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Knowledge Management in Academic Libraries in Nigerian Universities: Way Forward

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Abstract

Colleges and universities have significant opportunities to apply knowledge management practices to support every part of their mission. Knowledge management in universities can be applied in five key areas such as research, curriculum development, alumni services administrative services and strategic planning. Academic libraries are part of the university and its organizational culture. Whatever affects universities has an impact on academic libraries. As a result, role of academic libraries is voluminous to provide the competitive advantage for the parent organization. The success of academic libraries depends on their ability to utilize information and knowledge of their staff to better serve the needs of the academic community. In librarianship there is the creation, storage and collaborative sharing of employees' information within the academic library environment. In sharing and collaboration, a library's effectiveness and efficiency, productivity and profitability is enhanced. Knowledge Management is therefore the process of capturing, organizing, and storing information and experiences of workers and groups within an organization and making it available to others. It is used in this paper to refer to a process that focuses on five related library activities – capturing, classifying, exploiting, sharing, and applying both the explicit and the implicit know-how for the benefit of the library, librarians, the library users, and the academic community.

Key Words: Knowledge Management, Academic Libraries, Nigerian Universities

Introduction

Knowledge Management (KM) is a policy to provide the right knowledge to the right people at the right time and people share and utilize this knowledge in order that organizational performance can be improved (Thavamani, Velmurugan and Selvamani, 2014). Management of knowledge is the systematic management of an organization's knowledge assets for the purpose of creating value and meeting considered and strategic requirements. KM deals with creating, securing, capturing, coordinating, combining, retrieving and disseminating knowledge (Roy, 2015).

According to Kidwell et al., (2000), Yang & Lynch, (2006), Wang, (2006), Wen, (2005), Thanuskodi, (2010) in Nazim and Mukherjee (2011), knowledge management is newly emerging approach aimed at addressing today's business challenges to increase efficiency and efficacy by applying many strategies, techniques and tools in their existing business processes. Like other business management trends, knowledge management is also a commercial concept, emerging first in profit sector and then entering into the non-profit or service sector. Due to the appearance of new knowledge producers in the education sector, universities are started looking into the possibility of applying corporate knowledge management systems.

Colleges and universities have significant opportunities to apply knowledge management practices to support every part of their mission. Knowledge management in universities can be applied in five key areas such as research, curriculum development, alumni services administrative services and strategic planning. Academic libraries are part of the university and its organizational culture. Whatever affects universities has an impact on academic libraries. As a result, role of academic libraries is voluminous to provide the competitive advantage for the parent organization. The success of academic libraries depends on their ability to utilize

information and knowledge of their staff to better serve the needs of the academic community. Academic Libraries are pinched on both sides: reduced budget and increased demand from faculty and students. It is, therefore, paramount for academic libraries to operate more efficiently with reduced financial and human resources. Thus, knowledge management is considered as one of the most useful solutions for academic libraries that can be adopted in order to improve their services to become relevant for their parent institutions in the present competitive and challenging environment. This is especially true of countries like Nigeria with a rapidly developing economy. Therefore, academic libraries require a definition of knowledge management that corresponds to the libraries' characteristics and performance expectations.

Ajiferuke, (2003) in Nazim and Mukherjee (2011) opined that library professionals seemed aware of the opportunities knowledge management provide to them as majority of them strongly agree that library professionals have important roles to play in knowledge management programs. Similarly, an overwhelming majority agreed that information management is an aspect of knowledge management, which demonstrate the thinking of library professionals that information management involves management of explicit knowledge (textbooks, documents, databases, web pages, etc), while knowledge management is broader aspect which involves the management of both explicit and tacit knowledge. Library professionals believe that professional education and training programs, combination of practices, information technology and knowledge sharing are the important tools of knowledge management for academic libraries (Nazim and Mukherjee 2011).

