

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOUNDERS LIBRARY AT ST. GEORGE'S UNIVERSITY, GRENADA, WEST INDIES

Shamin Renwick

Senior Librarian

School of Education Library

The University of the West Indies

St. Augustine Campus

Trinidad and Tobago

Email: shamin.renwick@sta.uwi.edu

Abstract

Purpose: This paper describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations of the Founders Library at St. George's University, Grenada, West Indies.

Non-empirical research technique: Personal observation and reflection on current events utilizing the authority/experience of the author were used.

Findings: The Library closed physically and services were moved to online-only mode from mid-March 2020. Strategies by the University and activities undertaken by Library personnel during the initial response; the work from home period; and the subsequent phased reintegration of staff when the Campus reopened to limited in-person classes for students of the School of Arts and Sciences by mid-August 2020—are outlined.

Research limitations/implications: This first-hand account, reflecting a management and leadership perspective and written whilst the pandemic is ongoing, is a unique reflection on events; thus, would necessarily reflect the sole perspective of the author.

Originality/value: To date there are no other publications on the effect of the pandemic on Founders Library and few, if any, on its effects on the wider Caribbean. This article will serve as a primary source of information for analysis when post-pandemic research investigates its final effects on libraries in the Caribbean and should prove to be useful in terms of planning for situations of uncertainty, whatever the cause.

Theoretical/Practical/Social/ Implications: An adaptation of project management's urgent/important prioritization matrix on which to base selection of projects is proposed. It is recommended that 'urgency' and 'impact' may be more useful criteria for analysis under pandemic conditions and for contingency planning in emergency situations.

Keywords: COVID-19; Sars-COV-2; Pandemic; St. George's University; Founders Library; Grenada; Caribbean academic libraries; West Indies; Prioritization Matrix

Introduction

This paper describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic conditions on the operations of the Founders Library, St. George's University (SGU), a US-managed, private international university on the island of Grenada, West Indies. The experience of managing and leading the

Library during a period when it had to be closed physically within a short time-frame and online-only services were maintained by library staff who suddenly had to move to working remotely is elucidated. The importance of decisive but empathetic leadership is discussed. It was found, on reflection, that the prioritisation matrix currently being used by leaders and managers to determine which optimum activities should be focused on changes during a pandemic as different priorities come to the fore as a result of constraints of working away from the physical library and only operating virtually. The conclusion sums up the experience at Founders Library and recommendations on how to manage and lead better are suggested.

Background

St. George's University

SGU was established in Grenada by charter in 1976, on the site of the 4-week 1969 Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) Expo. The rolling terrain of the True Blue lava-based peninsula, surrounded by the bluest of blue Caribbean waters, has been designated the World's Prettiest Campus by *Nas Daily* ("World's Prettiest Campus"). The School of Medicine (SOM) started classes on January 17, 1977; the School of Graduate Studies (SGS), the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) and the School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) were founded in 1994, 1996 and 1999, respectively (St. George's University, "History of St. George's University"). Over the years, the 65 buildings on the 42-acre campus have hosted students and faculty from over 140 countries and currently SGU has 7,400+ students and an alumni body of 22,000+ (St. George's University, "About SGU").

Founders Library

Library services at SGU were formalised in 1979 with the creation of the Marion Library on the lower level of the Campus. By 2000, as the University continued to grow in leaps and bounds, the Founders Library was inaugurated in the upper Campus area. It is a three-storey building, with the book collection, information desk, OPACs, Technical Services and Archives & Records Management Units on Level 1; the administrative offices, three computer labs, seven small-group meeting rooms, open study spaces, and the journals stacks on the Level 2; the 24/7 study space is on Level 3. The Library is also responsible for several individual and group study spaces and printing rooms around the True Blue Campus. In addition to this campus, the Library also serves SGU's students based at the Northumbria Campus, Newcastle, UK, and the staff at the SGU New York offices.

Library Faculty and Staff

The professional staff comprises a Library Director, two Faculty Librarians and a Campus Records Manager/Faculty Librarian. (Note that professional librarians at SGU, including the Library Director, have faculty status, hence the use of the term Faculty Librarians). Support staff include a Library Administrator and a Secretarial Assistant (both part of the Administrative Unit along with the Director). The three Units, Archives and Records Management (ARM), Technical Services, and User Services, each have a Supervisor (at the Faculty level, i.e. Faculty Librarian), a Manager and three Library Assistants.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Pandemics, like all global events, affect the world in fundamental ways. Those that are debilitating or deadly with no immediate treatment, vaccine or cure, such as the COVID-19 disease caused by the novel SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (World Health Organization, “Naming the Coronavirus”), have an even greater and more destructive long-lasting impact and negatively influence, for example, life-expectancy, quality of life and the future of world development and priorities.

In 2020, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which probably started in China in December 2019, has had and continues to have a tremendous effect on the Founders Library as work that was considered normal and routine no longer obtains at this time. The Library’s impromptu closure in March 2020 was considered to be the safest measure and any member of staff who could work from home was encouraged to do so. Nevertheless, SGU did not close but maintained emergency personnel, as necessary. Students moved to classes being in an online-only mode initially. Later, by mid-August at the start of the new academic year 2020-2021, limited numbers of students were allowed to return to in-person classes, whilst following Government required COVID-19 protocols.

