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Implementing Knowledge Management in Libraries in Nigeria

Godwin Nwachukwu Arua
ngonwa4tochi@gmail.com,
ngonwa4tochi@yahoo.com
Federal College of Education,
Eha-Amufu,
Enugu State, Nigeria

Celestine Onyebuchi Eze
eze.onyebuchi@yahoo.com
Federal College of Education,
Eha-Amufu,
Enugu State, Nigeria

Chinenye P. Nwebiem
Enugu State College of
Education (Technical) Enugu,
Enugu State

Abstract
A good number of organizations are embracing knowledge management as a key strategic initiative. Appreciating the importance of knowledge is one thing, sharing and managing it effectively is another thing. The implementation of a knowledge management programme in an organization has the potential for improving customer services, quickly bringing in new products and services to market, and reducing cost of business operations. Information technologies are often used in knowledge management programmes in informing clienteles and employees of latest innovations and developments in the business sectors, as well as sharing knowledge among the employees. Knowledge management needs to consider the three elements of people, processes and technology. Success in implementing knowledge management in libraries will require a strong leadership and vision from the top management, which can influence the knowledge sharing efforts in a positive way. This paper discusses the concept of knowledge management and what libraries can do to improve their knowledge management in all of the key areas of library services and the challenges of such efforts.

Keywords: Knowledge, Management, Knowledge Management, Libraries, Information Technology

1.1 Introduction

Knowledge management is one of the hottest topics today in both industry world and information research. In our daily life, we deal with huge amount of data and information but this is not knowledge until we know how to dig the value out of it. This is the reason we need knowledge management. Unfortunately, there is no universal definition of knowledge management, just as there is no agreement as to what constitutes knowledge in the first instance. Simply put, knowledge management is the systematic and explicit management of knowledge. The term knowledge refers to an aggregate of information, but knowledge is more meaningful, intelligible and usable than information. Davenport and Prusak (1998) defined knowledge as flux mix of frame experience, values, contextual information and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new

experiences and information. In organizations, it often becomes embedded in organizational routines, processes, practices and norms.

Within the field of knowledge management, knowledge has been broadly categorized as explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is described as documented or codified knowledge while tacit knowledge is non-documented or non-codified one. Nonaka (1991) distinguished between explicit and tacit knowledge as explicit knowledge is formal and systematic and can be easily communicated and stored, in product specifications or scientific formula or computer programme. Tacit knowledge is highly personal. It is hard to formalize and therefore difficult, if not impossible to communicate.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

2.2 Concept of Knowledge Management

The emergence of knowledge has led to the transformation of post-industrial information society into knowledge based society. Knowledge management is a new emerging field. Since the mid-1990s, knowledge management has attracted much attention from many scholars and practitioners from different fields associated with business, management, library and information science, computer science and so on (Chowdhury, 2004; Schlõgl, 2005). Knowledge management is concerned with managing both recorded (explicit) and tacit knowledge (Chowdhury, 2004). Abell and Oxbroow (2001) sees knowledge management as the creation and subsequent management of an environment which encourages knowledge to be created, shared, learnt, enhanced, organized for the benefit of the organization and its customers. According to TQMI (2007), knowledge management is concerned with the acquisition, storage and transfer of knowledge within an organization, to enable the individuals, teams and the organization as a whole to be more effective. A more comprehensive idea about knowledge management is the assertion that it is concerned with exploitation and development of the knowledge assets of an organization with a view to furthering the organization's objectives (Davenport, Delong and Beer, 1998). This knowledge can be used for activities such as decision-making, problem-solving, strategic planning, marketing and employment development.

The aim of knowledge management is to discover how knowledge is used and shared within organizations and seeks knowledge as information required in a particular situation. Its objective is to ensure that the right information gets to the right person timely to enable him to take the most appropriate decision (Obasikene, 2008). This means that the proponents of knowledge management seem to be more concerned with knowledge delivery than in managing knowledge. Knowledge management is not just about information; it is also about people. The future lies in helping people to become their own knowledge manager. Knowledge management can be viewed in terms of:

- People – how do you increase the ability of an individual in the organization to influence others with their knowledge?
- Processes – its approach varies from organization to organization, there is no limit on the number of processes.
- Technology – it needs to be chosen only after all the requirements of a knowledge management initiative have been established.
  Or
- Culture – the biggest enabler of successful knowledge-driven organizations is the establishment of a knowledge-focused culture.

- Structure – the business processes and organizational structures that facilitate knowledge sharing.
- Technology – a crucial enabler rather than the solution.

