Lessons Learned for Libraries during the Pandemic: A Review

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ABSTRACT

The Corona virus has affected a myriad of professions and scientific institutions around the world, and the library and information centers have also suffered from adverse consequences of the pandemic. The way libraries have confronted and experienced the new transformations during the pandemic are of great importance and should be explored. Due to the unpredictable timeline of the pandemic, libraries and information centers have to adapt to changes and should be properly prepared for the post pandemic era. Lessons learned from the pandemic can be effectively utilized as and when the reopening of libraries and future planning services. Defining a practical unified model for the reopening as well as having resilience according to library values and policies is absolutely vital. To achieve this goal, Apollo project model was introduced and developed for libraries in the post pandemic period. Library values should also be deemed as an essential factor for raising the awareness to people about libraries in the society during this pandemic period. It is suggested that library leaders, librarians including library equipment and services, are to be adapted to the current pandemic and post pandemic transformations and conditions. Libraries and information centers will be competently better at serving their communities, implementing their instructions and be more efficient in playing their role during post pandemic.

Keywords: Library reopening, Post pandemic, Library services, Library values, Apollo project model

INTRODUCTION

Corona virus known as "COVID-19" appeared in the city of Wuhan, China, and has spread rapidly to all countries across the world.

The fast spread of this virus has called the attention of the world to quickly take all the necessary steps and measures to fight and control the virus. Presently, the global community is ravaged by the pandemic while the end to the COVID-19 remains unknown due to variations of its spread among the countries (Ladan, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has become a long-term reality, disrupting all aspects of life for everyone on our planet and impacting nearly every profession, including libraries (Jones, 2020).

Critical roles of libraries are undeniable in society in multiple sectors; Not only do libraries offer information and resources on many ways, but also serve as community centers and welcoming environments on campuses and in various communities. Meanwhile, with the pandemic, many libraries have had to close their doors to in-person gatherings and services and transformed to an online environment, often within hours, so Librarians have had to make decisions and change very quickly and continually during the current

environment and library management has to decide what should be done in health crisis either for the society or for the library survival (Connaway, 2020).

Since, the potential roles of the libraries and their associates to acquire, evaluate, package, store and disseminate information, have placed a huge demand to intervene in critical situation such as pandemic era (Yap ,2020), therefore, Libraries and librarians still need to pursue their potential services in a global landscape, despite the emergence of unavoidable disturbances caused by COVID-19.

Ali & Gatiti (2020) revealed that there will be a significant role for librarians and information specialists during a pandemic situation in a country. They listed the expected role of a librarian; firstly, to promote public health awareness by creating and disseminating information relating to preventive measures; secondly to support research teams, researchers and faculty by providing information regarding the latest developments, research and literature; and finally to meet the core needs of regular library users.

As the prominent roles of librarians around the world are quite distinctive, hence it is better to review and take a quick look at some libraries efforts and experiences during pandemic in different countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Idhalama (2020), investigated the perceptions and attitudes of library and information professionals toward COVID-19 and the compulsory lockdown in Nigeria. An online survey was developed to get responses from 97 Nigerian library and information professionals. Findings of the research indicated that the majority of library and information professionals in Nigeria preferred partial lockdown to full lockdown, while other respondents felt that the current lockdown has brought economic recession and acute hunger in the land and for sustaining the prestige of the profession, government should tackle and fight the pandemic to the standstill.

Landoy, (2020) investigated how the University of Bergen Library in Norway, handled the challenges following the COVID-19 pandemic when the University of Bergen closed the campus on short notice and the Library immediately had to go fully digital by helping students by more automated access to electronic books and services. The results were the expansion of e-mail and chat-functions with librarians working from home with less-than-ideal infrastructure.

The suspension of in-person services and loss of access to physical collections at the University of Toronto's network of academic libraries left more than 100,000 students, staff, and faculty with only remote library support available for their research. Leveraging and expanding existing online services and digital collections and acquiring or building new research tools for scholars to deploy, were approaches the University of Toronto Libraries' staff have taken since the COVID-19 pandemic changed library operations (Walsh, 2020).

Roe (2020), described the experience and actions of the Laurentian University Library and Archives in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic over the spring and summer of 2020. The pandemic and the campus shutdown were experienced as disorienting and stressful for library employees, although work continued as well as possible. Over the course of the summer, a kerbside pickup and scanning service launched, a HathiTrust membership was sought, on-site archival work was restarted and plans were prepared for opening library space for study.