The Literature

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Academic Libraries

Oyelude, based at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, describes the wide-ranging, early impact of COVID-19 on academic libraries, internationally. These include: the cancellation of meetings and conferences; increased partnerships to support access to additional information resources and the collation of quality resources on the novel coronavirus and the

accompanying disease caused, COVID-19; and a substantial increase in the number of webinars to help librarians to cope.

Reporting on Academic Libraries' Responses

Cox, in an opinion article, ominously titled “Changed, Changed Utterly”, reflects on how librarians felt in a world of uncertainty and fear with not only work, but life in general changed and accurately predicted that libraries in the US would undergo major changes to their collections (e.g., lowered value of print, e-everything, massive digitization projects, loss of major deals for journals, copyright/fair use challenges); services (e.g., increased self-service, virtual alternatives, embedded librarianship, increased support for online teaching and research; increased sharing of open access and open educational resources; and library website as a virtual front door); spaces (e.g., increased and changed study spaces, disappearance of public technology) and operations (e.g., focus on employee safety, doing more with less, continuous learning and development and librarian activism).

The unprecedented nature of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that academic libraries were—like every individual, every institution, and every country—caught unprepared. The response came in waves. Initial measures taken by many countries worldwide were lockdown/stay in place orders and closure of borders. Libraries, at first, had to figure out how to manage their staff remotely and, subsequently, their services in unprecedented lockdown conditions. Early strategies included moving to online-only mode and/or the provision of curbside pick-up loan service where library staff were not under strict stay-in-place orders.

In a quick and timely response, Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg, librarians at Ithaca S+R, a not-for-profit organisation, based in New York, that helps the academic community to advance research and teaching in sustainable ways, undertook to collate the initial responses in North America (“Academic Libraries Response to COVID-19: Real-Time”). Innovatively, they conducted a series of surveys to cover the first 24 hours (“Academic Library Response to COVID19: The First 24 Hours”), then 48 hours (“Academic Libraries Strategies”) and later the first 10 days (“First This”) after the WHO declared the pandemic on 11 March 2020. This research found that, in the first 24 hours, there was little change in services offered, but mitigation and prevention measures were introduced, public events cancelled, and cleaning activities increased. Within 48 hours, 8% of academic libraries closed, 23% decreased hours,

23% accommodated remote working and more restricted access and limited services. Significantly, communication with staff remained under 64% for the first 48 hours. To summarise, in the first ten days, it was clear that it was “no longer business as usual for US academic libraries” (“First This”) as there was a substantial reduction in access to print collections and a correlation between increased online class delivery and libraries closing, limiting hours and increasing remote work. A similar regional survey of academic libraries in Europe, conducted during October-November 2020, found that a main concern of little more than 70% of participants was the health and safety of library staff (Association of European Research Libraries).

Many communication efforts, such as blogs and opinion pieces, regarding the safety and health, especially mental health, of library staff appeared during this time. One of the earliest webinars, hosted by American Library Association on March 20, 2020, highlighted some coping mechanisms: closing completely, not just closing to users; preparing FAQs and writing blogs for users; suspending active holds to stop persons from coming to the library; recognising that the disruption to life in general and exposure to or contracting COVID-19 was traumatic and could cause mental health issues; and promoting mindfulness for staff and users (“Coping in the Time of COVID-19”). Particularly useful measures taken to assist academic libraries in managing were the collating of resources relevant to pandemic issues (American Library Association; International Federation of Library Associations; Library Connect) and undertaking desperately needed research, such as, the Reopening Archives, Libraries and Museum (REALM) Project’s study of how long to quarantine various types of library materials (OCLC).

By May-June, webinars sharing academic libraries’ experiences were being promoted, for example, “Agility and Adaptability: The Caribbean Academic Library Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic” organised by Mona Library, The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus; EBSCO hosted several webinars entitled “Coffee (or Tea) with EBSCO” to address COVID-19 related issues for institutions and libraries around the world (Renwick); and Carbery et al. reported on Irish libraries (1-19).

Later in the year, published articles detailing the effects of the pandemic on academic libraries became available (see e.g., Canada’s University of Toronto Libraries (Walsh and

Rana), China (Guo et al.), Hong Kong (Ma), Ireland (Kavanaugh), Nigeria (Fasae et al.), Pakistan (Rafik et al.), and Sweden (Temiz and Salelkar)).

The review of the literature revealed that, apart from a webinar by the Mona Library and the possible representation of a Caribbean librarian at a webinar on COVID-19 impacts, there was a gap in documenting the experience of the pandemic's effect on libraries in the Caribbean. It was felt that the opportunity to record a first-hand experience and reflection on the impact of COVID-19 on SGU's Founders Library in Grenada would be warranted.

Non-Empirical Research Technique

This article is based on personal observation, reflection on current events, and utilises the authority/experience of the author (Dan) to present valid commentary, reflection, conclusions and recommendations. Thus, it documents systematically the experience, reflection on, and implications of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic from a management and leadership perspective using narrative reflective writing and the four stages of the reflective practitioner, the process would involve reliving the experience (re-inhabit), notice what was going on (reflect), critically analyse the situation (review), and capture new understanding (reframe) (Owen and Fletcher).

