

Team Project 1

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October 16, 2010

Fall 2010

LIBR 285-05

Evaluation of Best Practices for Public Library Collection Merchandising

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Abstract

Due to a decrease in Central City Public Library's (CCPL) circulation and a noticeable increase in patron browsing behavior, the staff of CCPL has decided to merchandise the collection. Studies in both retail and library settings show that displays significantly increase circulation/sales of items. To complete this project, we must first study our patrons and their use of the library. We will use the Plan-Do-Check-Act model to implement merchandising strategies. We will also survey and observe our patrons and their usage of the library. To engage staff in these changes, we will create a task force with one representative from each department. We will also maintain a blog to report on our progress to the community and retrain staff as necessary.

Evaluation of Best Practices for Public Library Collection Merchandising

Problem Statement

The staff at Central City Public Library (CCPL) feels the traditional library-centric approach to collection organization hinders patron “browsing,” a new trend that is becoming more and more prevalent among public library users. We are a medium-sized main branch location of a county library system consisting of eight libraries altogether. CCPL is located at the center of an urban community. The library’s users are a mix of young families with 1-2 children, stay at home moms, local middle school and high school children, recent high school graduates attending college for the first time, and busy professionals from a variety of fields.

Librarians have noticed more and more patrons of all ages just looking around the library or browsing, often leaving the library without checking out any items. Reference librarians have also reported more Reader’s Advisory (RA) inquiries than usual from patrons looking to read something new, popular, or different. When approached by our roving librarian, patrons that look lost or confused or who look as though they need assistance locating an item refuse help and say, “I’m just browsing.” To support librarians’ observations about the increase in patron browsing and unsuccessfully locating an item(s) to check out, recent ILS reports show circulation is down for Young Adult and Adult collections.

The librarians at CCPL believe this is a problem for many reasons. If patrons have the desire to browse the library collection as if it were a bookstore, but cannot locate items of interest independently or with ease, patrons will discontinue use of the library altogether. Because CCPL values the development of early and continued literacy skills through the promotion of reading for pleasure, we have developed a collection that reflects this. A significant percentage of the library’s collection is fiction, but if patrons experience difficulty or frustration finding pleasure

reading, librarians feel that our efforts to promote and sustain literacy are in vain. Patrons perceive that the library does not carry popular fiction. Patrons will stop using the library to fulfill their leisure reading needs and instead will patronize the newly built *Borders* bookstore and café which is the library's main competition. If patrons are showing an interest in popular/new/different fiction titles, and they can't find those items within the traditional organizational structure of the Dewey Decimal Classification system in library stacks, then we are not catering to the expressed user needs of our patrons and a change needs to occur. One of the fears of the librarians at CCPL is that unsatisfied patrons will spread the word to other library users that the library's collection is not current and does not provide a wide selection of popular fiction resulting in even more non-use and unsatisfied users.

The major impact of this problem from the perspective of our users is that their expressed needs are not being met. Users feel the environment within the library is not conducive to the way they seek information; they want the library to facilitate the discovery of new fiction for all users. By not displaying books so patrons can "see" and "feel" what they are about, we are unintentionally creating a negative view of the library and turning away users who would otherwise be very satisfied with the library's collection of fiction.

Scope of Analysis

In order to determine how to best meet the browsing needs of CCPL users and increase circulation, we will consider both an internal perspective which focuses on current library operations and an external perspective from library patrons. We will examine current best practices for library merchandising by conducting a literature review, and we will analyze budget constraints taking into consideration all cost components including: staffing, third-party contractors, new furniture or materials that need to be purchased, material re-labeling, and

updates to existing databases. Patron interest in browsing has peaked so we will need to examine usage patterns including circulation statistics, traffic patterns within the library to identify areas of heavy use, and patron perceptions about how the library can improve the browsing experience. We will also observe how customers in bookstores browse and we will examine the layout of bookstores in comparison to CCPL. Patron participation will be a major factor in determining how to proceed with the implementation of a plan to merchandise the library. We will incorporate several evaluative methods including the use of existing surveys created by other institutions and surveys that have been created by CCPL, we will observe patrons in the library as they engage in browsing, and we will solicit feedback from patrons throughout the process.