Bakti (2020), analyzed the use of social networking services in post-COVID-19 libraries based on Zoom webinar in Indonasia. The results of the analysis revealed that most participants declared the importance of changing the role of libraries and librarians post COVID-19. In addition, they also indicated the importance of innovation in creating new products by librarians to meet the needs of post-COVID-19 users.

Chewe (2020), investigated the potential social media role in academic libraries in Zambia in pandemic times. The study found that while the use of social media for personal purposes was very high, the application of these platforms to facilitate service delivery was nonexistent. Challenges such as lack of social media literacy skills and poor technological infrastructure were critical success factors that needed to be addressed. For adopting social media tools for effective library services, it was recommended that Library managements needed to provide support to mobilize librarians into a more proactive and participatory role in creating social media presence. Moreover, Enhancing and upgrading social media literacy skills of academic librarians were of a great importance and finally designing a social media strategy to guide a smooth adoption and use of social media was proposed.

Yap (2020), studied the role of libraries in Kazakhstan during the pandemic and how they responded quickly to avoid disruption of programs and services.

Library of congress has postponed and cancelled all public events, including concerts and music-related programs, beginning in mid-March 2020 to reduce the risk of transmitting corona virus. Recently The Library's Concerts staff embraced a new challenge, expanding virtual efforts to share extraordinary musical experiences with audiences worldwide through a project called The Boccaccio Project which consisted of ten pairs of composers and performers to write and perform brief solo works in response to their experiences during the global pandemic (Moats, 2020).

Franca (2021) conducted a research on how COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on Edge Hill University libraries in the Uk and how due to restrictions in place and limited access, they could overcome the physical library space by increasing in investment in digital content to better support students in the current climate. Their experience involved the digital provision of University text books via their library website and development of broader library remote access for all students.

Harris (2021), examined the impact of the novel corona virus on Jamaican academic libraries during the first six months of the pandemic. The results of this study showed that the library pandemic preparedness and management had the biggest impact on staffing and service mobility. The study also proposed a continuity planning checklist focused on the strengths, various lessons learned, and the future reopening.

Othman (2021), measured the efficacy of synchronous web-based learning during ongoing pandemic, among postgraduate Library and Information Science (LIS) students of Bangladesh. The results revealed that limitation of internet data, unstable internet, along with power blackouts were some of the primary inhibitors blocking the participants to attend classes online. This study concluded that most students do not seem to be ready yet to study in a synchronous delivery mode. It also recommended educational institutions in Bangladesh to provide an alternative delivery method, in order to sustain academic excellence in these challenging times.

As library experiences are widely different according to their needs and conditions, it is absolutely necessary to organize a defined policy and model for reopening in post pandemic.

LIBRARY REOPENING MODEL

Boardly (2020), described how the space-age technology Project Apollo method could be applied to pandemic issues such as re-opening schools in the U.S. Apollo engineering used six key steps of systems engineering to facilitate the management of such a task which include:
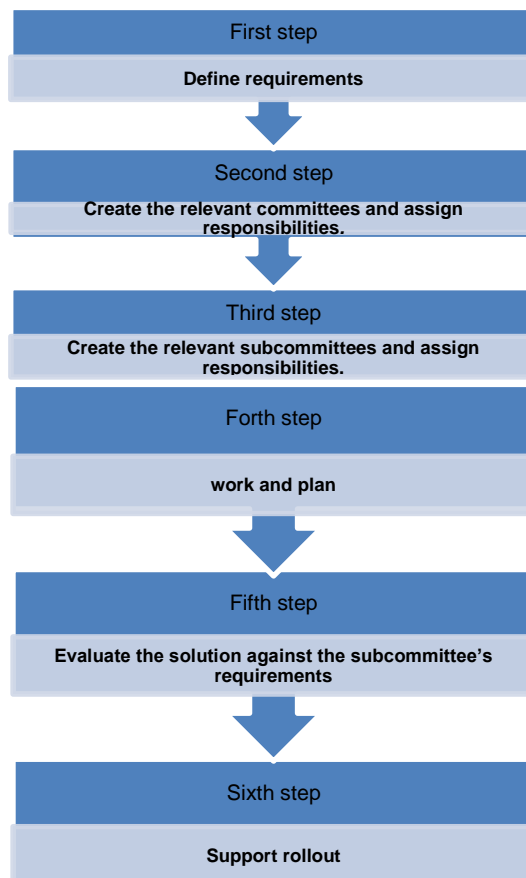
Figure1: Apollo project model for library reopening

These key elements of systems engineering can also be implemented for reopening of the libraries around the world after pandemic.

