

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT:

The emerging field of knowledge management offers academic libraries the opportunity to improve effectiveness, both for themselves and their parent institutions. This article summarizes knowledge management theory. Current applications in academic libraries and higher education are described. Similarities and differences between knowledge management and Libraries practices are discussed. Issues needing resolution are presented.

KEYWORDS: *Knowledge Management, Knowledge Managers, Knowledge Professionals.*

INTRODUCTION:

The emerging field of knowledge management offers academic libraries the opportunity to create knowledge to improve organizational effectiveness, for both themselves and their institutions. This article is intended to summarize the dynamic field of knowledge management and to describe how it can be used to make academic libraries more effective both inside the library and throughout the institution.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Libraries are social organizations where workers transform resources for use by consumers through the functions of teaching, research, and service. Also created is a growing amount of transactional information in databases, knowledge embedded in processes and documentation as well as explicit and implicit knowledge in the heads of the workers. As the pace of change increases and people change jobs

more frequently, information and knowledge that used to be concentrated in one person or process increasingly is being held by multifunctional teams with limited life spans, operating with rapidly changing systems and environments. Change is the order of the day. Knowledge loss becomes epidemic. Increases in organizational information and change have created a great need to manage knowledge to ensure effectiveness. And in higher education, librarians can play a key role in the knowledge management process.

Independently, librarians have developed and applied many knowledge management principles in the provision of Libraries services. Reference, cataloging, and other library services are designed to encourage the use of scholarly information and thus increase the amount of academic knowledge used in higher education. Questions in a reference interview and the points of access in a catalog both are intended to reinforce the ways that scholars work to create new academic knowledge. However, libraries have done little to use organizational information to create knowledge that can be used to improve the functionality of library and higher education processes. In many ways, knowledge management incorporates principles that academic librarians have developed and used with scholarly information for many years. It then applies these principles and others to organizational information in ways that create new knowledge to improve organizational effectiveness.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

While the business world is changing in the new knowledge economy and digital age, libraries of all types are undergoing drastic changes also. The new role of libraries in the 21st century needs to be as a learning and knowledge center for their users as well as the intellectual commons for their respective communities where, to borrow the phrase from the Keystone Principles, people and ideas interact in both the real and virtual environments to expand learning and facilitate the creation of new knowledge.

As a learning organization, libraries should provide a strong leadership in knowledge management. Unlike those business organizations whose goal for knowledge management is for competitive advantage, most public, academic, and research libraries, with the exception of company libraries (which may be known or called corporate libraries, special libraries, or knowledge centers), have a different orientation and value. Instead of

competition, internal use only, and little sharing of knowledge with others outside, the most important mission of public, academic, and research libraries is to expand the access of knowledge for their users. Charged by this mission, libraries should aim their knowledge management goal high. Below are examples of what libraries can do to improve their knowledge management in all of the key areas of library services.

NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

The exponential growth in human knowledge in a variety of formats has led libraries to develop their resources, access and share strategies from print to electronic and digital resources. Due to budget shortfalls in libraries, limited technological access, poor staffing and space, libraries have to carefully analyze the needs of their users and seek co-operative acquisitions plans to meet the needs of users. In fact, the lion's share of the library budget is allocated to its staff and acquisition and cataloguing of library materials. Effective use of staff and improvement of efficiency and effectiveness of technical services operations are the real focus of knowledge management in academic libraries. The goal is to make full use of the knowledge existing in the organization to increase the operational efficiency and productivity.

SIGNIFICANCE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

KM is defined by Gartner Group (2000) as a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving and sharing all the information assets of organization. Balcombe (1999) defines knowledge management as systematically capturing, sharing, using and creating knowledge to add value to the organization. It also refers to effectively identifying, acquiring, developing, resolving, using, storing and sharing knowledge, to create an approach for transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge (Shanhong, 2000). For the purpose of this paper and in the light of above mentioned definitions, KM may be defined as a process of identification, capturing, storing and exploiting knowledge (both tacit and explicit). To determine the value of Intranet as a KM tool at University Libraries in Karnataka, small survey has been conducted to know their understanding of KM. Their understanding of

KM is 'a process of identifying, acquiring, organizing and sharing of information packages among the user groups'.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARY OPERATIONS

Knowledge management is being used to improve library operations. Special libraries have taken the lead, but some applications now are taking place in other libraries. This section addresses how organizational knowledge can be created and used in internal Libraries operations. The discussion of these factors can be expanded for use throughout institutions of higher education.

From a theoretical point of view, knowing can be considered as a pyramid. All knowing begins at the bottom of the pyramid with data and unfiltered facts. When context is added, in the case of libraries through cataloging or metadata, data become information. When inference is added, often through public services such as reference, information becomes intelligence. Intelligence combined with certitude becomes knowledge. And at the top, knowledge combined with synthesis becomes wisdom. Libraries have excelled at creating scholarly information and intelligence from data, but they have tended not to create knowledge from intelligence. Moreover, they have not been as successful in generating organizational knowledge to achieve library goals. Knowledge management is one way to develop and apply the organizational knowledge needed to improve library operations and, ultimately, library effectiveness. It also enables libraries to generate organizational knowledge for higher education institutions.⁹

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Drawing on a survey of thirty-one knowledge management projects, Thomas H. Davenport, David W. De Long, and Michael C. Beers identified four types, each of which focuses on a broad objective:

1. To create knowledge repositories;
2. To improve knowledge access;
3. To enhance the knowledge environment; and
4. To manage knowledge as an asset.