Asogwa, (2012) observed that, in librarianship there is the creation, storage and collaborative sharing of employees' information within the academic library environment. In sharing and collaboration, a library's effectiveness and efficiency, productivity and profitability

is enhanced. KM is therefore the process of capturing, organizing, and storing information and experiences of workers and groups within an organization and making it available to others. It is used in this paper to refer to a process that focuses on five related library activities – capturing, classifying, exploiting, sharing, and applying both the explicit and the implicit know-how for the benefit of the library, librarians, the library users, and the academic community. KM in academic libraries may include:

- a process of collecting, organizing, classifying and disseminating information throughout a library, so as to make it purposeful to those who need it;
- Its aims are to capture the tacit and explicit knowledge that employees really have but are needed by the employer and the users in the library repository and filter the surplus out.
- It involves identification of categories of knowledge needed to support the overall library activities by combining indexing, searching, and technology to help libraries in organizing data stored in multiple sources and deliver only relevant information to users.

Academic Library: A Concept

An academic library is a library which provides an institution of higher education, such as a college, university or a school and it also serves two complementary purposes to support the school's curriculum and the research of the university faculty and students (Roy,2015). Academic libraries are information centres established in support of the mission of their parent institutions to generate knowledge and people equipped with knowledge in order to serve the society and advance the well being of mankind. In the digital age, academic libraries face

challenges from both within (academia) and without (the business sector). Implementation of KM enhances the traditional functions of academic library (Roy,2015).

The changing role of academic librarians as knowledge managers emphasizes the need to continuously update or gain new skills and knowledge to remain appropriate to the modern library's environment. KM helps academic libraries and information professionals in improving the services being rendered to their users. The academic libraries are the spine of any organization or institution to information dissemination and the different services offered by the libraries are mainly designed to fulfill the goals of the organization. The main aim of library is to provide right information to the right user at the right time. So in academic libraries the knowledge management cannot be overemphasized, as it helps to enlarging the traditional function in digital age (Roy, 2015).

Knowledge Management in Academic Libraries

Knowledge Management is a process, which deals with knowledge creation, acquisition, packaging and application or reuse of knowledge. It is basically consists of the following four steps:

- Knowledge Collection
- Knowledge Organization
- Data protection and presentation
- Dissemination of Knowledge Information

Knowledge Management is the way to keep knowledge growing through sharing and such sharing is best done either in material or human terms (Raja, Ahmad and Sinha, n.d). Knowledge Management has become a powerful tool for promoting innovation and realizing reengineering

the various walks of life. It occupies very outstanding position in the creation of knowledge innovation systems of a country. Knowledge management is a process of knowledge creation and modernization through an efficient organization and sufficient exploitation of information and knowledge resources (Thavamani, Velmurugan and Selvamani, 2014). Knowledge management therefore comes as a strategy to harness academic libraries and enhance the capacity to derive relevant knowledge from information (Asogwa, 2012).

KM in university libraries and knowledge management organisations (KMO) should be focused on effective research and development of knowledge, creation of knowledge bases, exchange and sharing of knowledge between libraries, staffs, users, and researchers, speeding up explicit processing of the implementing knowledge, and realizing of its sharing knowledge management which will inject new blood into the library culture. Universe of knowledge is rapidly changing its form, process of creation and organisation as well as mode of dissemination and accessibility. Transition from traditional paper based materials to digital materials has changed the expectations and information needs of the user community. Accordingly, traditional libraries/KMOs now hold electronic and digital materials accessible to the public. Knowledge is therefore organized in form of information and the creation of human mind. It is dynamic in nature and multidimensional in size which is evolved through time and used by the society (Kumar, n.d)..

KM is not only about managing or organizing books, journals, theses, dissertations, searching on the internet or arranging the circulation materials, however each of these activities can, in some way, be a part of the knowledge management spectrum and process. KM is about enhancing the use of organizational knowledge through sound practices of information management and organizational learning. It is the process of transforming information and

intellectual assets into enduring value. It connects people with the knowledge that they need. Therefore, KM envisions getting the right information within the right context to the right person at the right time for the right purpose. It includes the intact cycle of discovery, creation, storage, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge (Kumar, n.d).