Once a plan has been developed and change implemented, we will conduct satisfaction surveys. These surveys will be conducted at 3, 6, and 12 months after the change has occurred, and will be given to staff members and library patrons. The purpose of the surveys will be to solicit any opinions, both positive and negative, about the library's merchandising efforts. We will also review circulation statistics and note any increase or decrease. An increase might indicate that merchandising library materials creates an environment conducive to browsing, which in turn gets more books checked out. A decrease might indicate a flaw in the merchandising strategy, and our hope is that satisfaction surveys will highlight those flaws.

Literature Review

The idea of public libraries changing to look and feel more like a large bookstore is relatively new and is still being tested. Literature written on the subject of merchandising libraries can be divided into two categories: theory and studies. By means of a literature review, we conducted a feasibility study to determine if the practice of merchandising the CCPL is a viable option.

Theoretical Literature

Whether or not libraries should try to emulate the look and feel of large bookstores is debatable. Michael Sullivan identifies in his 2003 article, *The Fragile Future of Public Libraries*, three threats to public libraries. These threats are circulation rates, Internet competition, and a librarian shortage.

Sullivan cites flat circulation as a key indicator of problems within public libraries. Over a three-year period from 1999 to 2001, a Library Journal survey (2002) found that circulation statistics "dipped in 1999 and barely rose in 2000, [it] has leapt a robust 2.9 percent in 2001" (Sullivan, 2003, Flat Circulation section, para. 1). While the Library Journal interpreted a 2.9 percent increase as a positive indicator, Sullivan (2003) interpreted this differently, saying, "Flat circulation translates into falling impact" (Flat Circulation section, para. 1). Between 1992 and 2000, national per capita circulation actually dropped more than 20 percent. If the trend continues, he argues, there will be no reason for libraries.

Another challenge to libraries is the Internet. Sullivan argues that if libraries are seen exclusively as information centers, then the Internet is, indeed, a threat. American Libraries published the results of a survey conducted by NDP New Media which had 33,000 respondents; fully 81 percent said they were satisfied with the information they retrieved from the Internet (2002). The response from libraries has been to tell people that the information found on the Internet is not authoritative, essentially telling the public that they are wrong, which does not endear the public library to them. Sullivan contends that we must redefine not only the debate, but libraries themselves, identifying the public library not as an information center or "the People's University" (2003, The Internet section, para. 6), but as a place to get a book or take your child to hear a story. Libraries place too much emphasis on reference and information.

Sullivan also believes public libraries place too much emphasis on librarians. Lower-level workers are usually the people that interact directly with the public; these are the people who know what the public wants, and these are the people that should be making decisions about what books to purchase, what programming to offer, and how internet resources should be allocated.

Bookstores are doing well. Contrast an increase in sales of 20 to 30 percent in bookstores at the same time that the Library Journal was impressed with a 2.9 percent increase in circulation at public libraries. The large book stores are driving up sales, and they have adopted many of the services previously provided only by libraries. This includes services such as children's story time, reading groups, and Reader's Advisory. They provide the services for the same reason libraries do: to get people through the door. The big difference, according to Sullivan, is that once the people come into the bookstore, they actually have the books that people want. Meanwhile, libraries work hard at collection development, purchasing books that are diverse and books that offer differing points of view on a particular subject. These purchases often mean that there is no money available to purchase the books that people actually want. Sullivan poses the questions:

When someone asks for the book the whole country is reading, does your library make him or her wait two months? Do you have too few copies because you had to buy a book some reviewer said never really got the recognition it deserved? Is this why library use is stagnant or falling and the bookstore business is booming?

(2003, Bookstores section, para. 5).