CREATE KNOWLEDGE REPOSITORIES

Librarians are familiar with knowledge repositories. In terms of library operational information, most integrated library systems contain a component intended to provide useful information about library operation and user activity. This kind of information can be used to create explicit organizational knowledge, to inform services, to guide operations, and to measure goal attainment. Data about new monographs, for example, are created routinely when these items are added to the collection. These data could be combined with circulation data and online reviews to create notices for distribution to prospective readers. Or, usage data from an electronic reserve service could be aggregated and sent to the instructor in time to modify class activities to take advantage of what has been used. In each of these cases, data that are collected routinely as part of the operation of the integrated library system can be used to create and share knowledge that contributes to the improvement of teaching and research. By creating knowledge from existing data, libraries add value to integrated library systems.

IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE ACCESS

A second type of knowledge management project is one that improves access to and transfer of organizational knowledge. This often takes place by creating expert networks where individuals with desired expertise are organized formally into a network and put into contact with others, creating a community of interest. An example might be a network of subject specialists, perhaps from several institutions, who come together to share experiences and learn from each other. Another method is to create yellow pages, classifying individuals by different areas of expertise into a logical whole. Internal cross-training and exchange with other organizations also are used.

MANAGE KNOWLEDGE AS AN ASSET

Managing knowledge as an asset is the last type of knowledge management project and perhaps the least familiar to librarians. Although some companies audit their intellectual resources internally each year,

libraries tend to simply list their physical holdings and easily quantifiable activities, assuming that each item or activity measured is equally valuable and goal related. Some firms manage their intellectual capital to achieve maximum return, something most librarians have not considered. What would happen if librarians began to manage the library's assets explicitly to achieve maximum return? How would libraries value the operations knowledge in the heads of library workers? How should libraries value the knowledge embedded in their processes and products? How should they value the growing amount of information to which they have electronic access? It is no longer enough for library leaders to make intuitive decisions. To achieve quality, commitment, and acceptability, these decisions must be based on organizational knowledge and made collaboratively. The cross-organizational committee systems developed by the Kao and Sharp Corporations in Japan provide a way to create and manage organizational knowledge. In both companies, opportunities for innovation are presented on a regular basis, reallocation of resources is argued, and decisions are made to support the promising initiatives on a temporary, but corporation-wide, basis. After evaluation, the best initiatives are implemented.

ROLE FOR LIBRARIES

Academic librarians can benefit their institutions, their libraries, and themselves by undertaking a campus wide role in managing organizational knowledge. They can use knowledge management as a way to expand the library's role to areas such as administration or support services, where libraries have had little impact in the past. Moreover, they can develop cross-functional teams with units such as computing, instructional technology, institutional planning, and personnel to create collaborative organizations that have major institutional missions and responsibilities.

Higher education is in the midst of major change as accountability, technology, faculty aging, distance education, and many other pressures come to bear. Knowledge management offers an opportunity to manage some of these issues and achieve institutional goals by using organizational knowledge. Libraries can bring specific skills in the selection and organization of knowledge, training, and user support to cross-functional

teams. By doing so, they can create increased interest and support for their other missions. In the apocryphal words of the old sage, it is a risk that most libraries cannot afford not to take.

ISSUES IN LIBRARIES

Academic librarians, like faculty, are not very accountable for their time or resources used. It is assumed that as individual professionals, librarians know best how to manage their time and resources. They may go days or weeks without considering how they are contributing to organizational goals. Given the traditional paucity of library support and the vast quantities they organize, librarians tend to sacrifice speed in their operations. Until recently, they tended to do all their work in like-minded groups. Knowledge management, on the other hand, is based on assumptions of strategic planning, the time value of information, and cross-functional teams. If librarians are to function as key players in knowledge management, some accommodation will have to occur on these functional issues.

Finally, librarians as individuals usually seek the security of a stable organization. They look to the library to guide and support their development as individuals. Knowledge management organizations tend to be more individually based, reflecting the general trend toward organizational autonomy recently described by Peter Drucker. To be successful collaborators, librarians will need to take a more independent and self-directed approach to their work within knowledge organizations.

CONCLUSION

In fact, libraries have had a long and rich experience in the management of information. Many of such knowledge and skills of librarianship can be applied to knowledge management.

For any library to succeed in implementing knowledge management will require a strong leadership and vision from the top administration, which can influence the organization's knowledge sharing efforts in a positive way. As libraries enter the knowledge age of the 21st century, we should not take a back seat in the

development of knowledge management. Instead, armed with our professional knowledge and experiences, we should be in the driver's seat.

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