Asogwa, (2012) expressed that writers chose to define the concept the way it relates to their peculiar field of study. However, in library and information science profession, it is the insights, understandings, and practical know-how that every librarian possesses. It is the fundamental resources that allow professional and para-professional librarian to function intelligently. For that, the intellectual and knowledge-based assets of librarians were classified into two main categories namely, tacit knowledge, and explicit knowledge. The tacit knowledge includes:

- The know-how contained in the heads of librarians and other people's heads; knowledge each of us carry in our heads about how to do things, and the lessons learned through experience.
- It is the innovation and creativity, which is embedded in every normal human being that helps him or her in solving some daily and challenging problems.

When the tacit knowledge is expressed, codified and made public, it becomes explicit knowledge. Examples include knowledge shared during meetings, brainstorming sessions, workshops, conferences, seminars, etc. The knowledge is then recorded in the form of minutes of meetings and conference proceedings. The documents from such events represent the insights, experiences shared, codified and disseminated in an easily transferable form.

Roles of Librarians in Knowledge Management

According to Guns (1998), Abel and Oxbro (2001), in Thavamani, Velmurugan and Selvamani, (2014), library and information professionals have to identify, acquire and evaluate internal and external sources of knowledge and integrate, organize and make relevant knowledge available to the right person at the right time. The following are the laid down roles and responsibilities for library and information professionals in KM Programme:

- Tracking information and maintain a knowledge inventory.
- Ensuring the right kind of technology is in place such as internet, intranet, database and library softwares, OPAC and so on.
- Identifying valued skills, knowledge and expertise in the organization
- Analysis of documents, organization, classification and sorting, and their archiving for easy retrieval and faster dissemination
- Creating knowledge maps to find out when: and what is available
- Generation of knowledge vocabulary for standardization of terms and retrieval
- Acquisition of documents from external sources
- Categorizing the knowledge located inside or outside the organization for easy retrieval.
- Importing information literacy instruction to the users
- Training of users to maximize use of the knowledge repository

Professional Skills of Librarians in Knowledge Management

To take an assessment, there is the need to be acquainted with the basic principles of professionalism and skills. Skills are very essential for every professional, which help them to deliver services on time and in efficient manner to their users (Kumar, 2018). According to Mazumdar (2007), skill is an ability or proficiency in execution or performance, which is required for a person to plan and execute an action designed to achieve some goals or accomplish a particular task. A skilled person has the ability to perform any task successfully. The skill the person possessed can give the mind to face the challenges that occur in a particular profession because of the social, economic, educational and technological changes. Thus, in order to cope up with the ever-changing library and information science profession, librarians must have the relevant skills to perform their professional functions effectively.

The roles of LIS professionals are very important in the library because they have the skills required to acquire relevant information resources for the library and are able to process them according to the library system. The LIS professionals are the bridge between information resources and the readers (Kumar, 2018). In the library, resources are acquired and processed based on rules and regulations of the profession. And these rules and regulations do not come in rosy way. They are acquired from the academic world to handle library information resources in a way that users can easily access them. The core skills traditionally associated with library/information science include information handling skills - cataloguing, classification, indexing, enquiry work and user education training skills with facilitating skills and evaluation skills. (Hashim and Mokhtar, 2012).

Today's changing environment in library and information centres look for change in the professional skills besides the academic skill. The dramatic changes, largely the result of rapidly evolving information and communication technologies (ICTs), have impacted significantly on the knowledge and skills required for library and information science (LIS) professionals. The transformed landscape requires a new generation of LIS professionals to effectively and efficiently bridge it (Ravi, 2018). In addition, Ravi (2018) cited National Knowledge Commission (2007) while recommending the role of libraries as "gateways to knowledge" emphasized the skills required to fulfill the changing role of libraries as Library and Information handling skills, service orientation, ICT knowledge skills, communication and training skills, marketing and presentation skills, understanding of cultural diversity and knowledge mapping skills.

