

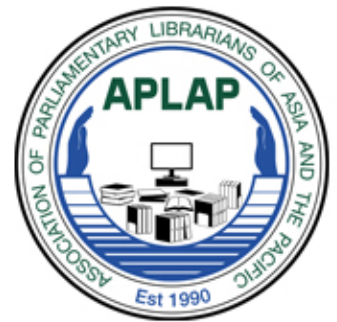
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Strategically Managing the Pandemic through Digital Transformation

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APLAP Country Report

Legislative Library & Legislative Records and Archives Services
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“STRATEGICALLY MANAGING THE PANDEMIC THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION”

By: Jose G. Villapando

Good day, I am Dir. Jose Villapando, on the part of the Philippine Senate, I will be delivering the country report that will focus on the Strategic Management of the devastating effects of the Pandemic to the Legislative Library and the Legislative Records and Archives Services. The report will generally deal on the impact of the pandemic to our services, the strategic management employed and the end-results of our efforts to combat the challenges encountered. However, before we start, I would like to provide you with a brief run-through of our institution, the Senate of the Philippines.

The Congress of the Philippines is a Bicameral Legislative body which is composed of the Senate of the Philippines and the House of Representatives. This is one of the three branches of the government together with the Executive and the Judiciary. The Senate of the Philippines which is the upper chamber of Congress, is composed of 24 Senators who have been elected at large or nationwide. In the present Congress, the Senate is under the leadership of Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III. One of the bureaus of the Philippine Senate, is the Legislative Reference Bureau responsible for Library and the Legislative Records and Archives services. It also supervises the preservation and organization of the Senate Museum.

Issues and Challenges Encountered

Our collections in the Legislative Library and the Legislative Records and Archives Services are catering to a “niche market”, considering that we are the only institution in the Philippines that have the possession and comprehensive collections of all Legislative Records which includes proceedings, and other relevant collections of the Philippine Senate. This I can say, makes our tasks to be more crucial in this time of adversity.

The biggest stumbling block then for those in demand for legislative research, may it be from the office of the Legislators, Local Leaders, Students, and other stakeholders; is to encounter a big interruption in our services. Unfortunately, this pandemic has unexpectedly happened to us all of a sudden, where everybody was caught unaware, and worse unprepared.

In the nature of our office operations, where we as a government office; public service should at all times be our utmost priority, in order to push forward our advocacy of Patriotism, Integrity, Excellence and Spirituality in serving the public. Failing to deliver the needs of the people in the best of our ability is one of our biggest challenges.

Needless to say, because of the pandemic and the uncertainties it brings to the safety and well-being of the population; most of our clients no longer frequent our office, specially outside researchers, considering that guests are being restricted from entering our premises. It is short of saying that the usual numbers of clients that we serve plummeted instantly.

As for the Legislative researchers from the Offices of the Senators, who are already inside the Senate building, understandably might likewise have similar apprehension in coming to our research facility to do physical research, due to the health risks. However, on occasions that they come to us for research, the personalized service that we used to provide, has been limited by the new protocols we are following, like social distancing. Simply put, because of the safety protocols, we were not able to assist them fully well. We can no longer come in close proximity to our clients to collaborate and discuss extensively, matters relating to their research needs and other technical information they may want to solicit. Specially now, we are starting to develop and pilot-test a “human library” wherein senior officers who happen to have deep experiences in the Legislative process, can able to share their institutional memories in some relevant proceedings to those who wanted to get insights, better understanding and appreciation of parliamentary procedures, through face to face discussions.

As for the other logistical operations like documentary management, including accession, filing, and maintenance; also, experienced set-backs considering that the same cannot be performed virtually.

For the digitization endeavors, considering that most of the activities were spent on the migration of both the documents and magnetic recordings into digital format, the WFH set-up likewise caused a slight blow in the effort to expedite the completion of digitizing our collection that slowed down the process by roughly 30 to 35%.

These are just some highlights of our unfortunate experiences we encountered in the midst of the pandemic. After having said these, we strategized our operations to at the very least level-off with our performance under normal circumstances. However, we cannot do this without the much-needed support mechanism provided by the Senate Leadership for us to maximize performing our duties, without jeopardizing quality of service.

Strategies and Implemented Parliamentary and Research Service to cope with the Impact on Operations to mitigate and arrest the problems and challenges in serving the public and protecting the employees

In so far as to protect the office staff from the vicious virus, since the early stage of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Senate leadership was quick to react in providing a policy that pave the way for the Legislative Reference Bureau to come-up with its customized alternative work arrangements (AWA) that is well-fit with our office operations.

As far as the Legislative Library and Legislative Records and Archives are concerned, we implemented a work-scheme of physically reporting to office for at least twice a week and a

Work from Home for the remaining days of the week. We do it in such a way that half of our staff will alternatively come to office every Mondays and Tuesdays and the other half every Wednesdays and Thursdays. Although there were occasions that all staff were required to WFH at the same time, in the effort to contain the virus from spreading during a spike.

For the staff who are scheduled to work from home, must virtually, using google form, log-in at 8:00 am and log-out at 7:00 pm, and generate the corresponding online attendance at the end of the month, for proper monitoring. Through this set up, while our workforce fell short by 50% from its normal staff complements, the strategically planned work coordination of staff reporting physically to office is well-supported by those working from home who have access to office on-line files alongside with the use of social media platforms as a means of communicating for real-time collaborations, makes things work-out. This kind of set-up came-out as if that all staff were physically present in the office even though half of the staff are remotely working from home.

