

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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1. Introduction

In the present era, information revolution and knowledge based society has led to social transformation. Huge investments in knowledge creation and use, through information and Communication Technology (ICT) have pervaded all aspects of modern life. Knowledge is the crucial resource in today's scenario. It is a source of economic wealth and vital asset to an organization. This realization not only occurs in business organizations but also in non- profit organizations such as academic libraries. The conventional function of academic libraries to collect , process, disseminate, store and utilize

information to provide services to staff and students is changing.

Maponya (2004), knowledge Management is a viable means in which academic libraries could improve their services in the knowledge economy. This can be achieved through crating an organizational culture of sharing knowledge and expertise within the library. Lee (2000) pointed out that the knowledge and experiences of library staff are the intellectual assets of any library and should be valued and shared.

The Changing role of academic libraries as knowledge managers emphasizes the need to constantly update or acquire new skills and

knowledge to remain to the today's library environment.

2. Knowledge Management an Overview

Knowledge is highly contextualized information enriched with individual interpretation and expertise. Alvin Toffler refers to Knowledge as highly organized product of human beings, which include personal experience, skill, understanding of different contexts in which we operate our activities assimilating and recording them in a form that can be communicated to other.

Sivraj (2005),'' Knowledge is the full utilization of data and information, coupled with the potential of people's skill, competencies, ideas, intuitions, commitments and motivations''. Knowledge is commonly distinguished from data and information. Knowledge is neither data nor information, though it is related to both and the difference between these terms is often a matter of degree. Davenport and Prusak (1998) distinguished Knowledge from information and information from data on the basis of value adding process which transform raw data into communicable message and finally into Knowledge. Knowledge is basically categorized into two types:

- a) **Explicit Knowledge** – Expressed Knowledge that can be captured, reported and documented in the form of publication and is available to use in one or the other form of data.
- b) **Tacit Knowledge:** The tacit knowledge that is not captured or recorded, but available through

the social interaction of those who have it and those who want to access it.

According to Dhiman and Sharma (2007) tacit knowledge is complex form of knowledge which lies most of the time as implicit one. It consists of hand –on skills, best practices, special know-how, intuitions, and so on.

And Knowledge management links Tacit Knowledge to Explicit Knowledge.

Srikantiah (2008) Knowledge management has become a new way of harnessing an institutions full expertise for achieving their objectives. It is done by capturing knowledge through databases, website interfaces and documents, sharing knowledge not only within an institution but also with external clients, institutional knowledge cultures, tacit knowledge and experiences of staff, information collected in the libraries, record centres, administrative units, operational units etc. To make Knowledge management effective, bringing tacit an explicit Knowledge together in an infrastructure is absolutely essential. Explicit Knowledge and tacit knowledge has symbiotic relationship whereby tacit knowledge contributes to explicit knowledge and vice-versa.

Thus, KM is the process of collecting, organizing, storing and disseminating knowledge.

3. Changing Environment and Challenges to Academic Libraries

Mahamood (2003) The changing environment of academic libraries demands new competencies in academic libraries:

- 3.1 Multiple formats of information like print and non-print
- 3.2 Web has had a tremendous effect on the growth of information. New means to deliver information over the web, places a challenge to the librarians in terms of helping students, make sense of information found on the web.
- 3.3 In networks online environment it is difficult to exploit all forms of digital and telecommunication technologies and find new ways to promote feasible form of collections, services and access to library materials.
- 3.4 Changing user need in terms of teaching and learning, developing curricula etc.
- 3.5 Changing role of academic librarians. They need to understand the information needs of users. They should be able to map the internal and external knowledge.

4. Applying Knowledge Management Practices in Academic Libraries.

The basic goal of Knowledge management within libraries is to leverage the available Knowledge that may help academic libraries to carry out their tasks more efficiently and effectively. It is important for academic libraries to determine and manage their Knowledge assets to avoid duplication of efforts. Knowledge management process involves the creation, capturing, sharing and utilization of Knowledge.

4.1. Knowledge Creation - Knowledge academic libraries can be created through understanding the user needs and requirements as well as understanding the curricula. Tang (1998) pointed

out that from the library's perspective, Knowledge creation implies participating more in user's reading and studying by identifying information needs. In order to succeed, academic library services must link with the university's academic programme and curricula. Academic Libraries can become part of the Knowledge creation process through participating in this context should involve all the management effort through which the academic library consciously strives to acquire competencies that it does have both internally and externally.

4.2. Knowledge capturing and acquisition - Academic libraries need to develop ways of capturing its internal knowledge, devise systems to identify people's expertise and develop ways of sharing it. Formal processes of capturing knowledge can include internal profiles of academic librarians and also standardizing routine information update reports. Knowledge academic libraries can be acquired through:

- Establishing Knowledge links or networking with other libraries and with institutions of all kinds;
- Attending training programmers, conferences, seminars and workshops;
- Subscribing to listserv and online or virtual communities of practice;
- Buying Knowledge products or resources in the form of manuals, blueprints, reports and research reports.

4.3. Knowledge Sharing – Expertise exists in people, and much of this kind of Knowledge is

tacit rather than explicit (Branin, 2003), which makes it difficult to be shared. (Anderson 2007), Technology based tools that encompasses social media have capabilities of sharing and disseminating knowledge and handling the intricacies of managing knowledge. Thus web 2.0 social networking media and collaboration tools such as blogs, real simple syndication (RSS) and chat have elevated role of technology in marketing KM to unprecedented levels. Social media and collaboration tools in a library environment include intranets, groupware, Google books, Notebook, Google Docs, Lotus Notes, Email, Twitter, and My Space etc. These tools facilitate the sharing, gathering and retrieval of information and allow its storage.

Another platform that may be exploited to run applications and facilitate collaboration and sharing of knowledge in a distributed environment without incurring huge costs is cloud computing.

4. Skills and competencies needed for Knowledge Management

(Teng and Hawmdeh 2002, p195) summed up the skills needed by the information professional in a knowledge-based environment:

1. IT literacy, i.e. knowing how to use the appropriate technology to capture, catalogue and disseminate information and knowledge to the target audience and knowing how to translate that knowledge into a central for employees of the organization to access;
2. A sharp and analytical mind;
3. Innovation and inquiring;

4. Enables knowledge creation, flow and communication within the organization and between staff and public.

5. Conclusion-

It can be clearly seen that the environment in which academic libraries operate is changing. It is both faced with challenges and opportunities. Academic libraries need to respond to these challenges in order to better serve the needs of the entire academic community. One way of doing that is engaging in knowledge management activities that is creating, capturing, sharing and utilizing knowledge to achieve the library goals. Knowledge management is a viable means in which academic libraries could improve their services and become more responsive to the needs of users.

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