What should public libraries do? Public libraries can offer what bookstores and the Internet cannot: community. Sullivan blames public libraries' inertia and lack of will to redefine themselves for their inability to attract users.

Sullivan's publication incited a lively debate in the sphere of public libraries. In 2006, Ron E. Scrogam responded to Sullivan with the article *The American Public Library and Its Fragile Future*. Scrogam argues that, rather than succumbing to inertia, public libraries have a history of reinventing themselves. The issue is not to become more like bookstores, but that public libraries need to make "its traditions, values, and principles" (2006, p. 8) appealing to the public so it will be supported. Libraries are a place of balance, "balance between education and recreation, between print and electronic, between quiet and noise, and between parental concern and civil liberties" (Scrogam, 2006, p. 8).

Scrogam argues that we know the public supports the importance of the library by its desire to have one. While some stereotypes hurt libraries, others help. People feel a sense of nostalgia when it comes to libraries. This good will, he says, should be fostered by giving the public what they expect. People still associate books and reading with the library, and they expect librarians to be aware of books and authors. Rather than reducing their reference collection, Scrogam urges libraries to continue to collect material for research, including preserving local written records.

Rather than simply offering the most popular titles, it is incumbent upon libraries to offer information on all sides of a topic, saying, "The marketplace of ideas is not only a metaphor" (Scrogam, 2006, p. 11). Having a professional librarian make book selections, instead of paraprofessionals, as Sullivan (2003) suggests, will ensure a more diverse collection.

Libraries are not bookstores, and patrons are not customers. Scroggum (2006) warns that public libraries must be wary of using a retail model, saying:

Libraries should jealously guard against the incursion of the language of the market in a public institution because the values of the public sphere will always fall short when analyzed according to those of the private sphere. The library does have to be a good steward of its resources, and it does have to increase its visibility to the public. However, it can only be socially profitable; it can only be competitive by defining its purpose and limiting itself to that identity; and it can only be less fearful of the future when it stops measuring its worth by counting circulation and reference transactions like sales (2006, p. 11).

We recognize that public libraries are not bookstores; however, most of the literature supports the idea of adopting some bookstore practices. Steve Coffman writes in *What If You Ran Your Library like a Bookstore?* that the typical Barnes & Noble now houses more books than 85 percent of all the public library systems in the United States. Quoting the Barnes & Noble 1994 annual report, Barnes & Noble describes its stores as “reminiscent of an old-world library, with wood fixtures, antique-style chairs and public tables, and ample public space and restrooms” (1998, p. 40). They now offer book groups, guest speakers, story time for children and even summer reading programs.

Coffman (1998) compares the costs of running a public library with a bookstore and notes it costs 30 percent less to run a book store than it does to run a comparably sized branch library. Bookstores are open more, pay their staff much less, and have all of their ordering done from a central location. Coffman also points out that most library users do not use reference

services – they simply come to the library to check out books, citing a 6:1 ratio of books checked out to reference questions asked.

Barnes & Noble and other large bookstores place a high priority on design, and public libraries should do this as well. Aaron Schmidt (2010) writes of the importance of design in libraries. Design includes visual design, such as color and appearance; interaction design (IxD), which Schmidt (2010) defines as "the process of creating how something behaves and how people must behave to engage it" (Three Kinds of Design section, para. 2), or how people accomplish things; and information architecture, which is organizing and structuring data. Examining design and the impact on users, Schmidt calls librarians "de facto designers" (2010, De Facto Designers section, title). He quotes Ranganathan's "Books are for use" and restates the Five Laws:

1. Books are for use.
2. Every reader his book.
3. Every book its reader.
4. Save the time of the user.
5. The library is a growing organism

(2010, Diverse Inspiration section, para. 3)

These points are simple, basic and important to remember, and sometimes it seems that bookstores are doing a better job of enforcing these laws than are the public libraries.