This first-hand account is, of course, a unique observation of events and, thus, necessarily reflects the sole perspective and biases of the author. Hence, it is a non-empirical study; such studies, some scholars argue, "are just as valuable for knowledge acquisition as empirical data" (Dan).

There is reflection on and a discussion of the challenges and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for library services and on library staff. An approach to decision making and prioritisation of projects to be undertaken under pandemic conditions is recommended. It is hoped that the model suggested will prove useful in planning for situations of uncertainty, whatever the cause.

This article, which describes the impact of COVID-19 on an academic library in Grenada, contributes to the documentation of responses to the pandemic of academic libraries in the Caribbean region, provides food for thought and acts as a "moment in time", screen shot source of data for analysis when the entire period can be fully assimilated and researched. As

the article is written during the pandemic, it is untainted by the final outcomes of the pandemic effects on libraries.

The Experience

COVID-19 Pandemic Reaches Grenada

Although we may have heard of cases of COVID-19 around the world since January 2020, many of us in the Caribbean were unaware of the extent of its swift global spread from epidemic to pandemic status. Administrative colleagues at SGU, a University with more than 80% of the faculty's and student's home residence being off-island, were far more cognizant and proactive.

Late in the evening of Wednesday, March 11, 2020, the day that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that there was a COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks"), SGU announced that students who wished to return home could do so with immediate effect and gave them 24 hours in which to respond. The urgency of this request is underlined by the fact that it was made in the middle of mid-term exams for some students. As the safety and well-being of University personnel and the broader Grenadian community were of paramount importance, SGU sought to lessen the burden on the Grenadian healthcare system by encouraging both students and faculty to return home, wherever that might be across the globe. Hence, SGU, with considerable logistical and planning skills, ensured that the majority of students and faculty moved off-island in less than a week. Amazing and admirable work, swift decision-making, sound foresight and courage on the part of SGU's Senior Administration and volunteer staff enabled the monumental task to be undertaken safely and efficiently.

Early on the following Sunday morning (March 15), permission was sought, and approval granted to shorten the Library's opening hours beginning the next day (March 16). Within the same week, the Library was closed, a decision taken by the Library Director and the Provost on the Thursday night (March 19). This decision was conveyed to Library Faculty and Staff via a WhatsApp call from the Library Director (who had flown to Trinidad and Tobago that morning) at a gathering of Library personnel on Friday, March 20. By the following Monday (March 23), a COVID-19 case had been identified on the island and the University moved to online classes and allowed only essential staff on the campus. This move to reduce operations was in compliance with the Grenadian Government's Emergency Powers (COVID-19)

Regulations. The swiftness of the events; fear of contracting a disease of which little was known; the drastic changes warranted by activities to reduce spread of the virus; uneasiness about job security; and the impact of the lockdown on family life were among the concerns prominent in the minds of Library professionals and paraprofessionals during the initial days of working from home. Early on, however, the HR department and senior leadership/management reassured all employees that they would continue to receive full pay and benefits. The Library Director, one Faculty Librarian, who returned to Florida on the day the Library closed, and the rest of the on-island Library personnel shifted into the unfamiliar routines of working remotely. As the Library was a little ahead of the curve, Library personnel had been able to save files online or on thumb drives, forward calls to their cell phones and take work materials home that Friday. They were fortunate to do so as the University required that they work from home and not return to Campus on the following Monday (March 23).

Impact on Library Faculty and Staff

Normally, “working remotely” implies that members of staff have an opportunity to plan and create a comfortable office space in their homes with appropriate computers, ergonomic seating, all the necessary equipment and adequate connectivity and bandwidth. When the lockdown was implemented, all Library faculty and staff (4 professional staff and 14 paraprofessionals) moved to working from home with immediate effect. Thus, they moved rapidly into a situation of working without the support of office equipment, supplies and, in several cases, based on where they lived, with inadequate Internet connectivity and bandwidth. An informal and impromptu survey of Library staff conducted during the week before the Library’s closure to determine who had access to IT equipment and the Internet in order to manage remotely, revealed that one person had neither. This was rectified somewhat by the staff member purchasing a smart phone. Others ensured access by borrowing an SGU loaner laptop through their alternative status as SGU students.

Impact on Library Services

Timely and sustained communication

Following its inception in early March, SGU’s Incident Management Team (IMT), comprising Deans, Directors, key department heads and on-island representatives, met weekly/fortnightly, as necessary, initially in-person and later online. The Library’s representation on this team enabled it to have direct input into decision making and to share

first-hand information with the University community. Often in the Caribbean, libraries are relegated to lower levels of information sharing. Discussions with and monitoring by the IMT played a crucial part in the management of the impact of the pandemic on the University. Timely, effective and comprehensive townhall meetings served to reassure University staff and inform them of developments and decisions taken to ensure the continued growth and development of the University. In addition, SGU had to rearrange expenditure priorities but did not cut faculty's or staff's jobs or salaries.

The SGU administration did an outstanding and admirable job of keeping the University community informed and updated in a timely manner (which continues up to the writing of this article). They used the user-friendly format of frequently asked questions (FAQs) posted in the password-protected University web portal, *Carenage*, covering every aspect of studies and support for students, faculty and staff both on- and off-island. They also provided for the health and care of employees by way of comprehensive and appropriate web-based information and, for those on-island, in-person. The information shared was garnered directly from the relevant departments, so the Library was afforded the opportunity to have updated, key information about its services posted prominently on the University FAQs.

