Best Practices in Libraries: An Overview

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Abstract: *Libraries are the service institutions satisfying the information needs of the users are their ultimate goal .In this paper we discussed about the various best practices practicising in different libraries. The best practices are not one time solution but a continuous process, by adopting these practices in libraries they can provide information service more effectively and efficiently.*
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I.   Introduction

Work is changing—it is becoming more collaborative and driven by technological change, ubiquitous access to information, and global organizations. So the workplace must change, requiring support for mobile workers who are empowered to choose where, how, and with whom they work rather than be assigned a single workspace unlikely to meet all their needs. This implies a new balance of individual and collaborative space, with blended settings that combine physical and virtual interaction. Libraries and knowledge centers have been regarded as places centered on information storage and retrieval within environments of quiet, individual contemplation. However, these libraries have the opportunity to become true "hubs" within the workplace—fostering collaboration, facilitating discovery, fueling innovation, and expressing the organization's culture and brand. To capitalize on this opportunity, these hubs must be planned using a research based process to forecast user needs and develop innovative, adaptable solutions that can change over time.

II.   Best Practices

Best practices are the best ways to perform a process, a function, or an activity that leads to a superior performance. These pertain to the processes, practices, and systems identified in public and private organizations that perform exceptionally well and are widely recognized as improving organization's performance and efficiency. Successfully identifying and applying best practices can reduce costs and improve quality. Best Practices are the means by which leading organizations in any field have achieved top performance, and they serve as goals for the other organizations striving for excellence.

Australian Best Practice Demonstration Program defines best practice as, "the pursuit of world class performance. It is the way in which the most successful organizations manage and organize their operations. It is a moving target. As the leading organizations continue to improve the 'best practice', goalposts are constantly moving. The concept of continuous improvement is integral to the achievement of best practice" Best Practice is a management idea which asserts that there is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc. these are the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a task.

These are the tools helps for the continuous improvements of the system, process and services and the applications best practices add exceptional value to an institution and are considered as reliable benchmarks or standards of quality.
 The Best Practices can be summarized as

a)   Collection Development:
Libraries should have build their collections in such a manner that include the all types ofr information sources(digital/hybrid) library with the acquisition of digital collection/non book material (CD's, DVD's, VCD's, Film's, Map's, Globe's, e-books, etc).

b)   Weeding out of less used/Outdated Reading Material:
This is the process of separating less used/outdated collection on regular basis is done with the help of circulation data and the suggestions of Faculty and Students. These less used/outdated books are being stored in the dead stock unit. As all these books are already in the automated/digital database, their location will be shown on dead stock. The user searches the OPAC and demand for any of these less used/outdated collections from dead stock. The Library staff can find and supply the required book and replace after its use. The major problem of less used/outdated books can be reduced to zero. User's time in retrieving the documents also is saved.

c)   Library Book Exhibition:
Libraries should organize book exhibition from time to time of book with the help of publishers and distributors. The motive behind is to bring awareness among the students on the latest books available in their subjects as well as to enable them in book selection process.

d)   Work as regional repository :
Libraries can also act as cultural storehouses by building the collections of books of local collection which portray their History, Culture, Economy, Geography, and Ecology and about their Society Standards Collection.

e)   User Education or orientation:
Library orientation or educating the users is very important to create the awareness about the library resources and services this will helps to users information they need to locate the information quickly and effectively and thus to ensure the maximum use.

f)   Library best user award:
This will helps to attract more students to visit the library and use the resources. Data is gathered through visitor register maintained in the library. Usage data is compiled through circulation of library items. Based on the above data and the observations of the library, one Best User Award, in form of a book or any attractive gift is given to the student who has made maximum use of the library.

g)   Promotional Scheme of books for Scholars:
Libraries can adopt this scheme by providing extra reading materials to the users those are first & second in rank of their annual exams.

