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Lightning Talk: Integrating Sustainability into the Daily Work Practices: Lessons Learned as a Manager

Presentation Slides: <https://www.slideshare.net/filarwilliams/integrating-sustainability-into-the-daily-work-practices-lessons-learned-as-a-manager>

Abstract: Integrating sustainability into daily library practices is both internal and external - as manager and faculty member on campus my leadership role can provide influence into both sectors. This session will share lessons learned, challenges faced, and tips for trying to change behaviors, educate, and carry out this core value of sustainability and <hopefully> also an understanding of the looming impacts of climate change which affect all aspects of all of our lives.

Integrating sustainability into daily work practices is a cultural, mental and behavioral shift in any institution. It may stem from grassroots cultural urge or from leadership setting the tone, and it is applicable to both internal (library staff behind the scenes) and external (patron areas, interactions) realms. As a library manager, and tenure track faculty member, my leadership role can have influence in both of these area. In the external realm, for example, I worked with students in a course studying the service design thinking process, which resulted in feedback and suggestions from undergraduates on sustainability practices they would like to see in in their library. Internal changes affect staff only but staff also need to be supportive of external changes as they may have to help create, carry out, or educate the public about the new policy, process or service. Examples of sustainability in the internal realm are a pilot project to compost in public spaces in the library, and daily work practice changes of using cloth rags instead of paper towels for cleaning. Library managers looking to integrate a sustainable mindset and practices in their library have the opportunity to assist in changing the culture, attitudes and behaviors.

At Oregon State University Libraries and Press (OSULP) sustainability emerged as a core value in the 2012-2017 library strategic plan. Also part of the plan was the strategic goal that launched the creation of the Library Experience and Access Department (LEAD), with the role to look conscientiously and holistically at the user experience and access to resources in the library. As Head of LEAD, my responsibility involves coordinating public services, the facilities for the largest building on campus, and the overall experience for our users' success in their learning, research and teaching. This short piece provides tips and feedback from a library manager on practical methods for changing behaviors and instilling a sustainability-minded attitude.

The first question to ponder is: Does your library have a culture that supports sustainability practices? Though this is not a yes or no answer, often a gradient, if it leans toward a yes, it will be much easier to integrate sustainability more holistically into your library. Do you have a strategic plan which the library closely follows? Do you have such elements such as “core values”? If your library doesn’t have sustainability as a core value, perhaps your campus has sustainability as part of its plan or the key values it seeks in the campus community. At OSULP sustainability is a core value of the library in our strategic plan (OSULP, 2012-2017). Therefore, as a manager I can easily support shifts in culture, policy, and practice by pointing to the strategic plan and its’ core values. I can easily add sustainability values into staff position descriptions, turning the value into action, and then evaluate on this value as well:

Example in a Circulation Technician position description: “As needed, consult with LEAD supplies coordinator and/or the library’s sustainability committee to ensure maintenance and replacements of laptops and hourly equipment can be adapted to take advantage of other sustainable methods and materials.”

If your library is a strong NO in terms of sustainability being part of your library culture then you have more an uphill battle. If you are in a manager or leadership role, focus on your department or unit, find kindred spirits and colleagues who might help advocate change at your “local level.” Often modeling behaviors can be the best influence on others. Those in tenured position also have a more solid voice at the table, so grab those advocates to help support sustainability efforts. Those of us with the inherent power in the institution can use this to support sustainability and the social justice aspect to make change in our libraries.

External focus impacts the patrons or users space in the library. Whether it is working with students, courses, or simply supporting public service area changes, the focus is on affecting the external side of the library. One example in my library has been working for the past several terms with students in a course studying service design thinking processes. As they learned the process, they applied the service design method to redesigning services in the library based on topics I provided. Some topics have been sustainability practices, recycling and composting. Feedback and suggestions from these undergraduate students on sustainability practices they would like to see in their library has not only offered direct user input but actual ideas we had not considered, and an opportunity to connect with these student advocates who are motivated to see these redesigns put into practice.