Increased communication among Library personnel

Within the Library, decisions on how and when to communicate, both formally and informally, during the “work from home” period had to be taken. Unit heads met at least twice a week with their staff; the Library Senior Administration met twice a week, formally; and, among professional staff, regular and ad-hoc meetings were held on a need-to basis. The entire Library team met fortnightly.

Recognising that all-video meetings were tiring and difficult, especially when there were connectivity problems, meetings were held in various modes, sometimes with cameras on for greetings at the start and end of meetings only. Less formally, WhatsApp groups for all Library personnel and for senior Library administration were set up for urgent communication and informal sharing, respectively, as soon as the Library closed. Library faculty and staff, in some instances, went beyond the call of duty as they rose to the challenge of remaining relevant to the aims and objectives of teaching and research of the University.

Accelerated implementation of planned projects

The pandemic accelerated implementation of some previously planned projects. One such venture was the roll-out of the EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) in late March. The implementation process had been undertaken some months before and, fortunately, resolution of the last few technicalities was being finalised when the pandemic was announced. In addition, EDS also provided the opportunity for the Library to implement a live online chat service. The two Faculty Librarians undertook to host two, two-hour chat sessions each day, morning and afternoon, Monday to Friday.

Retrieving books from globally dispersed users

Initially, measures were taken to renew loans and waive fines during the first semester. By the end of the semester, retrieving loans from an international community of staff and students proved to be a challenge. Arrangements for book returns through the SGU New York office were instituted as border closures made sending by mail within the Caribbean and beyond a difficult, and certainly not prudent, task. An amnesty on fines was implemented in an attempt to have books returned. Unfortunately, as persons left the island in haste and could only travel with one suitcase, many books remained in stored luggage and at the homes of the hurriedly departed. During the August Phase 1 return of staff to the Campus, SGU assisted in the packing and shipping of students' belongings to their homes. During this exercise, any Library books found were returned to the Library.

Increased Library support for the transition to online learning

Under pandemic conditions, the Library's main responsibilities were the provision of access to online information resources and keeping users informed. Thus, responding to connection issues and other queries in a timely fashion was obligatory. Authoritative coronavirus and COVID-19 information resources to counteract fake news, support for teaching and research efforts, and additional information resources, content and trials from supportive vendors to aid user access to more authoritative and quality information during this period were also highlighted and updated regularly on the Library's webpages. Library policy was changed to allow for the purchase of books in e-format only. More open access resources were identified and added to the Library's A-Z listing of online resources.

Move to online training

The Library, traditionally, had conducted only face-to-face information literacy training. The move to online-only mode of interaction provided it with the opportunity to host its first online workshop (via Microsoft Teams) entitled “Discovering the Library’s Resources”. Registration was managed using Eventbrite, a web-based service which was learnt on a needs basis at the time. In addition to the regular attendees - faculty and students, the session was also attended by staff from SGU HR and Administration thus broadening the base of persons on Campus benefitting from and becoming aware of the Library’s offerings. The inclusion of the latter group was considered to be important as libraries in the Caribbean do suffer in part from non-academics not always being fully aware of the role and function of the library and the support it can provide. The online workshops led to the production of the first narrated video on the use of Library resources which was posted on the Library’s webpages.

Overhauling the Library’s webpages

It was quickly recognised that there was a need to review the webpages providing access to the Library’s resources and services. All handouts were updated and posted along with additional tutorials and open access sites. Library-specific FAQs related to the COVID-19 pandemic period when classes moved online together with ARM Unit FAQs were drafted and posted. The former was updated regularly as circumstances changed. Information about obtaining articles via the Library’s document delivery service was updated and it was decided that this service would be provided free of charge as the Library had no immediate facility to collect monies.

During this period, the University’s new web portal was rolled out. Library faculty and selected Library staff were trained to navigate and update website content using content-management software, quite different to the previous html-based website. As online was the only means of providing academic support to users, reviewing, rewriting and adapting the Library’s website content, design and presentation was a high priority activity for Library personnel.

Sustained printing services

Prior to the lockdown, printing was done at the Library or at printing rooms around the Campus. Currently, printing is facilitated, for those students staying on the Campus, at a specific printing room and by appointment.

Adapting promotion and outreach efforts

Founders Library, in compliance with University policy, does not utilise library-specific social media platforms. Other than notifications in the University's weekly online newsletter, the Library informed the University community of upcoming events in print and some email. However, during the period of working remotely, email became the predominant tool used to promote Library events and services to Deans and the President of the Student Government Association (SGA) for sharing with faculty and students accordingly. One-on-one emails to faculty and staff were also used to inform, share and maintain relationships important to academic librarians' ability to accomplish their work most effectively.

As there could not be an in-person graduation, a brief video, wishing graduates well on behalf of the Library, was produced in less than 24 hours (due to the tight deadline and evidence of the willingness of staff to learn on the fly) and submitted for sharing at the online-only commencement ceremony.

Changing roles of Library staff

To ensure that the work of the library remained relevant during the lockdown, every staff member was allocated some responsibility—whether it was answering forwarded telephone calls, assisting users and/or working on projects e.g., finding full-text for the fledgling institutional repository, reviewing book collections for updated editions for purchase, or inputting links for ebooks into the catalogue. The Director and Unit Heads developed viable/feasible projects not “make-work” projects.