In the Legislative Library and Legislative Records and Archives Services, we started to engineer the idea of fully digitizing our records with the intentions to access our collections on-line. While we have not fully completed our digitization since this is a continuing process, out of sheer desperation to alter the situation; we already soft launched by putting on-line the digitized collections, to reap its benefits after the national government declared an Enhanced Community Quarantine in the National Capital Region for almost three months, where nobody in the Senate could report for work.

When the status of the quarantine was relaxed, we return back to work on a skeletal work-setup with a limited 50% capacity of the workforce. The continuing digitization endeavor slowed down, together with the lowering of output of other tasks. However, with the diligent work of our staff, we can say that the shift from physical-manual work; towards a hybrid operations via physical and virtual set-up, turned out to be more than enough for us to provide most, if not, all of the needs of the clientele. One of the key strategic moves made was to place the digitized collections stored in Senate mainframe and Network Attached Storage to be up and running 24/7 on-line over the net.

We were also able to come-up with the blueprint and implement our on-line scheme in such a way that the moment we have to undergo a complete work from home arrangement, we can immediately utilize our technological innovations designed to take on the almost impossible challenges that we face.

With the support of the leadership of the Philippine Senate in providing us with all the significant equipment needed to provide for our digitization, we were able to continuously serve our Clienteles who cannot physically come to our office to research; and at the same time, the Library and the Archives Staff who cannot likewise come to office to work due to WFH arrangements. Currently we are using the following tools in our digital environment to better serve the clientele

For the Legislative Records and Archives Service, we have the following tools:

DIGITAL ARCHIVES LEGISLATIVE COLLECTIONS

This is the Migration of hard copies of legislative document files into searchable digitized version containing the full contents of the documents, not just the title. This likewise includes the digitization of all magnetic tapes containing the complete A/V recordings of Senate plenary sessions and committee hearing proceedings.

Digitized migrated materials are stored in a Network Attached Storage (NAS). This is actually a personal cloud computing which was started with a measly 16TB storage as our humble start-off point. We planned to upgrade to 128 TB as our medium-term goal, and increase it as the need arises. The NAS is connected to our online network which is 24/7 accessible online for access by our staff. This is the mother storage of our legislative and archival collections. These Documents are indexed and arranged the same way we index it and file it physically in our physical storage rooms.

These digitized legislative records which can be requested electronically, will be delivered through the researcher's registered email. Usually, the process works almost in real time. As the whole process will only take between 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

ONLINE LEGISLATIVE RECORDS RESEARCH REQUEST PORTAL

To serve our clients who cannot come to us, we made ourselves available through our virtual office. This electronic research request platform employ the use of Infographics in the Senate Web page as a research portal facility to remotely request for available digitized legislative documents using a QR code. The posted infographics of the "Senate Digital Archives", informs the public of the online availability for request for legislative documents. The QR code can both be scanned or clicked to bring the researchers to our google form, to fill-up the request.

GLOBODOX

Globodox is a proprietary computer software application, which is the Senate Archive's version of "GOOGLE". This is an electronic file management system devised and customized as a Legislative Records search engine designed to expedite research process. The system is capable of searching over a million, and still growing, digitally stored documents using words or phrases. Searches can be done by Keyword, Title, Names of the Senators, Subject matter etc. This is being utilized for researchers which have a specific topic to search for. If one is not sure where to start, this is the tool for them.

SIMPLIFIED LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

Another digital tool conceptualized by one of the Senior Archives staff to search for the background and history of frequently searched legislative measures. This is a product of Research and Development intended to fast track research process of landmark legislations.

For the Legislative Library Service, we have:

DESTINY LIBRARY MANAGER (DLM)

This is the library's Integrated Library System (ILS) where 30,000 volumes of printed books, e-books, and other reference materials are encoded and searchable through Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC). Searches can be done by Keyword, Title, Author, and Subject. A Link to the library's OPAC is available in the Senate Website.

VERTICAL FILES

This is a collection of the Library's more or less 5,000 volumes of ephemeral materials such as pamphlets, documents, photos, posters, etc., which is relevant to the library collections. Indexed and encoded by Title, Author, and subject. Stored in a vertical filing boxes in folders arranged alphabetically by subject.

HEINONLINE

Like other libraries around the world, we are also using Heinonline Research Platform. As we all know, it is a premier online research platform that provides more than 193 million pages of multidisciplinary periodicals, essential government documents, international resources, case law and much more, composed of fully searchable images-based PDF's.

The legislative library uses this platform in its Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) - where 39 Legislative Senate Committees are receiving abstracts of timely journal articles relevant to legislative issues.

PRESS READER

This is an online newspaper and magazine platform where the Library staff has remote access to. In effect, the relevant materials are viewed and can be saved in google drives.

E-BOOKS

36 titles of e-books are accessible through computer terminals connected in the Senate Internet Protocol (IP) address.

End Results of our efforts to mitigate the effects of Covid -19 in the Office operations

Despite the limitations brought about by the pandemic, the Legislative Library and the Legislative Records and Archives Services were able to continue rendering service to its catered clientele and stakeholders through the digital synergism we have implemented, without compromising quality of service while observing proper health protocols.

Because of the automation of our system, we were able to cut costs, time and processes not to mention government resources that were saved through this digital transformation. This translates to serving more clients daily and expedite the delivery of services almost in real time as compared to our operations before the pandemic.

To sum it up – the advantages these brings are glaring: the researchers can make requests using our portal 24/7. We can serve clients at the safety and comfort of their own homes; same thing with our own staff performing WFH who can deliver public service in the safety of their dwellings.

Going by the experiences during this pandemic, in all humility, we have attained success, in our efforts to combat the supposed devastation this pandemic could have brought us in our work environ. No amount of weaknesses or limitations were experienced to hamper our work, on the contrary clientele services even turned out to become more efficient.

Thank you and have a pleasant day ahead.