According to Ravi (2008), in order to cope up with the ever-changing library and information science profession, the library professionals must be a skilled professional. The skills can be categorized as domain specific skills, essential skills - reading, writing, computer application, creative thinking, analyzing skills etc. As part of the skills, the profession requires managerial skills - planning, organisation, managing negative people, assertive skills and conflict management skills. Leadership Skills are part of the key skill that a librarian needs, to be able to arrive at the target of the organization. Leadership skills include goal setting, team building, motivation, risk taking, formulating vision and others. In the library, there are lot of sectional duties with its peculiarities and uniqueness, as such, contextual skills – operational skills in different environment or culture comes in, in order to achieve the organizational goals.

According to DIK (2011) in Widén and Kronqvist-Berg (2014), seven key areas were identified for professional efficiency in LIS. They are digitalization, reading skill, scholarly

communication, participatory culture, pedagogical skills, marketing, and academic skills. The key areas focused on communicative skills, in various ways as well as juridical competence within the different areas. Digitalization skill entails technical competency and ability to communicate with IT personnel and systems, juridical competence, license agreements, and procurement. In addition, reading skill involves information and media literacy skills competency, to meet all kinds of user groups (children, multicultural and people with disabilities). Consequently, the library of this century must give ICT a top priority. These skills will assist Library and Information Science professionals to effectively apply ICT-based technologies to the provision of library and information services (Nkanu, Iyishu and Ogar, 2013).

Librarians should first and foremost have knowledge of the tools, skills, and competencies needed for effective knowledge management and take steps to acquire them. Raja et al (2009) in Asogwa, (2012) enumerated the types of knowledge-related tools which are effective in managing and handling information in academic libraries to include, the Intranets/Extranets skills, electronic document management skills, data analysis skills, data warehousing, mapping tools, machine learning, workflow management systems, groupware, information retrieval tools, and web archiving skills.

KM creates enablement to mine and extract the wealth of knowledge in library employees. Information technologies, information explosion, multiple formats of information, changing users' needs and tools have assigned newer roles and responsibilities to academic librarians. It has transformed them from custodians of recorded human intellect to knowledge navigators; they have migrated from librarians to cyberians, knowledge engineers, knowledge gatekeepers, networkers and knowledge brokers. These skills and competencies have to be

gripped and imbibed by all knowledge workers or they will become irrelevant in this 21st century (Asogwa, 2012).

Challenges to Knowledge Management in Academic Libraries

Library professionals perceived several challenges to incorporate knowledge management into academic library practices. Capturing and managing tacit knowledge in organizations such as libraries is a big challenge for library professionals as perceived by 79% of respondents in a research carried out (Nazim and Mukherjee, 2011). Although library and information professionals have been acknowledging for years that knowledge management is a burgeoning field of great interest to them, but they do not know what exactly is meant by knowledge management.

According to Roknuzzaman & Umemoto (2009) in Nazim and Mukherjee (2011), knowledge management is misinterpreted as information management or content management activities of a library. Knowledge management is difficult to incorporate into academic library environment due to misunderstanding of knowledge management concept by library professionals as indicated by 78% of respondents. 71% of respondents consider that knowledge management is not widely adopted in academic libraries due to the lack of knowledge capturing and knowledge sharing culture.

Change management and financial constraints including lack of IT infrastructure are other important factors that contribute to the failure of knowledge management in academic libraries as indicated by 45% and 59% of respondents respectively. Lack of knowledge sharing culture, top management commitment, incentives and rewards, financial resources and IT

infrastructure are the major constraints for the implementation of knowledge management in academic libraries (Nazim and Mukherjee, 2011).

Tripathy, Patra and Pani (2007) in Thavamani, Velmurugan and Selvamani, (2014) asserted that the following challenges face the library and information professionals has retarded Knowledge Management programme in academic libraries:

- Rapid change in ICT infrastructures is a handicap to the librarians to communicate knowledge to the users. Since ICT is an important tool in 21st century for KM, information professionals need a high level of technical skills in ICT which many do not possess.
- Management of tacit knowledge is not so easy. It is hard to know what is in human mind. It is also difficult to capture tacit knowledge and manage it within a large academic library.
- Lack of up-to-date knowledge as to what is happening in ICT
- Financial constraints are not there for knowledge sharing incentives.