Some members of staff had poor/no Internet or Wi-Fi access; no computer—only a cell phone without a data plan; and homes with only one device to be shared among parents trying to do their work and children attending online classes and doing homework all at the same time. Such situations required modifications to assignments and deadlines to avoid added stress. To keep staff engaged, they were assigned to attend continuous development and training sessions and present reports at weekly meetings to share and facilitate discussion about what they had learnt.

Microsoft Teams was rolled out to replace OneDrive in May 2020. The Library Director specifically requested that the Library Team be organized early in its implementation. Its introduction was welcomed as it allowed for improved staff communication, scheduling,

recording and hosting meetings as well as for easy storage of and access to files in a central place by the Library Team and various Library Channels (or sub-Teams).

Phased Return to Work

After four months with only a few imported COVID-19 cases and no community spread, and with most, but not all, students continuing online classes for semester 1, 2020/2021 academic year, SGU determined that some workers could return to Campus on a phased basis, with a 25% capacity in the first instance, from mid-August 2020. It was decided that Library staff would return to the Library at that time. There would be an increase in daily attendance of 50% and 75% in subsequent phases. Adjusting the schedules to accommodate the specified capacity was a significant task as these schedules and timeframes were not internal to the Library but had to be reported to and approved by the overarching IMT committee heads located on-island and at the head offices in New York.

Conditions for the reintegration of staff included no users in the Library, physical distancing of six feet, and use of masks. Some new services, including curbside loans/returns to on-campus users and scanning of essential course materials (if not available in an electronic format) for faculty only, were introduced. COVID-19 testing, use of hand sanitizer, regular hand washing, daily monitoring of one's state of health and other strict Campus regulations to reduce the chances of contraction and spread of the virus were mandated. Plexi glass barriers were installed at the Library's information desk and other places with high interactivity on Campus. Limited use of shared spaces, like the kitchen, was instituted. Staff were encouraged to have long conversations and lunch in the open air. Only one Faculty Librarian was on-island during this period, the others had to continue to work remotely as borders remained closed and COVID-19 cases were increasing outside of Grenada.

Needless to say, the return to Campus and working and providing services under these new conditions warranted the drafting (with input of all Library staff) and ratification of detailed policies and procedures to govern the new "norm." Former traditional activities were no longer routine, simple or self-evident. For example, did conventional copyright regulations/restrictions apply to copying and scanning of materials under eclectic pandemic conditions in developing countries?

The Library's customary face-to-face student orientation was not possible due to online-only mode of teaching. However, the Library was invited to provide input for a general orientation via an online course. A review and transformation of the content of both presentation and wording was necessary in order to communicate the appropriate tone and reflect the customer-service orientation of the Library's offerings.

The two off-island Library faculty returned to Grenada and phase 2 of the staff return started in mid-November. The newly appointed Library Director (the only hire in a period of non-routine hiring) assumed duties remotely in November.

The Reflection

"Library as Place"

Often in the Caribbean, the library, whether academic, national, university, public, special, or school, is seen as a physical space—somewhere to visit, to study, to borrow a book. The lockdown conditions removed what some consider a safe or even, a lucky space.

The Internet is associated with the free indexed Web, thus deep web materials provided by libraries are simply associated with 'online information' and therefore are thought to be free and easily accessible. There is little understanding or appreciation of the work librarians do to enable access to the deep Web by all levels of users which, in the case of academia, would include lecturers, students and administrators. The online-only access to information may prove to be of benefit to libraries if, due to the libraries' outstanding academic support and outreach efforts during this time, persons, usually satisfied with Google searches, become aware of the availability of libraries/authoritative resources and to understand the difference between the two. This is not to deny that in the Caribbean and other areas where the digital divide is evident, many users have been negatively impacted in fundamental ways during this period of online-only access.

Absence from the Library building meant that those projects and routines that were to be done physically in the Library, for example circulation, a major journal weeding project, and book repairs were put on hold. These were resumed when the Library team returned, albeit, at a slower pace, as there was only 25% of staff present initially. Determining priorities for work would require different selection criteria during pandemic conditions.

Management Decision Making

Project management propounds the prioritisation matrix, “popularized by authors Michael Brassard (*The Memory Jogger 2*) and David Allen (*Getting Things Done*)” (Peterson par. 9), to determine those actions that are high priority. This type of matrix is patterned on the Eisenhower Principle-inspired (Scroggs par.1) Important/Urgent Matrix proffered by Covey (151).

For nominal (that is, normal and desired) conditions, general project management practices prescribe an effort-value matrix for task prioritisation (see Fig. 1).

