

BRINGING THE LIBRARY RIGHT INTO THE WORKPLACE: A CHALLENGE AND A TOOL OF SURVIVAL FOR A TELECOMMUNICATIONS LIBRARY*

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As today's big corporations struggle to survive and thrive in a period of ever-increasing change, the need for rapid and large-scale performance improvement has never been more difficult. The Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT), frequently called the "telephone giant", is one of the many corporations that experienced the buy-outs and mergers phenomena. The years 1998 and 1999 were periods of transition, during which PLDT undertook measures to make itself leaner and fitter. It was during the transition when the PLDT Vice President for Personnel Management and Development, Mr. Emiliano Tanchico, and I decided to "bring the library right into the workplace".

The PLDT Library before the Transition

The PLDT Library in 1998 occupied a very small space in the darkest corner of the second floor of the two-story training center. There were about 3,000 titles in the shelflist, fifty percent of which were on-loan and were already long overdue, and about seventy percent of the total were outdated. Three computers were used for word processing, spreadsheets and catalog records on CDS/ISIS. There were two telephones but there was no fax machine. Employees who were lucky enough to know that there was indeed a library had to brave the Metro Manila traffic to personally go to the library, search the card catalog and borrow books. Although former librarians bought good books, the library's collection did not improve much because a great number of expensive materials were not returned and no efficient tracking system was in place.

The Options

While the desire to automate was a given, several options were considered by the management to address the problems that confronted the library... and some "mistakes" were made along the way. One of which was hiring a consultant who

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re-catalogued two-thirds of the previously DDC-classified materials and used Macrothesaurus instead of LC. Another error was the creation of a CDS/ISIS database without adopting MARC.

Other options considered were: in-house development of a library system using Visual Basic, hiring another consultant who will automate the library, outsourcing cataloging and indexing, merging the library to the documentation unit of HRD, and many more. For the cynics, another option would just be getting rid of the library.

Building a Grand Vision

When I joined the Company in the last quarter of 1998, I myself had no idea on what to do exactly with the PLDT Library. I had been working at the University of the Philippines College of Science Library, but I was not a professional librarian; and up to this time, I am still not a licensed librarian. I was not even sure if the decision to accept the job offer to become the Information Resource Administrator of the only telecommunications library in the country was right or not. The only thing that I was sure of at that time was that, just like the Little Prince, I believe that "you are not given a wish, without giving you the power to make it come true".

I knew my limitations, but I also knew right from the start that my superiors and I had a shared vision - and it was the grand vision to develop the PLDT Library into a state-of-the-art telecommunications information resource center. A shared vision that provided focus and energy to what we want the library to be and inspired a commitment from us and every member of the staff to achieve it. We wanted to be the "preferred telecommunications library" and to achieve this, we set the following goals:

- * To preserve, optimize and improve information resources provide to library users, especially on telecommunications and business
- * To utilize existing and emerging technologies to provide timely and relevant information
- * To develop and provide new value-added services to meet information needs
- * To create and maintain a library homepage
- * To continue to support corporate training activities

Creating a Compelling Case for Development

Convincing other people, particularly those who have decision-making powers is never easy when you are introducing change. The only way possible for us to get

support was to create a compelling case for development. We articulated the rationale, goals, scope and the return of investment (ROI) of the library development plan in a way that made it compelling to the Company's key IT and budget decision makers. The computation of ROI included savings in the use of employee time and transportation expense and savings from efficient tracking of library materials.

Managing Development in an Integrated Fashion

After getting the nod of the executives and securing the necessary budget for the development plan, comes the implementation. The development plan covered the revamp of the following services:

- * Collection Development
- * Cataloging and Indexing
- * Serials Monitoring and Control
- * Circulation
- * Reference the introduction of the following:
- * Internet and Multi-media
- * Library User Education

and the launching of:

- * Marketing and promotion of library services
- * Library Research, Evaluation and Planning

to ensure that the entire program achieves its goals. Additional project employees were recruited, trained and dedicated to the task at hand. The library was also given a new home, a 400 square meter-room, complete with new tables and chairs, carrels and shelves.

The reorganization and automation of the library services were very ambitious and complex to manage. The process included re-cataloging of the entire collection using the US Library of Congress Classification Scheme, and changing of the book labels, pockets, covers, and cards.

Part of the approved development plan was an integrated library system concept and a timetable for selecting, acquiring and installing the integrated library system.

The PLDT Integrated Library System Concept

The desired system for PLDT is an online, real-time integrated library system for internal operations as well as an information access system that presents a single

user access to a number of databases, systems, and services, including: actual catalog, digital information resources via the Internet, subscription database services, electronic reserve, and authentication.

The end-user client includes a World Wide Web browser client software. The user must have capabilities for searches of the virtual catalog and a variety of other databases accessible principally and primarily via Z39.50 supplemented by use of other standardized or proprietary protocols, agents, or search engines which provide coverage of databases, systems, and services of interest to PLDT. The user must be able to invoke the display of holdings, status, and availability information for an item or items of library material.