At this point in our literature review, we have determined that merchandising our library is a viable option. This leads us to other considerations. How do patrons use their public library? What do they expect and what do they want?

Understanding Users

Using retail methodology to analyze library use patterns, including traffic and other types of behavior, shopping behaviors can be broken down into the categories of convenience, shopping, and specialty (Koontz, 2005). These behaviors are further defined by user characteristics. As an example, convenience includes “ready reference,” local newspapers, popular magazines, and the online catalog. Convenience users have specific characteristics; they require little assistance, make frequent and quick use of the library, and desire easy access. Patrons who are identified as shoppers use the library’s reference materials and seek out books that are for leisure or are popular. This category has the largest number of library patrons. They need a wide selection of materials, they like to comparison shop, and they require in-depth information. Specialty users include people who come to the library to use the computers, to look for assigned reading, to reserve material, or to use the study carrels. This is the smallest user group comprised of patrons looking for unique materials who do not use the library frequently (Koontz, 2005).

The library should be designed with the various patron behaviors in mind. Convenience patrons, for instance, want to pick up their items on hold and check out quickly. They will be happy to have the holds near the front of the library and would likely appreciate a self-checkout station nearby. Shoppers will want to browse the new books as well as books on various subjects. They will be the type to sit at a table with a number of books about a particular subject to study and compare before making a selection. These patrons will be pleased with wide, curving aisles, colorful displays, and comfortable resting spots.

The ideal layout of the library, according to Koontz, is very specific and should follow what retailers know and have been employing for years. Some examples include having the main

doorway to the facility on the left side of the building. The aisles should be wide and have curves rather than right angles, which interrupt mental search activities. Color and lighting should be incorporated to highlight displays and special collections. Strive for easy mobility and access to materials.

Barnes & Noble understands the importance of atmosphere and image. Atmosphere, which Sannwald (1998) defines as the interface between the user or customer and the organization, is directly related to the feeling that people have about an organization. Image is the result of atmosphere. Image, Sannwald says, “is the library’s reputation – how the public views its services, collections, buildings, systems, and staff” (1998, Image section, para. 1). Image is the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of an organization. For a positive image, the library needs people to think that its technology is up to date; that the staff delivers “Nordstromlike” (Sannwald, 1998, Image section, para. 2) service; that the building is distinguished, yet exciting. The key to success, Sannwald writes, is knowing your target audience and knowing what it wants (1998).

The founder of Barnes & Noble stated that shopping is a form of entertainment and, to consumers, shopping is a social activity. They do it to mingle with others in a prosperous-feeling crowd and to see what is new. They shop to enjoy the theatrical dazzle of the display, to treat themselves to something interesting or unexpected. Books purchased are not necessarily read. They are purchased so people can display their cultural aspirations.

Public libraries are not bookstores and librarians are not shop clerks. We believe we can maintain our commitment to the public while simultaneously providing patrons the information and the entertainment they seek in a way that is both pleasing and comfortable. However, it is undeniable that libraries face competition from bookstores.

Libraries vs. Bookstores

Traditionally, libraries have had little competition. Libraries were seen as the place to find and receive information. However, the prevalence of large bookstores is threatening the value of libraries to the public. It is imperative that libraries transform themselves to reaffirm their role in society. One important step to take in this transformation is to understand who the library does and does not serve. Hemmeter (2006) collected national data on demographics, library use, and business patterns to analyze the factors that predict library/bookstore use. As the number of bookstores per 1,000 county residents rises, the use of the library decreases though these results were not found to be significant. Hemmeter (2006) found a number of factors that contribute to library use. First, living less than a mile from a library increases the probability of use by up to 25%. Second, families with children are 20% more likely to use a library. Third, higher education levels predict higher library use. This study also reveals the group for which libraries receive the most competition.