Management entails all those processes associated with the identification, sharing and creation of knowledge.

2.3 The Value of Knowledge Management

Some benefits of knowledge management correlate directly to bottom-line savings, while others are more difficult to quantify. In today's information-driven economy, companies uncover the most opportunities and ultimately derive the most value from intellectual rather than physical assets. In order to get the most value from an organization's intellectual assets, knowledge management practitioners maintain that knowledge must be shared and serve as the foundation for collaboration. Yet better collaboration is not an end in itself, without an overarching business context. An effective knowledge management programme should help an establishment to achieve some of the followings:

- Foster innovation by encouraging the free flow of ideas.
- Improve decision-making.
- Improve customer service by streamlining response time.
- Boost revenues by getting products and services to market faster.
- Enhance employment retention by recognizing the value of employees' knowledge and rewarding them for it.
- Streamline operations and reduce costs by eliminating redundant or unnecessary processes.

A creative approach to knowledge management can result in improved efficiency, higher productivity and increased revenues in practically any business function. Information technologies such as intranets, web portals, and group works are often used to facilitate the sharing of knowledge among a group of workers in an organization because of their capabilities in extending the reach as well as enhancing the spread of an appropriate transfer. The implementation of appropriate knowledge management programme in an organization has the potential of improving customer services, continually improving business processes, quickly bringing new products to markets, and bringing innovative new ideas to commercialization (Heisig and Verbeck, 2001). Integral to the implementation of knowledge management is the understanding of the organization's information flow and implementing organizational learning practices which make explicit key aspects of its knowledge base. In this paper, attempt is made to discuss efforts on how to implement knowledge management in key areas of library services in Nigeria

3.1 Knowledge Management in Libraries

Knowledge management is not about managing or organizing books or journals, searching the internet for clients or arranging for the circulation of materials, it is about enhancing the use of organizational knowledge through sound practices of information management and organizational learning. The purpose is to deliver value to the business. However, each of these activities can in some way be part of the knowledge management spectrum and processes. It rests on two foundations: utilizing and exploiting the organization's information. Just as 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

a learning and knowledge centre for their users as well as the intellectual commons for their respective communities. To borrow a phrase from the key store principles cited in Lee (2005) "people and ideas interact in both the real and virtual environments to expand learning and facilitate the creation of knowledge.

The objectives of knowledge management in libraries are to promote knowledge innovation which is the core of the knowledge economy society (Krishnan, 2010). As a foundation for collection, processing, storage and distribution of knowledge and information, libraries

(1) represent an indispensable link in scientific system chain, an important link is the knowledge innovation.

(2) take part in scientific research process directly. The library is a component of knowledge innovation.

(3) must pay attention to diffusion and conversion of knowledge innovation into realistic productive forces.

The aim of knowledge management in libraries is to promote relationship in and between libraries, between libraries and the user; to strengthen knowledge of Internetworking, and to quicken the knowledge flow (Krishnan, 2010). In the knowledge economy era, libraries are entrusted with an important job of carrying our researches on development and application of information resources, construction of virtual libraries, protection of intellectual property rights in the electronic era, etc, and paving way for knowledge innovation.

3.2 Approaches to Implementing Knowledge Management in Libraries

The goal of knowledge management is for organizations to become aware of its knowledge individually and collectively and to shape itself so that it makes the most

effective and efficient use of the knowledge it has or can obtain. Competency is an essential factor in the discussion of resource based of an organization. For an organization to reposition itself in the environment of competition, it requires competency building. This refers to any process by which an organization qualitatively changes its existing stocks of assets or capabilities or creates new abilities, in areas that will help it achieve its aims. Competency building involves the creation of new strategic options (Sanchez, Heene, and Thomas, 1996). These competencies are focused on the four domains of organizational resource base of culture, strategy, leadership and structure.

Research has shown that these competencies are critical and organizations must focus on them to be competitively ready. Akhaven, Jafari, and Thomas (2006) conducted a study of six successful companies in knowledge management programmes and found out that issues concerning strategies, leadership and culture were critical success factors of knowledge management programme in the organizations surveyed. A study to identify the competences perceived to be essential for successful application of knowledge management in academic libraries in Nigeria reveals that skills needed for successful knowledge management applications include cultural skills, leadership skills, strategic skills and restructuring skills (Ugwu and Ezema, 2010). It further stressed that for effective implementation of knowledge management in university libraries in Nigeria, librarians should be trained to acquire the identified skills to face the challenges of knowledge economy. This fundamental study reveals the relevance of knowledge management in university libraries in Nigeria in line with the competencies needed for effective implementation.

