are presented in the “A” Case to stimulate your thinking and spark your imagination about approaches in your own organization. The “B” Case illustrates how Baker Library’s innovation and opportunity management approaches have resulted in a new approach to information literacy skill development based on user-centric design, faculty collaboration, and products designed to enable course- or curriculum-specific learning activities.
Use of Public Programming Strategies in Promoting Access to Documentary Heritage at Zimbabwe National Archives
