



A STUDY ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS IN ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES

KEYWORDS

Academic Libraries, KM, Management Change, Information Technology, Planning, Learning Organization, Organizational Learning

Dr. M.SURULINATHI

Research Advisor & Associate Professor
Department of Library and Information Science,
Bharathidasan University, Trichy -24

N. RAJALAKSHMI

PhD Research Scholar
Department of Library and Information Science,
Bharathidasan University, Trichy -24

ABSTRACT

In the 21st century knowledge management is increasing becoming a crucial tool. It has already been successfully implemented in academic libraries. They are the treasure house of knowledge which cater to the needs of scholars, scientists, students and others who are in the mainstream of higher education. Academic libraries are making the transition from traditional centers to modern information ones. These libraries in regard to their necessities and special conditions should be designed in such a way that they meet the needs and realize the expectations of their patron's best. KM as a managerial task is a process that smooth's away and paves the way to this transition and supports a dramatic transformation occurring through operating a thoughtful policy, and with an information technology planning, jointly, brings about a newly-networked and an agreeable environment in academic libraries.

INTRODUCTION

In the present information and knowledge era, knowledge has become a key resource. Faced with competition and increasingly dynamic environments, organisations are beginning to realize that there is a vast and largely untapped asset diffused around in the organisation knowledge (Gupta, Ayer & Aronson, et.al., 2000). This realization not only occurs in business organisations but also in non-profit organisations such as academic libraries. The conventional function of academic libraries is to collect, process, disseminate, store and utilize information to provide service to the university community. However, the environment in which academic libraries operate today is changing. Academic libraries are part of the university and its organizational culture.

Whatever affects universities also affects academic libraries. The role of academic libraries is changing to provide the competitive advantage for the parent university a factor that is crucial to both staff and students (Foo et al., 2002).

Knowledge management is a viable means in which academic libraries could improve their services in the knowledge economy. This can be achieved through creating an organizational culture of sharing knowledge and expertise within the library.

However, organisations face innumerable challenges in nurturing and managing knowledge. The challenges occur because only a part of knowledge is internalized by the organisation, the other is internalized by individuals (Bhatt, 2002). Organisations, including academic libraries can create and leverage its knowledge base through initiation of appropriate knowledge management practices. TFPL (1999) argued that "for organisations to compete effectively in the knowledge economy they need to change their values and establish a new focus on creating and using intellectual assets". The success of academic libraries depends on their ability to utilize information and knowledge of its staff to better serve the needs of the academic

community. 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.

Academic libraries as constituents of the parent university should rethink and explore ways to improve their services and become learning organisations in which to discover how to capture and share tacit and explicit knowledge within the library.

Statement of the problem:

KM is nothing new and research into it can be traced back for decades. However, standardized KM methods and techniques are still not available, if not taking into account some publications on "Best practices". Different attempts to determine KM have been undertaken but they have always dealt with high-level processes only, been too specialized on specific aspects, or dealt with KM too broadly. KM is difficult due to its nature and complexity. While knowledge itself is something intangible, KM has to cover various aspects such as the way people work together (digital library), what are the technical tools that can be of assistance in the creation and mediation of knowledge (Library information technology), and so on.

Scope of the study

The scope of the study is to know the knowledge management process in academic and research library. This study has been undertaken to know and analyses the factor influencing the knowledge management process of the merits and demerits.

Objectives

The overall objectives of the study is to know the knowledge management process in academic and research library. The following are the specific objectives of the study;

1. to reveal the core processes of KM for LIS professionals;

2. to inquire into library practitioners' ways of knowing about KM;
3. to explore their understanding of KM concept;
4. to examine their responses to KM for incorporating it into libraries, more particularly into digital libraries (DLs); and
5. To explore the problems of incorporating KM into library practices.

Knowledge Management (KM): Overview

Knowledge management (KM) is a process of creating, storing, sharing and re-using organizational knowledge (know-how) to enable an organization to achieve its goals and objectives of creating knowledgeable professionals and workforce. The advent of the "e-revolution", through the growth of global networks has accelerated the use of knowledge management (KM) especially in academic libraries. In the 21st Century KM is increasingly becoming a crucial tool in providing a dynamic and effective service to library users. Koenig (2000) believes that KM was caused by disorderliness and confusion of the great and almost unbounded volume of information.

HOW KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT WORKS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES?

According to the definitions mentioned above, the basic concept in KM is how to deal with information in an organization. In management practice, internal information (that is, information about mission, vision, policies, facilities, opportunities and shortcomings in an organization) and external information (that is, the society's needs, expectations and environmental changes) must be identified, retrieved, evaluated and analyzed. The result will reveal whether the mission and activities of an organization are aligned with society's expectation. The outcome in this process is the acquisition of knowledge. This knowledge results in the "organization's management philosophy" (St. Clair, 2003).