In practice, the library and

information professionals are traditionally concerned with the dissemination of information and/or knowledge. Hence, knowledge management should be a very common practice in day-to-day library work. As a learning organization, libraries should provide a strong leadership in knowledge management. Most public academic and research libraries with the exception of company libraries – corporate libraries, special libraries or knowledge centres whose goals for knowledge management is for competitive advantage, have a different orientation and value. Their mission is to expand the access of knowledge for their users. Charged with this responsibility or mission, libraries should aim their knowledge management goal high and carry out the following activities to improve their knowledge management in all the key areas of operation of library services.

4.1 Knowledge Resources Management

The exponential growth in human knowledge has necessitated libraries to develop their resources access and sharing strategies from printed to electronic and digital in concert with the mission and charges. Constrained by limited funding, technology, staff and space,

(a) Libraries should carefully analyze the needs of their users and seek to develop cooperation acquisition plans to meet these needs.

(b) Libraries should develop and maintain an integrated online public access catalogue (OPAC) with both internal and external resources as well as printed and other formats of knowledge. They should search and select useful websites and knowledge sources regularly and include them in OPACs by hard link. These resources should also be reviewed and updated regularly.

(c) Libraries should device a means of capturing all the tacit knowledge that are

of importance to their users, their organizations, and to the internal operations of the libraries. The website of each library should serve as a portal for all sources of selective and relevant knowledge and information whether explicit or tacit, whether onsite or remote and in all formats. Portals is a means of gathering a variety of useful information resources into a single, on stop web page, helping the user to avoid being overwhelmed by info-glut or feeling of lost on the web.

(d) The size of information resources on the web is growing exponentially in this current digital and networked era. One has to search the large number of findings in order to find the few relevant pieces of information. Still, information on the web can be very useful if only we can employ advanced artificial intelligent tools to surf the internet and to select, find, arrange, classify and automatically deliver the needed information to each user on his/her special interests and needs.

(e) The traditional time-honoured methods of cataloguing and classification are no longer adequate to handle the finite number of books, journals and documents and to deal with almost infinite amount of digital information in large electronic databases and on the Internet. The adoption of use of Dublin care metadata and the Cooperative Online Resources Catalogue (CORC) has been a new approach to capture web information by cooperative efforts.

4.2 Resources Sharing and Networking

It has been the tradition of libraries to be involved in resources sharing and networking. The rapid development of computer, telecommunication, networking and digital technologies have greatly expanded this. It is very common for libraries

in developed countries to be a member of several consortia at the same time for various types of cooperative work and resources sharing. An example is the Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC). To achieve success in resources sharing and networking, all member libraries must cooperate and participate selflessly. Large and major libraries must take the lead in such an endeavour and the government and or parent organization should support in policies and funding. It could be said from experiences that all libraries, regardless of size and specialties have benefited from one type of library cooperation or another and resources sharing as well.

4.3 Information Technology Development

There has to be a well-designed and operational knowledge management system in order to enhance the implementation of knowledge management. An enabling factor is to put in place the use of latest information technology in libraries. The library director or head librarian should work together with the Chief Information Officer, heads of planning department, computer and information technology centre, human resources management department, the finance department, etc to design and develop a knowledge management system. Such a system should be built an existing computer and information technology infrastructures, including upgraded intranet, extranet, and internet and available software programmes to enhance capture, analyze, organization, storage and sharing of internal and external information resources for effective knowledge exchange among users, resource persons (faculty, researchers and subjects specialist, etc), publishers, government agencies, business and industries, and other organizations through multiple channels and layers. Some of the newly developed information technologies for database and information/document

management that can be used in knowledge management include data warehousing, data mining, text mining, content management, knowledge extraction, knowledge mapping, group ware, and information visualization, etc (Chen, 2001).

4.4 User Services

Libraries aim to serve the society. As a conduit for information, serving a wide spectrum of information seekers, they have a critical role to play in the enhancing knowledge generation and dissemination. The utmost goal of knowledge management is to provide users with a variety of quality services in order to improve communication, use and creation of knowledge. These services should as much as possible geared to the interest and needs of individual users. Individual user information can be elicited by analyzing the records of user registration, surveys, circulation and inter-library loans, frequently asked reference questions, and the use of e-journals and digital resources, etc. Periodic users' survey will reveal user satisfaction and needs and the findings for the planning and redesign of library service. With new technology, services such as new publication alert and selective dissemination of information, hitherto provided manually to the user is now available automatically with greater efficiency and convenience in libraries. Each library user can also set up his/her virtual **'Mylibrary'** enabled by library systems and networks for collecting and organizing resources for personal use and to stay informed of new resources provided by the library (Galagan, 1992).