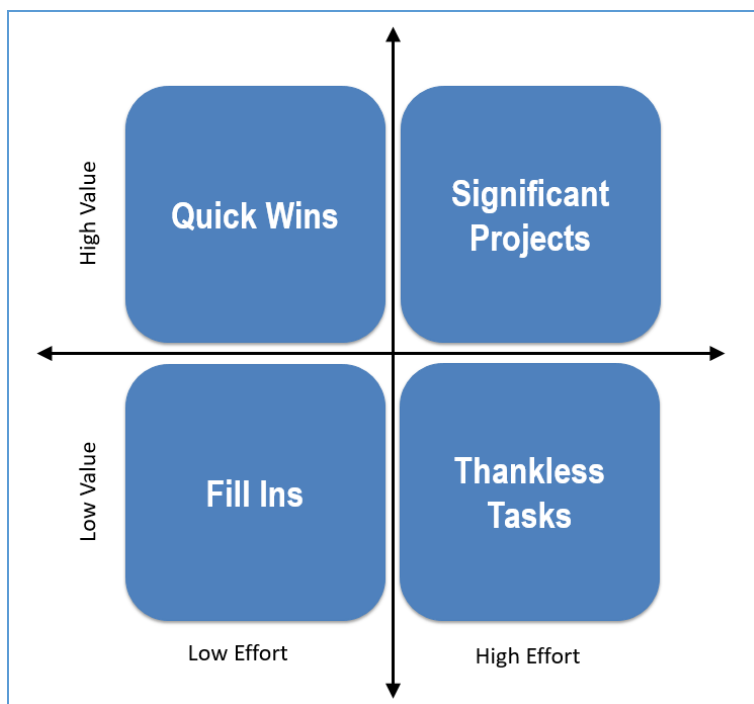


Fig. 1. Effort-value Matrix from Peterson, Oliver. “Prioritization Matrix 101: What, How & Why? (Free Template).” *Process.st.*, 6 May 2019, <https://www.process.st/prioritization-matrix>. Accessed 15 Nov. 2020.

According to Fig. 1, tasks that are prioritised according to high value/low effort required are considered quick wins and, therefore, relatively easy to achieve; high value/high effort are significant projects taking much to get done but rewarding in the end; low value /low effort tasks can be categorised as fill ins and could be done without urgency, and low value/high effort would be thankless tasks and, thus, not highly prioritised.

Under pandemic conditions, this matrix could be deemed as an unrepresentative model since a task may retain its original effort/value but have a drastically different impact and become

more or less urgent or even impractical. Thus, an urgency-impact matrix may be used, allowing for prioritisation analysis based on the degree of impact vs degree of urgency during anomalous or unexpected conditions (see Fig. 2).

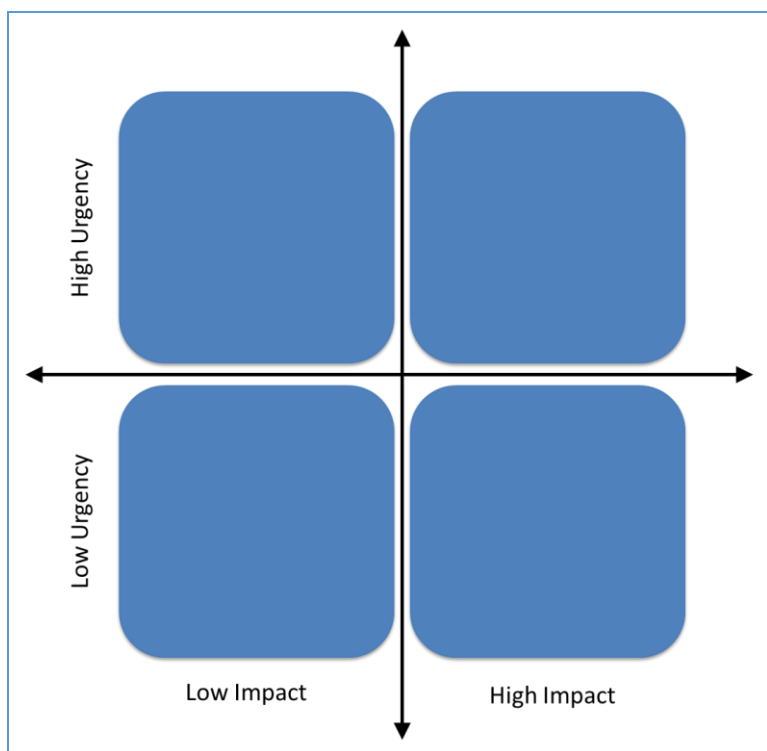


Fig. 2. Urgency-impact Matrix

Staff

Founders Library's staff members were accustomed to physical work in the Library, as online work, apart from providing access to and using online resources, was not part of their routine; during the period of working away from Campus, however, they had to work only in the online environment. Therefore, Library faculty had to reassure staff that there were sufficient online tasks for them to do in order to affirm that staff remained relevant to the University's mission and provide service to users.

Recognising that the unplanned and long-term separation could result in a deterioration in staff relationships, connections and relationships among staff had to be encouraged and sustained to ensure that a high level of cooperation and motivation was maintained. As the Library was being restructured into specific units, this period allowed each Unit to "gel" with lots of discussion, laughter, sharing of personal experiences and fun stuff as they got to know each other even better. The Unit heads did an excellent job of keeping work and relationships going and ensuring that staff were kept up-to-date, trained, and motivated, which also helped

them to maintain balance in other stress-related areas of their personal lives. Thus, staff looked forward to and were willing to attend meetings. There was even an online baby shower. One staff meeting was described as the best ever and as extremely useful.

