Outsourcing Trends in University Libraries

Ankita Tiwari*   Dr. Sarika Sawant**

* **M.L.I.Sc. Student**
SHPT School of Library Science,
SNDT Women's University Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

** **Assistant Professor**
SHPT School of Library Science,
SNDT Women's University Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

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Abstract: - *Outsourcing means to source from outside or in other words getting another person or organization to provide a service on a contractual basis. It can be very helpful for Libraries and any other management. The paper lists the activities that can be outsourced. It also outlines the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing.*

Keywords: Outsourcing, Library services, University libraries, Library activities

Introduction

Outsourcing of some library services is not a new thing. Outsourcing means to source from outside or in other words getting another person or organization to provide a service on a contractual basis. Outsourcing is the potential tool to lower overall cost and improve the quality of library services and products. It began 25 years ago. It is a trend found in many types of libraries today. Outsourcing has tremendous potential for various library activities and services. It has become an integral part of all types of the libraries. It has become a strategic tool in library management.

According to Barthelemy and Geyer (2001) it helps in focusing on special activities in which the industry could achieve a unique competitive edge. Musbika (2009), Mohile (2008), Wadhwa and Ravindran (2007) (as cited in Katikar (2017) defined outsourcing is the strategic use of resources to perform activities traditionally handled by internal staff and their resources. It is a management strategy by which an organization

outsources major non-core functions to specialised and efficient service providers. Basically defined, outsourcing is the transfer of an internal service or function to an outside vendor (Bordeianu and Benaud 1997).

Noradiva Hamzah et, al (2010) Outsourcing is defined as the replacement of inputs or value added previously created in-house by an external provider within a long-term contractual relationship for the expected mutual benefits.

Libraries services that could be outsourced

According to Ugah (2010)the services that could be outsourced are

Cataloguing

Outsourcing of cataloguing can be temporary measure to deal with backlog. Most university libraries are facing the problem of backlog. Based on the size of the backlog and available staff, outsourcing can be crucial in reducing cataloguing backlogs.

Cataloguing card production

University libraries that still engage in catalogue card production should consider outsourcing it. Libraries with card catalogues may have a backlog of card production or poor quality work.

Book pockets, book cards, borrower's tickets

Production of these printed materials should be outsourced. Production of these items is done at long intervals, and it is not worth the expenses and effort producing them in-house.

Binding and book repair

Some university libraries maintain a bindery and book repair unit. Some libraries have had problems with this unit becoming corrupt, using facilities, material, and time to engage in the private business of binding, enriching them to the detriment of the libraries while at the same time collecting salaries and allowances. Outsourcing is a cure for that kind of corruption.

Photocopying

Most libraries have photocopying service. Libraries should outsource this service; a business partnership should be engaged and allocated space within the library or its vicinity, to photocopy libraries materials at a reasonable cost to the user's.

Indexing and abstracting

Most libraries do not have the resources to provide indexes and abstracts for their collections of periodical literature and similar material. Due consideration should be given to the issue of outsourcing indexing and abstracting, and the production indexes and abstracts.

Collection development services

Okogwu (2014) described that Libraries outsourced their collection development by contracting vendors with the services of building their collection. Some new libraries have begun with opening day shelf ready collection put together according to standard list by vendors.

The pros of outsourcing

The pros of outsourcing often positively reflected by libraries are as follows

- Better revenue realization and enhanced returns on investment.
- Lower labor cost and increased realization of economics of scale.

- Tapping in to a knowledge base for better innovation.
- Free libraries time, enabling companies to focus on core competencies while not being concerned about outsourced routine activities.
- Increased speed and the quality of delivery of outsourced activities.
- Reduces cash outflow and optimizes resource utilization.

The cons of outsourcing

The cons of outsourcing often dwelled upon

- Possible loss of control over a library's activities.
- Problems related to quality and turn-around time.
- Lower than expected realization of benefits and results.
- Issues pertaining to lingual accent variation.
- Longer term contracts may become dysfunctional when conditions change rapidly.
- Existing staff may lose their positions.

Purpose of using outsourcing

Gupta and Sharma (2012) described the purposes or reasons why and how outsourcing is important and given the reasons that are as follows-

- To concentrate on core activities
- Lack of required staff
- Improve the quality of library services
- For continuous improvement in services
- To introduce new services

- Save manpower
- Save time and energy
- To reduce staff responsibilities
- More efficient than in-house
- To enhance user's satisfaction.

Research paper revealed that most Indian libraries have been using selective outsourcing for many years, which has had favorable impact on these libraries. The majority of libraries outsource professional automated and non-professional activities and services. Libraries are still not ready to outsource professional traditional library activities and services, whereas the literature shows that internationally libraries outsourced tradition activities and services equally. Indian libraries also want to continue and expand the use of outsourcing in the future, especially digitization, RFID tagging and maintenance.

In addition to this there are few more advantages as follows

Positive aspects of outsourcing

- Reduce and control costs (Economic favor the use of contract labor over direct employment, or service levels can be improved or expanded at an equal or lower cost).
- Improve library services.
- Expansion of the library's planning, implementation and evaluation processes.
- Maintaining content, ensuring links are working, and other time-consuming tasks can be centralized with outsourcing.

- Providing specialized equipment not owned by the library.

- Free up internal resources and professionals for other purposes such as improving library services, concentrating on core activities.

- It ensures proper resource utilization, in fact skilled manpower; advanced technology and excellent infrastructure are utilized productively.

- Outsourcing helps libraries to share its risks rather than carry the entire responsibility alone. This also ensures that libraries problems are minimized.

Drawbacks of outsourcing

According to Ugah (2010)there are issues common to traditional libraries practice that may indicate the need to consider outsourcing, including high cost, low productivity, poor management, and lack of communication (Appleby, 2000).

Tsiang (2006) cautions that outsourcing is a controversial issue that could affect the future of the library profession.

Outsourcing is a controversial issue with redundancy Implications for library staff. Outsourcing is a frequently misused and misunderstood term and some disagreement can be traced to different definitions (Appleby, 2000). There are some drawbacks of outsourcing are as follows

- When libraries begin outsourcing processes, they might find it difficult to

manage the outsource provider when compared to managing processes within the libraries.

- The staff of libraries might not like the idea of outsourcing the library processes and they might express lack of interest or lack of quality at work

- In case of dusting and cleaning activity the contract term can be discontinued by the agency at any time without giving any reasons or prior notice.

- The employment opportunities of the library workers could be narrowed down if outsourcing take place in a large scale (Mautusi Basak, 2013)

- Quality problem.

Role played by the librarians in outsourcing

Mautusi Basak (2013) in the context of library outsourcing the librarians performs an important role to coordinate in the process of outsourcing. Librarians need to clarify and understand the outsourcing issues, positions and concerns. For providing outsourcing services, clear understanding and agreement about the meaning of terms and conditions. In case of big libraries, there are so many types of outsourcing activities. Some medium and small libraries are also outsourced their services, sometimes it is project basis or sometimes it is contractual basis. In all cases librarians or permanent library professional have crucial role to play in this respect.

Conclusion

The study has provided an overview of outsourcing practices with its pros and cons. Outsourcing generally positive with benefits in cost-saving, reduced staff redundancy and enhanced user and libraries satisfaction. It enhanced library services and improves library management.

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