Mylibrary-like services are the number one trend "worth keeping an eye on" and library users who are web-users, a growing group, expect customization, interactivity and customer support. Thus, approaches that are library-focused instead of user-focused will be increasingly

irrelevant (LITA, 1999).

4.5   Human Resources Management

Knowledge management is a new paradigm in libraries in the sense that concerted efforts need to be exerted to manage knowledge systematically (Ahmed, Lim and Loh, 2002). Managers at all levels are charged to implement knowledge management in their respective units/ sections so that a network of knowledge management managers is in place. Each manager is expected to manage both staff and workflow in their sections as well as knowledge pertaining their sections' goals and operations. This demands not only gathering knowledge existing currently in their sections but also knowledge relevant to their operations from other sections/ departments and even from other libraries or professions.

Library staff and users, both within and outside the libraries possess a great amount of expert knowledge. Such expertise abounds in the university and research communities and should be inventoried, indexed, and updated regularly and be made searchable and accessible through electronic databases created and maintained by libraries. The knowledge and accumulated work experiences of library staff over the years forms the intellectual assets of any library and should be valued and shared. The libraries should establish an organizational culture for sharing of knowledge and expertise with appropriate incentives and rewards. Those staff members who share their tacit knowledge and experiences through writing, publishing, lecturing, tutoring, or mentoring should be recognized and rewarded appropriately. A culture that places emphasis on cooperation, sharing and innovation in libraries can only be established by a strong leadership and commitment from the head librarian or library director and a shared vision by the library staff. Libraries as a learning organization should allocate part of their annual budget to staff training and continuing education to all members of staff. Knowledge has to be renewed and expanded to prevent it from becoming stagnant.

The transfer of knowledge and experience from experienced staff to newly employed library staff should be encouraged too. Libraries should put in place mentoring system to help new library staff to learn from the experiences of older staff members. Scheduling of informal seminars, brownbag sessions at regular intervals and at convenience times, where staff can interact and exchange 'lessons learned', 'best practices' and other specific experiences and knowledge are advocated. Also, special interest groups and chat-rooms can be created through intranet. Since many valuable experiences have been accumulated over time, libraries should pay attention to providing favourable working conditions and environment, which will contribute to better staff retention.

Librarians at managerial levels need to look both within and beyond their departments or libraries to see what workflows, organizational structures, services, technologies, etc out there that may be imported and adapted to improve services to their customers.

5.1 Creating the Future

Librarians should create our own future, so if we are to take a leading role in the future of knowledge management, where do they start? The main challenge is to engage all individuals in the discussion about knowledge management and help them to understand what the benefits will be for them.

Organizations are encouraged to take a long term view of knowledge management and to identify the major information and knowledge obstacles faced by staff now, and

plan for the elimination of the overtime. An audit of all the information and knowledge system in an organization may be an action that can help identify the urgent need for knowledge management. Strategies such as identifying the multiplicity of data sources held in filing cabinets, insecure laptops, hard discs that are not regularly backed-up, in the heads of key staff approaching retirement, etc. The audit can also be a tool for identifying priorities for attention in the knowledge management strategies.

The biggest challenges are not tools, techniques or technology, but related to human and cultural factors. Knowledge sharing must become an ingrained behaviour for all professionals. This requires personal development, leadership and the changes in the way that managers treat individuals and that organizations motivate and reward their staff. Knowledge management occupies a very outstanding position in the creation of knowledge innovation systems of any country. As the traditional custodian of information, libraries need to be aware of the implications of the chances in a knowledge society and develop technological and managerial skills that will enable them to make effective use of information to meet their organization and changing needs.

Conclusion

Libraries have had a long and rich experience in the management of information. Many of such knowledge and skills in librarianship can be applied to knowledge management. Librarians are generally driven by a desire to provide access to information sources and match this desire with values that assume information sharing as a good thing. These attributes are important for the successful practice of knowledge management. But they are not sufficient. They need to be harnessed in two directions towards specific organizational objectives that provide greater value to customers and clients; and

second, in the way in which libraries and information services are themselves managed.

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 positively. As libraries are in the knowledge age of the 21st Century, we should not take back seat in the development of knowledge management but should be at the forefront, being equipped with our professional knowledge and experiences. Librarians should work together with information technology specialists and others to develop the appropriate knowledge management systems.

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