Leadership

Leadership can be interpreted, at its most basic, as having vision, empathy, trust and valid communication; these four characteristics came to the fore and served best in managing the responsibilities, work and staff of the Library. Reassurance that the work of libraries is relevant is a challenge under normal circumstances in the Caribbean, an area that lacks a library-use culture among young people, and is particularly difficult in Grenada where there has been no valid functioning Public Library and National Archives for over a decade. One early leadership challenge, under pandemic lockdown/work-from-home conditions, was managing expectations:

- In terms of communication - the value of responding in a timely manner and with honesty and empathy was emphasized
- In terms of productivity - how were staff going to know if they were successful? It could not be by monitoring that they worked from 8 am – 4 pm. Always keeping in mind individual situations (e.g., being a parent, being pregnant, variable access to the Internet, insufficient access to equipment, lack of tools to work with as well as the nature and type of work that could be done in the online mode), productivity would be measured in terms of output, such as the completion of projects or assignments in a timely manner, rather than counting hours.

Another leadership challenge during this period was engendering trust:

- Demonstrating trust in staff by not micromanaging but giving them autonomy to self-manage and produce results
- Allowing persons who were having difficulties adequate time to adjust
- Understanding that being pregnant in the middle of pandemic or work-from-home conditions may mean that work might “suffer”
- Empathizing with persons who may have multiple reasons for stress: concern about family members’ job security, contracting the virus, home schooling, caregiver roles, loneliness, lack of tools or access to the Internet and finding ways for them to contribute, assigning everyone responsibilities so that there should be some measure of balance and accountability

- Getting members of staff to appreciate the work and contribution of others by having Unit heads report at staff meetings and recognising the work that had been completed
- Responding to all concerns, even if research had to be conducted before a response was presented
- Being able to honestly put things into context and project positivity when outcomes were unclear or unknown
- Assuring staff that their best interests were desired.

Reporting to the University in a timely manner and format as well as being accountable for time and work accomplished were among those activities that reflected the relevance and importance of the Library despite relatively easy access to information on the Web by users.

Implications

Library as a Service (LaaS)

It may seem a far-fetched consideration for academic libraries in the Caribbean but what might happen when, having survived the long months (if not years) of the pandemic without the “Library as Place” and with the previously unimaginable push that information technology got during this period, resources and funds become extremely scarce in developing countries. Could Library as a Service (LaaS), that is a paid library-type service, take a foothold? It might be something similar to a DeepDyve (www.deepdyve.com) “the largest online rental services for scholarly research” (Instant Access to Thousands of Journals for just USD 49/month) or a Blinkist (www.blinkist.com), 15-minute non-fiction book summaries, type of offering. This would be in line with development of SaaS (Software as a Service) and PaaS (Platforms as a Service).

Practical Decision Making in Pandemic/Emergency Conditions

It is suggested that the value of the impact rather than the amount of effort be the criterion for determining the order in which activities should be enabled under emergency conditions and when making contingency plans in case of further lockdown conditions. For example, prioritising some tasks before the COVID-19 work-from-home period using the value/effort matrix may have looked like Fig. 3 below. In this case, the tasks were prioritized based on the conditions of working in the Library and valuing the Library as Place rather than for its online services.