Another external example was implementing composting (Hussong-Christian, 2016) into the library main floor. With a robust composting system in the small town of Corvallis where OSULP resides, the project started by simply collecting pizza boxes (over 70 in less than a week) during finals for composting. Library staff then shifted to composting stations on the main floor. This is an ongoing challenge, with a much higher learning curve for students, custodial services, and our student employees, among others, as we realized more education is needed. As a manager, I supported one of my librarians to host a campus sustainability undergraduate intern for the year to help with signage, educational planning and activities, and providing insight on how to improve these sustainability decisions and services. Peers can

be a key to understanding other peers (aka students) and a motivating factor for implementing new services.

As this last initiative implies, external services or cultural shifts also require commitment from the internal realm. The staff must be on board to support the user experiences (external) and daily work practice changes (internal) Most of the external started first with the internal: for example, a staff composting service was designed and redesigned before launching in the public space.

Some examples of internal support are:

- Supporting staff to attend a local sustainability conference(s) and requiring they share on the blog or at a meeting what they learned and at least one idea that we may be able to implement.
- Sending a staff member to attend our town's Master Recycling program during work hours, knowing she would bring back, solid knowledge on how to recycle properly so we are not "wishful recyclers," causing more harm than good.
- Using cleaning clothes or simply rags we cut up and brought in for cleaning staff and public areas and then taking them home to wash.
- Purchasing a "party pack" made of recycled materials, which library departments can borrow for parties to cut back on waste (and developing a process to have it properly cleaned).
- Advocating for the purchase of a regular size refrigerator in the LEAD department so staff can bring in food and eat more sustainably.
- Switching to refillable whiteboard markers so we are not throwing out the plastic ones. This is in the internal realm since we have to convince someone to undertake the messy process of refilling white board markers.
- Promote and share what is happening and why at library-wide events and briefings.

As we work through internal practices, we can also apply these to the external or public areas. For example, we are considering cleaning stations around the library using eco-friendly cleaners and rags instead of throw away toxic wipes.

For any size library, consider forming a committee to look into these sustainability practices. The model of the committee might vary depending on your institution and culture: do you want to require a representative from each department or just take those who are particularly interested in the topic and will promote the ideas to other library departments? Does the committee fall under the library as a whole or under one manager who can advocate for the group? Will you have student representatives or is the committee mainly internally focused? Whichever path you take, make sure the committee is given power or knows the process to bring change to the library, make sure they have a solid mission, make sure they are keeping to capacity and not burning out, and check in regularly and have them report out so the whole library knows the activities and impact of the group. Still not convinced? Here is what my sustainability committee members have to say:

“acknowledgement on the part of the library that sustainability is something we should pay attention to and having regular opportunities to talk with like-minded colleagues to brainstorm projects”

“I see now that with a **supportive [library] administration**, we can create proposals to possibly get bigger things done....”

“the opportunity to **change our policies** and practices for the better, And a **chance to really embed some of MY core values in my workplace.**“

“Because students love their library so much, it does provide an opportunity to subtly **teach them about sustainability, and allows us to model behavior**”

Committee members also mentioned challenges, including projects or ideas are often out of committee’s reach or control such as limitations due to budget as well as university agreements and policies. Also the limited capacity of members to carry out the ideas, when it may be a small team or those who want to do more but have limited workload capacity or follow through. As a manager, I communicate regularly to see if I can help with offering information that might help carry out (or not carry out) an idea, help recruit other key stakeholders.

In conclusion, as a manager, use your power and privilege to help integrate sustainability practices in your workplace. Find existing infrastructure, methods or processes to integrate or make change. Find other advocates and join forces to make change happen. Educate and be transparent throughout the process, communicating and listening regularly. Hopefully these changes in culture will provide the baseline to even more substantial and meaningful changes, and more advocates to join, in your library.

References:

Oregon State University Libraries and Press Strategic Plan 2012-017

<http://library.oregonstate.edu/files/osulp%20strategic%20plan%202012-17.pdf>

Uta Hussong-Christian, (2016) "If you build it, will they sort it? Compost collection in the academic library learning commons", Library Management, Vol. 37 Issue: 6/7, pp.340-351, <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-04-2016-0026>