Define requirements:
The first step in planning to return patrons to libraries or information centers is by identifying stakeholders – including students, instructors, researchers and librarians– to hear their concerns. Then, planners must itemize the key benefits that libraries can provide in addition to training and services.

Create the relevant committees and assign responsibilities:
Coordinating a wide range of instructions is critical to safely reopening libraries. To do so, a small task force outlines an overarching approach breaking down the overall effort into its component parts, such as libraries ventilation and sanitation, development and services. The task force then creates a committee for each 'sub-problems,' such as an on-site librarian committee, testing and tracing, a remote service committee and a medical committee. To ensure that each individual group contributes to a successful overall solution, the task force develops committee requirements to guide and evaluate their efforts, while giving each committee as much flexibility as possible in leveraging its expertise.

Create the relevant subcommittees and assign responsibilities:
Each library committee outlines its approach to its sub-problem and creates subcommittees to provide more detail on different elements of the approach. For example, the on-site library committee might break off into smaller groups that address safety enforcement, design and building ventilation. Each subcommittee is given 'subcommittee requirements' to guide its efforts. If necessary, work can be further specialized within sub-committees as the space shuttle program involves more than a dozen levels of responsibility.

Work and plan:
As each subcommittee tackles its assignment, coordinators orchestrate their efforts to avert missteps and enhance synergies between other groups. For example, if the safety subcommittee concludes that some members will not keep masks on in library, the coordinator might create more aggressive requirements for those working on library design and ventilation.

Evaluate the solution against the subcommittee's requirements:
Integrate proposals from every committee. Once all issues facing on-site committee have been addressed, individual solutions – on masks, building ventilation, design, and more – are evaluated as a whole before being approved as the committee's integrated, overall solution. The committee solution is then evaluated against the committee's requirements. Each of the committee solutions is then evaluated as a whole before becoming the task force's plan. The task force's plan is then evaluated against its requirements. Stakeholder representatives then evaluate whether the plan ensures that libraries can, indeed, open safely.

Support rollout:

Initially, these protocols are implemented at a small scale and then ramped up slowly as all are trained to understand their responsibilities: librarians, administrators and other staff. Maintenance and adaptation is needed to deal with unforeseen events such as running out of masks or patrons and library staffs getting sick. Once an effective vaccine is available and the pandemic dissipates, the plan can detail how some protocols can be safely dismantled.

As Libraries worldwide are exploiting different resources, experiences and policies for better contact with their users, library values should not be neglected in a post pandemic world.

For this reasons, five key values of libraries are elaborated (IFLA policy and advocacy blog, 2020):

Information matters:
The importance of the access to information that libraries provide is only as great as the importance of the information itself, in the eyes of a decision maker. Pandemic is a good time to ensure a focus on creating strong and sustainable information infrastructures, not least in the shape of libraries, in order to ensure the preservation, organization and availability of information into the future.

Connectivity matters:
Libraries' mission to provide access to information for training and support in the pandemic times has made strong case for a serious investment in moving towards universal connectivity.

Universality matters:
The pandemic has had far reaching different consequences for almost everyone, especially those in precarious jobs often suffered far more than others. Libraries are a great example of this, with a clear mission to provide universal services. Libraries themselves always need to be aware of how their work may be more or less accessible or welcoming to different individuals and groups.

Culture matters:
Culture is all too often seen as being at the periphery of policy-making, a secondary concern compared to issues such as finance, security or foreign affairs. The Pandemic has seen many turn to culture as a source of comfort in difficult times, as well as making clear the role of cultural concerns (the norms, values, and behaviors of individuals and groups) in the effectiveness of the response. Cultural institutions, not least libraries, have also been valuable sources of information for responses and put things into context.