Though higher income levels predict higher library use, the effect of bookstores is greatest for those in the middle-income group. Hemmeter (2006) noted that these results are unexpected as those with higher income levels can afford to purchase their own copies of books. However, those with higher income levels generally live in more affluent areas with newer, more personalized libraries. This finding is troubling as the middle-income group represents a large proportion of voters who may decide to support other services over libraries. This may lead to a decline in funding or the complete closure of a library altogether. It is imperative that libraries better market their services and create a more attractive environment. Libraries should take cues from these large bookstores to understand what attracts potential patrons to the bookstore instead of the library.

Retail Studies

Much of what libraries know about merchandising comes from the retail environment. The goal of merchandising in retail is to make products look as attractive as possible so that customers will buy more. Numerous studies have been conducted to show that creating special displays for products will increase the sales of those products. Wilkinson, Mason, and Paksoy (1982) studied the effects of display level on unit sales. Over a period of 80 weeks, four products at a supermarket chain were placed in one of three groups. The first group had a normal display level with no more or less shelf space than usual. The second group had an expanded display with twice the amount of shelf space. Finally, the third group had a special display with regular shelf space plus a separate display in another location. Wilkinson, Mason, and Paksoy (1982) found that display level had a significant impact on unit sales. Furthermore, the special display level had a much greater impact on sales than the expanded display did. The percent increase in sales for all four products in the special display group ranged from 175% to 577%. From this research, we can conclude that special displays have a powerful impact on the sale of retail products.

Another revealing study conducted by Gagnon and Osterhaus (1985) examined the effects of displays in both grocery stores and pharmacies. Twenty four grocery stores and 24 pharmacies were chosen for this experiment. For four weeks, items were placed in a special display near the aisles in which the product was normally kept. For the next two weeks, items were displayed in a high-volume area not associated with the product. Gagnon and Osterhaus (1985) found that the floor displays resulted in significantly higher unit sales in all stores. Furthermore, the displays in high-volume locations sold significantly more than the displays near the aisles in which the products are kept. They also found that the displays did not adversely

affect the number of units sold off the shelves. This research reveals how important a knowledge of traffic flow is when deciding where to place a display.

Library Studies

Despite the relative newness of merchandising in libraries, much research has been completed on the advantages of using displays in general. Baker (1986) extends this research a step further and explores the factors that cause displays to increase circulation. This study examined two hypotheses. First, items on display circulate more because they are more visible and accessible. Second, items on display circulate more because they provide a narrower choice of materials for patrons, thus avoiding the effects of information overload. This study conducted two experiments using two Illinois public libraries that served roughly the same number of potential patrons (5,000-7,000). The first experiment tested the first hypothesis. The variable studied in this experiment is visibility/accessibility. In both libraries, all books were kept in their normal location for a three month period. During this time, circulation figures were recorded. For the next three months, books were randomly assigned to a different display setup. One setup displayed the books spine out on a cart near the circulation desk, a high-traffic area where the books would be both visible and accessible. The second setup was the same cart arrangement, but the cart was located behind the stacks where they were not especially visible or accessible. Finally, the rest of the books were left in their normal locations (control).

The second experiment studied how recommendations affected circulation (i.e. narrowing of choices). In this experiment, half of the books in each display were marked with a red dot, indicating that it was a recommended title. Signage informed patrons of the meaning of the red dots. To ensure that differences in circulation were due to researcher manipulation and not the books themselves, a second three month period was used during which the

locations/recommendation status of the books were reversed. In other words, the books with low visibility were moved to the location with high visibility and the books that were not recommended, were recommended instead of those that had been previously. Also, patrons who checked out items from any of the experimental groups were asked why they had chosen the item.

Baker (1986) found evidence to support the first hypothesis. Books experienced a substantial increase in circulation when moved from regular shelving and from the low visibility display to the high visibility display. Also, patrons identified as browsers during the follow-up interview were more likely to check out items in the high visibility area. Though the study did find that recommended titles circulated more than non-recommended titles, this effect was only observed at one of the libraries. Baker (1986) found that the library in which this hypothesis was supported has a much larger collection, thus indicating that perhaps the effects of information overload were greater. Further tests need to be conducted to support the second hypothesis.