In regard to the value of KM in management practice, this paper attempts to explore the usefulness of KM and tries a more subtle process for personal and organizational benefit. Personal benefit refers to how the managers as well as the staff can form their beliefs and values and develop their knowledge and skills.

Changing environment and issues facing academic libraries

Multiple formats of information

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are said to be changing the way academic libraries operate today. Academic library collections are no longer collections comprised almost entirely of printed materials but collections comprised almost of materials in multiple formats and media (Budd, 1998). Information technologies such as computers, multimedia and CD-ROMs are bringing unprecedented abilities to academic libraries in providing services and resources to the university community.

Changing user needs

Academic libraries have to provide information services for users acting in the changing academic environment. Academic librarians need to liaise with library users, faculties and schools to support the effective teaching, learning and research in universities. As universities' market demands are changing in terms of improving students learning outcomes, this has a direct impact on academic libraries and their delivery of services. Due to societal and technological development.

Organizational structures

As a result of rapid environmental changes, academic libraries need to rethink their organizational structures in an attempt to provide quality service to the university community's, traditional teaching changes increasingly in creating learning environments.

Stifle (1996) suggested that "we must flatten our organisations and eliminate the bureaucracies that make us inflexible and slow in our response to our environment and the opportunities that are constantly presented".

Changing role of academic librarians

In an age of great change in information formats, delivery models and technologies, an important new role emerges for the academic librarian. Barnes (2000) argued that knowledge workers will be the most important profession in this century. There is no doubt that they are librarians. One of the major roles of academic librarians in the knowledge economy is that of knowledge managers. It is evident that academic librarians can no longer meet the information needs of the university community through the traditional avenue of simply adding to their library collections. Academic librarians need to go an extra mile.

Foo et al., (2002) pointed out that academic librarians as knowledge workers, need to play active roles in searching for innovative solutions to the issues involved in adapting to new environments.

Process KM:

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 librarians to carry out their tasks more efficiently and effectively. Knowledge management is also aimed at extending the role of librarians to manage all types of information and tacit knowledge for the benefit of the library. Knowledge management can help transform the library into a more efficient, knowledge sharing organization. Knowledge management process involves the creation, capturing, sharing and utilization of knowledge.

Figure 1: The Knowledge Process



Source: adapted from How (2001, p. 51)

Knowledge creation

Whether the key objective of academic libraries is to provide resources and information services to support the university community, the key resource that is required is knowledge. That is, the knowledge of the library's operation, the knowledge of library users and their needs, knowledge of the library collection and knowledge of library facilities and technologies available.

Knowledge capturing and acquisition

Capturing and acquiring knowledge is crucial to the suc-

cess and development of a knowledge-based organization. Organizations often suffer permanent loss of valuable experts through dismissals, redundancies, retirement and death (Proust, Rub & Romhardt 2000,). The reason for this is that much knowledge is stored in the heads of the people and it is often lost if not captured elsewhere. The surest way to avoid collective loss of organizational memory is to identify the expertise and the skills of staff and capture it.

Knowledge sharing

Expertise exists in people, and much of this kind of knowledge is tacit rather than explicit (Bender, S. and Fish, A., 2000), which makes it difficult to be shared. At its most basic, knowledge sharing is simply about transferring the dispersed know-how of organisational members more effectively. Knowledge sharing is based on the experiences gained internally and externally in the organization. Making this knowhow available to other organisational members will eliminate or reduce duplication of efforts and form the basis for problem solving and decision-making.

Skills and competencies needed for knowledge management

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

- IT literacy, that is 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 database for employees of the organisation to access;
- A sharp and analytical mind;
- Innovation and inquiring; and
- Enables knowledge creation, flow and communication within the organisation and between staff and public.

It is important for academic libraries to encourage librarians to constantly update their skills and competencies in this changing environment.

CONCLUSION

The academic libraries are called upon to play a crucial and leading role over other types of libraries by transforming their information management skills, techniques, practices and recourses. Such transformations at the present age create new functions for professional librarians, and if they do their best, it will promote the quality of library services.

The strategic approach to the management of libraries, creating a learning organization and gaining the ability of organizational learning as well as information technology planning provide a relevant context for employing KM. These approaches have provided an insight for most people in the university community about the role and capabilities of libraries in enhancing teaching, learning and research and about the value of information in their academic life. Redefining roles and responsibilities, positive involvement of information personnel in delivery system and constant evaluation of goods and services will make the academic libraries highly appropriate and resourceful in future.

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