Rights matter:
A common theme in the four previous sections has been the idea that people have rights – to information, education, public services and culture. The pandemic has brought home to many the value of these rights, often of course when they are compromised. It has also forced greater awareness and reflection on the tension that can exist between rights – freedom of assembly and the right to health, freedom of speech and the right not to be subject to discrimination.
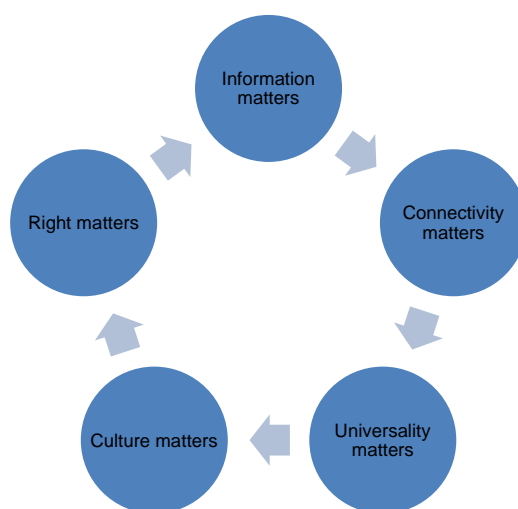
Figure 2: Five key values of libraries in pandemic and post pandemic period

Lessons learned from pandemic for post pandemic period

Here, some useful Lessons learned from pandemic to adopt for post pandemic period are outlined for leaders, libraries, and librarians:

Library leaders:
It is obvious that library leaders are making continuous changes and are interested in sharing and learning from each other in order to provide resources and assistance to their communities in this new environment.

Some of the themes that library leaders should be concerned about include both the challenges and opportunities of retraining and reassigning staffs in either all online or in a hybrid environment that includes some in-person as well as online services. Library leaders should also have effective collaboration with other departments within their communities, local businesses and industries, professional associations, and library consortia (Connaway,2020).

Equipment:
Many libraries should offer hot spots, laptops, chrome books, and tablets to their public and academic communities. However, the need for this equipment has increased and if there are funds to purchase more of this equipment, there is a great demand for them and a short supply available for purchase. Some students, faculty, and library staff may have limited or no Wi-Fi service at home. Librarians can provide equipment and technology access enabling individuals to teach, learn, and work from home, highlighting the digital divide for both community members and library staff.

Library staff:
Some library staff needs to be retrained so they become capable of transforming their workflows to an online environment. Library staffs perceive this as an opportunity to try new ways of working and providing programs, resources, and services. Others may identify this transition as a good challenge, such as creating metadata for open content,

making physical resources available with no or minimal metadata, and providing library users the capabilities to order materials and to have them directly shipped to their homes. Most library staff may feel the intensified pressure of the challenges associated with e-resources, e-textbooks, e-book loan restrictions, and copyright and licensing agreements.

Reference services:
It is advised that reference services that are offered in person or as hybrid models (both in person and virtual) should immediately switch to virtual. Chat and email reference services need to be increased, with library staff having to set up and learn virtual reference services. Reference consultations are suggested to be conducted through video conferencing tools or telephone (Connaway,2020).

Library instruction programs:
Instruction programs, such as story times, author talks, artist exhibitions, and information literacy instruction, should all be offered through video conferencing and webinars. Academic librarians need to assist faculties with preparing online courses and to embed information literacy instructions into courses and virtual learning environments.

Interlibrary loan services:
For some libraries, interlibrary loan may become more heavily used and depended upon. This means that library users are able to directly order materials from certain online sites and have the materials delivered to the individuals' homes. The library staff can retain records of the purchases and provide metadata for discovery based on the order of information.

Although library budgets and staffing restrictions and limitations can be a challenge to the operation of services mentioned above, pandemic uncertain times will make these pressures more concerning. A major concern is how to make the case that the physical library still be very important in a community. Some ideas include promoting and marketing the library's offerings in the online environment as well as cultivating and developing online communities.

CONCLUSION

As in so many other parts of our society, COVID-19 has forced many changes and challenges to the ways in which libraries operate. Although libraries have undergone various pressures and transformations in pandemic times, have experienced emerging roles, sought new technologies and proposed rapid online services; they often look forward to what have not been fulfilled yet, according to their expectations. As predicting the ending time for pandemic is still unknown and libraries are still in their infancy of experiencing unforeseeable problems, it is necessary to plan a unified integrated model for library reopening programs. Apollo project method with regard to library values and goals are the key factors in managing and providing better services for potential library users and researchers; however, practical lessons learned from libraries experiences around the world are also adaptable to post pandemic period and should not be neglected.

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