Because browsing has been such a popular way for patrons to discover new titles, Goldhor (1972) studied whether specially displaying titles, a way to facilitate browsing, would increase the titles' circulation. Two medium-sized public libraries in Illinois were the subject of this experiment. During phase 1 of this experiment spanning six months, Goldhor (1972) collected circulation data of 110 titles in each collection. No significant differences were noted between the two sets of data. During the next six months (phase 2), these same 110 titles were placed on a special display near the circulation desk in one of the libraries. In addition, patrons were interviewed about their selections. As was expected, the experiment revealed that circulation for the displayed books was significantly higher than circulation for the same titles at

the control library. Also, over a third of the patrons indicated that they selected the titles due to browsing.

In a later study, Goldhor (1981) replicated previous work (Goldhor, 1972) and expanded on it. For three months, the circulation figures of 144 books were recorded and patrons who checked out these titles received questionnaires. For the next three months, the books were split into three groups. Group A books were placed in a special display with signage indicating their presence. Group B books were left on their normal shelves, but their titles and a brief description were placed in a book list that was handed out to patrons. Finally, Group C books were placed on their regular shelves with no special treatment. Goldhor (1981) found that Group A books were checked out seven times more frequently than during the first three months (control period). Also, Group B books were checked out four times more frequently than previously. Nearly half of patrons responding to the questionnaire indicated that they had chosen a book due to browsing, confirming the popularity of browsing as a selection method.

Type of Analysis

A wide variety of models and tools are available for analysis of this project. We have narrowed our selection to five: surveys, focus groups, observation, Plan-Do-Check-Act, and Think Aloud/Think After Data Protocol.

Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)

We recognize the need to make improvements in our public library. PDCA is a model we will follow throughout the process of making the improvements. The first part of this model is planning, which involves establishing a process, creating goals or targets, creating a task force, and identifying appropriate benchmarks. The second part of the model, the “doing,” includes studying the problem and possible solutions and documenting observations. Once the studies and

testing are complete, the findings are checked. This could include reviewing what we learn, reviewing the thoroughness and validity of questions we posed to participants, and whether or not service can be further improved. The final phase, action, will be the result of all of the other steps. What we will do to improve our patrons' experience at the library will be based on the information gathered through this process.

Surveys

Surveys can be a highly effective method of discovering how and why people use the library. We have determined that surveying people in the library as well as an online survey will be effective. The online survey can be accessed both through our library website, as well as a mass e-mailing for cardholders who have given us their e-mail address. We will question users about their library practices, book purchases, satisfaction with library materials and services, etc.

Focus Groups

While surveys help us to gather the data we think we need to complete our informational snapshot of our patrons, focus groups are an effective way to add depth to that information. Mathews (2007) describes focus groups as a group interview. Focus groups can also provide analysts with a serendipitous revelation, something previous unknown or not considered that was not included in a list of survey questions.

Ideally, we will conduct different focus groups with various stakeholders. These groups might include senior citizens, representatives of various non-profit community organizations, Spanish language speakers, young adults, etc. These groups will be small, with a maximum of twelve participants to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak. To curb rising costs, the focus groups will be conducted by an in-house moderator. Key questions will be developed to

ensure the discussion moves forward, although the moderator will allow for a free-flowing discussion to elicit a variety of ideas.

We will ask various members of our staff to work with the community to recruit people to participate in the focus groups. Our staff members are already specialized in outreach to specific members of the community, and they are best able to find willing participants. The sessions should be video recorded so they can be further analyzed at a later date. Our analysis should identify and summarize trends.