The system described in the concept paper is an integrated library and information access system whose design is based on open-systems and established industry standards and takes into account the basic interrelationships of bibliographic and other data and processing functions in library systems and services.

Time Table

Phase I Hardware and Software Acquisition

- * Scouting for the suitable Integrated Library Software
- * Request for information from eight companies
- * Request for proposal
- * Product demonstration and evaluation
- * Actual purchase

Phase 2 Implementation

- * Installation
- * Staff Orientation/Instruction
- * Testing
- * Training

Phase 3 Database Creation

- * Item Inventory
- * Barcoding
- * Encoding/Editing

Phase 4 Functional Integration/Actual Operation

- * Output Analysis/Functional Analysis
- * System Customization
- * Revision of Policies
- * Documentation

Phase 5 Evaluation

We selected the Library.Solution, the integrated library system developed by The Library Corporation (TLC), West Virginia. After several meetings and long hours of deliberation and careful study of all the offers that we received, we reached the conclusion that the Library.Solution is the right system for us.

Engaging and Mobilizing Leadership

During the process of implementation of the development plan, it is of great importance to get the support of executives and influential people in the company.

If direct involvement is not possible, endorsement from upper and middle management will surely make the task of the library administrator a little easier. Even though the project has just started, it is best to talk about it, explain the project's goals, discuss its benefits, and ask for suggestions and comments from the bosses.

In our experience, the executives who first heard about and understand the automation plan and those who in one way or another became involved, either in the evaluation process or in the approval, were the ones who helped us "promote" and market the new library system. The Center Head of the Information System Operations, for example, was very supportive of the library automation project (and is still supportive of the library now) because he knew from the very start, what were the objectives of the project.

Engaging and Mobilizing the End-Users

In the course of implementation, the end-users of the PLDT Library helped us by giving their suggestions, by telling us what were their expectations, and by letting us know of their actual needs. We also asked for copies of the employees' research outputs, project proposals, homegrown training manuals and brochures/pamphlets that they developed, to become part of the library collection. Since we were not able to conduct an information needs analysis before the implementation of the development plan, the inputs coming from the end-users themselves helped the

library team to take-off and proceed with enough confidence that we were doing the right thing.

When we introduced the changes in the library policies, we did not receive complaints, maybe because people were only too happy to see that their library is finally growing --- and it's growing beautifully!

Implementing New Value-Added Services

Perhaps for libraries in developed countries, the value-added services I am talking about are no longer new, but in the Philippines, most libraries still stick to traditional policies and services. The following are the new services that our library offers to our users:

*** Document Delivery**

Since our motto is "bringing the library right into the workplace", we decided to get rid of the policy that requires users to go to the library to borrow books. Users may request that answers to their reference queries be sent to them by fax, e-mail attachment, or through our mailing service.

*** Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) and Online Borrowing**

The OPAC is accessible via the corporate intranet, and this allows our users to browse the catalog and borrow books online. The books are delivered to the office of the borrower within 24 hours through the mailing service.

*** Computer-Based Training (CBT)**

The library houses the CBT Campus which is also accessible via the intranet. Employees who wish to attend IT training need not leave their respective offices because they can train themselves using the CBT. The PLDT Library subscribes to over 200 titles of IT Training Courses.

*** Reference Service Through E-mail**

We answer reference questions sent by e-mail. Those who are not yet ready to use the Online Public Access catalog can also borrow and renew library materials through e-mail.

*** Interlibrary Loan**

When materials being requested are not found in the PLDT Library, assistance from neighboring corporate and academic libraries may be requested.

*** Internet Access**

Since not all employees have Internet browsing privilege, the library offers PCs that can be used for web surfing. When users can not come to the library, they may request through phone that an Internet search be made for them.

Bibliographies/Suggested Readings

The library can provide users with bibliography or list of references/suggested readings for specific topics.

* Photocopies of Telecom Newsletters

The library subscribes to leading telecom newsletter and these newsletters are photocopied and distributed to executives who requested to be in the mailing list.

* Efficient Library Homepage

The PLDT Library Homepage aside from providing information about the resources and services of the library, provides useful links to telecommunication resources, government databases, and it also features PLDT corporate news.

Bringing the Library into the Workplace" as a Survival Tool

The motto, aside from being a challenge and an inspiration becomes a survival tool for the corporate library especially during these times when reorganization, cost cutting, and streamlining are on going. The motto is a clear response to the "call for libraries and librarians to reinvent themselves" in order to survive.

The PLDT Library now enjoys the benefits that the two years of hard work brings. The employees and executives welcomed the re-birth of the library with open arms. Although we have not yet reached the entire 13,000-strong PLDT population, we are satisfied with the rapid increase in library usage, with the growing popularity of the services that we offer and with the amazing concern and cooperation shown by our users.

We believe that as long as we maintain the image of the library as a learning tool, a strong support to corporate development, and a significant agent of information dissemination, the corporate library will always be considered a necessity and a valuable asset.

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