As there are so many KM needs it is hard to know where to start. The most highlighted challenges include inadequate funding, lack of motivation and lack of infrastructure. The least cited challenges include moving to other professions, language barriers and the ability to work independently. It was established that inadequate funding has a negative impact on infrastructural development and capacity building. We note that some of these problems result from context (environment), cultural background, lack of maintenance of available infrastructure and the misplacement of organisational priority which altogether has affected knowledge management in academic libraries in Nigeria (Enakrire and Ocholla, 2017).

Way Forward to Overcome Challenges of Knowledge Management in Academic Libraries

Top level support and provision of rewards/incentives also have a key role in the success of knowledge management as perceived by 65% and 53% of library professional respectively. Benbya (2008) in Nazim and Mukherjee (2011) suggested that the impact of top management and leadership support is greater for knowledge management as it is an emerging discipline and employees may need the added incentive of a total commitment from their organizations' top management and leadership. Top management support also influences other factors critical to the success of knowledge management, such as organizational culture, as the top management is crucial in fostering trust and promoting a knowledge-sharing culture.

Asogwa, (2012) observed that there is a need to reshape the structure of academic libraries for them to be able to improve the services they provide to library users. That was why university librarians are urged to make their libraries more clients-centered, to re-design work processes in line with university's goals, and re-structure the tools in order to support front-line performance of knowledge management. The emphasis is more on the needs of the library user than the needs of the library. It is emphasized that the hallmark of a university education, information sharing, team-based structure, empowered employees, decentralized decision making and participative strategy should be promoted through knowledge management. Like other organizations, academic libraries need to reshape their structures to better serve their clients.

Academic librarians need to go an extra mile to understand the information and knowledge needs of users. They should be in a position to map internal and external knowledge that would assist them in increasing their efficiency. In other words, academic librarians should

extend their information management roles and enhance their knowledge management competencies. This pointed out that academic librarian as knowledge workers need to play active roles in searching for innovative solutions to the issues involved in adapting new technologies into their environment (Asogwa, 2012).

In addition, academic libraries should rethink their role in the whole university community. There is imperative to support the needs of the users since the teaching and learning patterns in universities have changed. As information and research resources become more varied, this places a challenge to academic libraries. There is a serious argument that the changes in the nature of information, in research strategies and in the structure of higher education are affecting academic libraries. These changes define much of the shifting context within which academic libraries must operate. Thus, Budd (1998), Foo et al., (2002) and Maponya (2004) in Asogwa, (2012) suggested that the changes brought by electronic media necessitate transformation in the way librarians think about their jobs, the users of information and communication process of which they are part of them. Academic librarians must strive to remain competent navigators of knowledge each medium in order to assist the library users.

In view of this modern trend, academic librarians need to liaise with library users, departments, and faculties to support teaching, learning and research in universities. As explained, liaison is very important in an environment of resource-based learning where scholars are encouraged to carry out more independent work and make wider use of a range of learning resources. These challenges therefore require academic librarians to offer user-friendly ICT oriented facilities such as providing for remote access to information and services analyze the changing user needs and give support to users in like new academic environments.

Summarily, Raja, Ahmad and Sinha, (n.d) concluded that the IT and knowledge workers need to work together and focus on getting the right information to the right people at the right time. The entire librarian and information scientist community should have knowledge management strategy or framework to use the IT to disseminate the information as demanded or required. The following points are identified for the better implementation of knowledge management in libraries mostly in academic libraries:

- Provision of sufficient budget for the library
- Provision of special fund for the new technologies
- Equipping library with new technologies and network facility
- Inter change of technical staffs among organizations/ libraries
- Staff sharing to develop the professional skills in libraries
- Organize a training programme

Conclusion

Knowledge creation is best performed by universities and other higher institution of learning. As learning-and-knowledge organization, universities should empower their academic libraries to develop campus-wide knowledge management systems. It now time for library to reposition themselves in the central stage of and as a leading player in knowledge management economy (Bello, 2018).

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