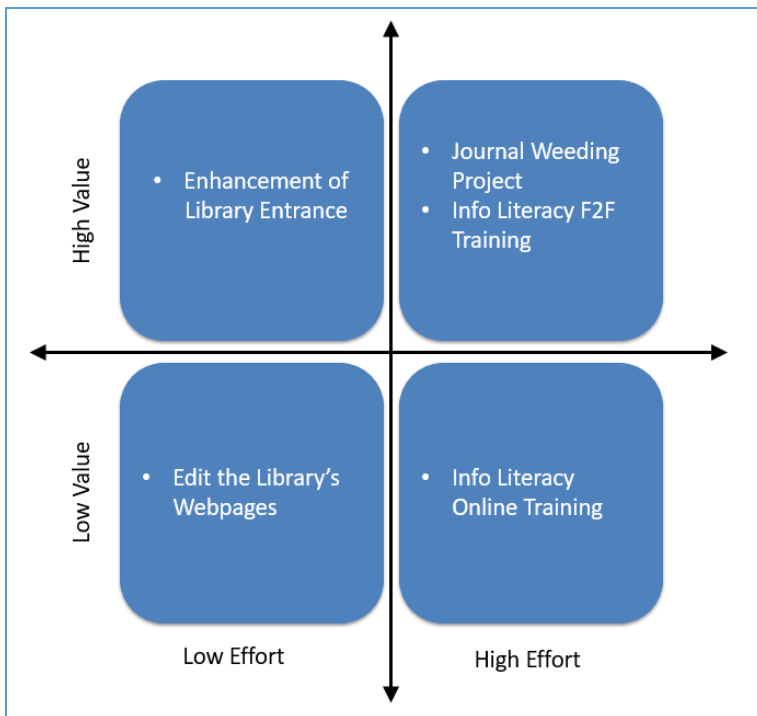


Fig. 3. Value/effort Prioritisation Matrix

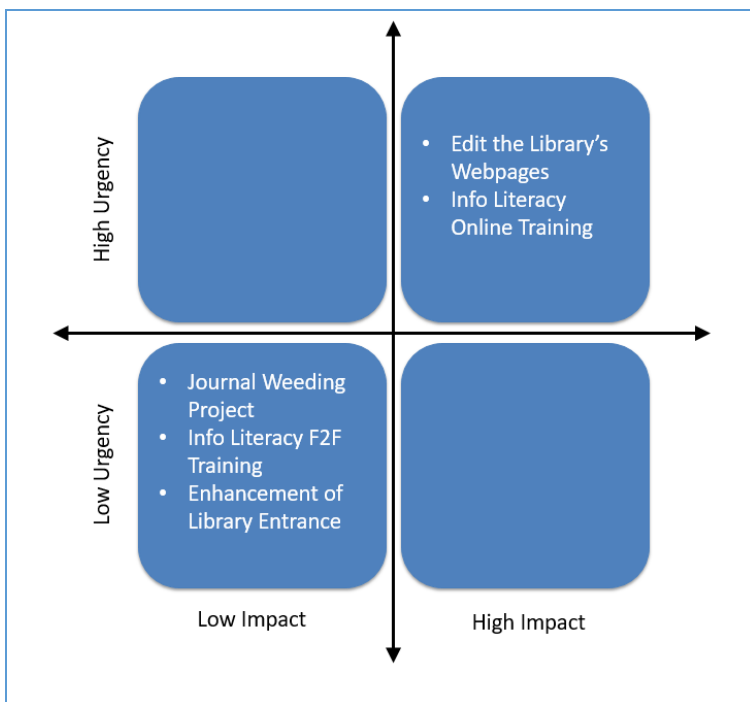


Fig. 4. Urgency/impact Prioritisation Matrix

However, as Fig. 4 shows, the priorities change under the pandemic conditions using the urgency/impact criteria. In this case, the tasks based on the physical library would not be

urgent nor have great impact, though they are still very valuable and will take effort. Under Campus closure conditions, the online tasks become the priority.

Social Implications for Leadership

For leaders and managers, the suddenness of the drastic changes to social and interpersonal interactions among staff as well as non-existent physical users, means conducting change management without the theory, meaning, there is change but no opportunity to get buy-in, or sell an idea, or any of the other nice, considerate things they are advised to do to make change palatable.

Library staff demonstrated that they wanted a leader with a vision and the ability to manage extreme change, ensuring that staff remained relevant and had a contribution to make. They expressed their appreciation of these attributes and demonstrated trust.

Conclusion

In mid-March 2020, the WHO announced its assessment that COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus, could be characterized as a pandemic. In response, many countries quickly took urgent and aggressive actions, included lockdowns. Libraries around the world, including Founders Library, had to suddenly close physically and move personnel to working from home and delivering services in an online-only mode. This arrangement was to last for several months during which time other measures, similar to those taken by libraries internationally, were put in place including: increased partnerships to support access to additional information resources and the collation of quality resources on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19 (Oyelude); reduced hours followed by closure of the library within days (Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg, "First This") while other issues, as predicted by Cox, had to be addressed namely, lowered value of print, copyright/fair use challenges, increased support for online teaching and research, promotion of increased numbers of open access items, the library website as the virtual front door, and focus on employee safety and continuous learning. However, unlike the findings of Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg about US libraries, communication at Founders Library increased considerably. A particular concern stressed in communication was for staff well-being and safety which was also noted in the early ALA webinar ("Coping in the Time of COVID-19"). Founders Library utilised the pandemic resources recommended by ALA and IFLA and the standards on quarantine practices recommended by REALM (OCLC).

By mid-August 2020, the staff returned to work on alternate days. Although the Library remained physically closed to users, it was able to offer curbside loan services to SAS students (whilst SOM and SVM students continued online only) in addition to online services, which were maintained for the University community through-out the affected period.

Library staff have resumed work stronger for the experience. A significant impact of the lockdown was that staff members became closer, demonstrating a strong desire to return to the office and to see their colleagues again, and to resume their duties. All looked forward to the reopening, better equipped and more conscious of and prepared to support both in-person and online service, whereas prior to the pandemic they were primarily focused on in-person service.

The University community came to a much greater understanding and appreciation of the Library's online contribution to and support for teaching, learning and research.

One of the most important lessons learned from the pandemic is that leadership matters. With no similar circumstances for possibly a hundred years to draw on and therefore no training to deal with the likes of the impact of such a pandemic on library services and work, it was necessary to call upon the leadership "instinct".

Recommendations

Keeping in close contact with your professional and support staff, using both formal and informal channels, is an imperative when working remotely, especially given the suddenness of the pandemic events. Continuous communication should be maintained and some of it can be fun or light in nature. Activities could be arranged, accordingly.

Dealing with concerns, both major and minute, in order to alleviate one's own and/or staff stress is prudent. Since workloads may be lighter due to the nature of the individual staff responsibility, this is an opportune time to focus on continuous professional development. Identify relevant sessions, assign staff responsibilities for attending, hold reporting and discussion sessions.

Use the prioritisation matrix to identify the most productive work activities. Use change management techniques to sell your vision, promote the relevance of library work under the

current conditions and to make staff understand the significance of their work, albeit mainly online. This is especially important for staff who get most of their job satisfaction from interpersonal interaction; indeed, this aspect may have been their original *raison d'être* for choosing to work in a Library.

It is recommended that leaders stop and take a breath, do their research, analyse and evaluate their situation and respond instinctively, effectively and empathetically. Positive emotional intelligence and values play a role in managing and leading during pandemic times.

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