Think Aloud/Think After Data Protocol

This is a tool in which participants verbalize their experience in the library both as they are performing the act or they perform the task and then discuss what they did and why. To perform the first method, participants will be given small recording devices that they can carry with them while in the library so that they can record their thoughts as they perform a variety of actions. Once they are finished using the library, they will return the device to the library staff so that the information can be analyzed. The Think After Protocol will require either a recording device as described above, or a staff member would interview the participant after the action is complete. As with the Think Aloud process, the data would be combined with information from the other respondents and analyzed. Utilizing these methods will help us to better understand the thought process behind patrons' behavior.

Observation

Observation is a tool that will be very useful in determining how our patrons use the library and interact with various aspects of the library. For our study, we will use both overt and covert approaches. Video cameras will be ideal to covertly observe people by recording how people navigate the library, how they use the space, and where they spend their time. Do they

come to the library alone or with friends or family? If they enter the premises with other people, do they remain together or do they separate for individual pursuits? Do they do what they need to do and leave, or do they socialize with other patrons? Do they pause to look at the current art display? Overt observation will be useful to observe patrons to determine the patterns described above, with the addition of the observer being able to ask the patron questions. Questions would relate to the patrons' overall satisfaction with how they are interacting in the library at that moment.

Chosen Methodologies

Upon completion of our review of models and tools to use in our analysis, we have decided to employ three methods: Plan-Do-Check-Act, Observation (both overt and covert methods), and Surveys.

The Plan-Do-Check-Act is the best model for our library to follow during this initial process of change and to aid us in continuing to refine and adjust what the library can offer the community and the most appropriate way to deliver services. Observation can provide us with both qualitative and quantitative data and will assist us in identifying patterns we might not otherwise discover. Surveys are the best way to reach both users and non-users. We should be able to gather a large sample of quantitative data with survey questions, as well as some qualitative information with open-ended questions and space for additional comments.

Required Data

This analysis will require several types of data. From our surveys, we will collect primarily demographic data and data about patrons' preferences. It is important to know who the library serves as we consider merchandising our library. Asking about our patrons' preferences will provide data about whether patrons prefer to browse or precision search, which items they

check out most regularly, and how they feel about the current layout of the library (i.e. Dewey-based organization). Our observations will yield data on circulation, gate count, in-house material usage, and traffic flow. Circulation will enable us to identify areas of weakness in the collection. Gate count and in-house material usage data are important to complete the picture of how many patrons we serve. Circulation count is not an accurate measure as many patrons do not check out items during their visits. Similarly, many patrons use materials in-house. If we did not collect statistics for these materials, we would not have a complete understanding of what items are used and how frequently. Finally, traffic flow will enable us to identify the areas of the library that are most popular. This is integral to deciding where to place a merchandising display.

Reporting to Staff

In order to inform, train, and report results to library staff, we will need to implement the use of three strategies. The first will be a planning task force. This task force will include a representative from each department who will have the responsibility of reporting back to their co-workers with any decisions or progress that has been made. Task force members will also hold the responsibility of reporting back to the task force with ideas and suggestions from their individual departments. The second method of delivery will be the use of a blog to report on the planning process and any progress made and/or roadblocks encountered. The blog will also enable the library to communicate progress with the community. It is yet to be determined who will manage and write the blog. The third strategy will be to redesign training procedures to reflect new library services and operational design. The entire staff will be involved in the training process once a decision has been made to implement change.

Conclusion

Our librarians have observed an increasing number of patrons browsing the collection unsuccessfully, a factor which could be causing a decline in circulation. Using methods and theories learned through evaluation of literature on the subject, we will attempt to remedy library design issues by using suggested best practices to merchandise portions of the collection in order to meet the browsing needs of our patrons and increase circulation. After careful review of several different evaluation tools and methods, we have decided to focus on three: surveys, observation, and the PDCA model of continuous improvement. Our plan is to conduct a small-scale test of collection merchandising and then evaluate the outcomes. If the initial testing phase is successful, we will make adjustments as necessary and proceed to test on a larger scale. If it is decided that initial testing is unsuccessful, we will conduct more research, re-evaluate our strategies, and either abandon the plan altogether or completely redesign the test and try again.

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