ICT-enabled practices

h)   Automation of Library Services:
To meet the fourth law of Library sciences i.e save the time of the user automation of all the housekeeping operations viz. acquisition of books and other material, creating maintenance of its catalogued database, circulation of its holdings etc, is essential and to give service more quickly, efficiently and effectively. Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) facilitates the users to search for information by author, subject, title, ISBN, keywords etc and helps to reserve item on loan, view special collections, cancel reservations, request renewal of loan, to see list of new arrivals, request addition of new publication, define SDI profile.

i)   Local Area Network or Free browsing Facility in the Campus:
The goal of this practice is to network the information resources of the library with the entire academic and research activities on the university / college campus and to evolve a user friendly environment by using the information and communication technology tools to provide quality and quick retrieval of the information sources along with resources available in other libraries at their desktops.

j)   Library homepage for Information dissemination:
Libraries should have their own website where they can regularly display information about the latest additions and other current information like job opportunities, fellowships, training, student placement, academic; research and scientific news are displayed.. A good number of faculty and researchers regularly use this service and make effective use of their academic and research interests. Timely and wider dissemination made effective use of Information Services and number of logs to library website increased.

k)   Web OPAC:
Through Web OPAC libraries can provide wider access to its resources. Library collection availability and its status are very important for the users. The card Catalog is converted into machine-readable format to make it available for access over the Internet.

l)   Access to Digital Repositories:
By creating digital centre of the faculty publications, research outputs, project reports, thesis and dissertations and university publications and locate the same on the website of the library. This will facilitate the users to have timely access to the information on institutional developments, create an awareness of the institutional needs, individual's responsibilities and privileges. The process involves installation of digital repository software, internet and intranet connectivity.

m)   List Services (Servs) and E-mail
Libraries can provide its services by maintaining several list services (mailing lists) to cater to different communities of users, e.g. faculty, research scholars, etc. These lists aim to broadcast a message to a large number of people within the institute or beyond the boundaries of the institute. The library makes good use of all these list services to communicate with the users particularly when a new e-resource is introduced or a service is launched. These services are also useful for informing or inviting users to a seminar or a demonstration organized by the library. It is an extremely important medium to market library resources and services.

n)   Creating News Groups
By creating several news groups which can be subscribed to by users depending upon their area of work and interest, where information about latest happenings as well as new services and sources is posted for wider dissemination. It also allows subscribers (users) to post their suggestions/feedback. All posting on this newsgroup are regularly monitored by the librarian to take follow up action.

o)   Web-based Instructions, FAQs
The library uses its website optimally to provide appropriate instructions so that users are able to use various resources and services effectively. A link to FAQs attempts to answer general queries that users normally ask. Other web-based instructions provided are guidelines for fair use of E-Resources, submission help (for institutional archive), FAQs (online submission of theses).

p)   Virtual Reference Desk/Ask your Librarian
By providing a link in the library homepage/webpage where library Users and others can ask any question related to the library using the link or Ask your Librarian this link serves as a virtual reference desk.

q)   Training Seminars and Workshops
The library organizes training sessions and workshops for the users whenever a new product database or service is introduced. These programmes include presentations, demonstrations and exhibitions, and are organized at the institute level as well as at the department level depending upon the relevance and need.

r)   Library Brochure or Institute Newsletter
This brochure provides a detailed account of all activities, rules, resources and services of the library**.** These are a very popular medium of dissemination of information about the resources and services, a copy of the brochure can also be made available for download from library web site.

s)   One-on-one Appointments
It is an excellent way to get to know the library users personally and to understand their information needs better. It also gives user an opportunity to informally interact with library staff and clarify any of his doubts, queries and to better understand as to how to use various resources and services of the library resulting in the enhanced usage.

t)   Suggestion Boxes:
By keeping a suggestion box would help to get user feedback on various services provided by the library. It can also be made online by providing a link on the library webpage.

u)   In Service Program me:
The goal of this program me would be to motivate professional staff to enhance their skill and expertise in conventional and e-library associated services and operations by arranging in house and external training programmes.

v)   Vendors' Participation

One of the important methods of user awareness is active involvement of the publishers and vendors. It is different from vendors selling their products. They regularly visit the institute to interact with library staff and the users to update them with new developments and/or features added to their product. Publishers or their representatives are also invited to give a detailed presentation about that resource followed by a live demonstration. Many publishers/vendors request the library to let them conduct training sessions to update users

w)   Other best practices ;

Some of the other best practices are displaying newspaper clippings/ Career/Employment Information/ Services on the notice board periodically, conducting Information literacy programmes, participation in Consortium, extended library hours, creating library blogs, etc.

III.   Conclusion

Apart from providing regular services, it is necessary to provide new and improved services as and when needed**.** To cope with the timely challenges, every library has to identify and develop its own best practices to enhance the collection development process, services dissemination and use of the library as a whole. Developing best practices, analyzing and revising them at a regular interval will lead to continuous improvement in overall performance of the library and the whole institution.

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