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Perceptions of Information Professionals about Knowledge Management in the Information Institutions of Bangladesh: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of information professionals about Knowledge Management (KM) in Bangladesh. The study was conducted through survey using a pre-structured questionnaire. A short, well-structured both open and close ended questionnaire was sent 80 information professionals who had been working in different libraries of Bangladesh by post. The respondents were selected from each division of Bangladesh (30 respondents from Dhaka division, 10 each in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal and Sylhet division). We received 40 responses and the response rate was 40 percent. The results of the survey show that 90 percent of the information professionals of Bangladesh first read about KM in literature, but none had taken any courses on KM. 43 percent of the responded information professionals of Bangladesh agreed that KM is just another fad like Total Quality Management (TQM), 50 percent of the information professionals strongly agreed that KM is a new term for what information professionals were already doing. The government of Bangladesh as well as the higher educational institutions should provide better educational opportunities on KM.

Introduction

Knowledge management (KM) is a collection of processes that govern the creation, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge in an organization (Newman, 1991). KM is the '…the process of creating, capturing and using knowledge to enhance organizational performance' (Hazeri and Martin, 2006). More relevant to the library context is Blake's definition: '…the process of capturing a company's collective expertise wherever it resides –in databases, on papers, or in peoples' heads – and distributing it to wherever it can help produce the biggest payoffs' (Blake, 2006). It involves the management of explicit knowledge (i.e. knowledge that has been codified in documents, databases, web pages, etc.), and the provision of an enabling environment for the development, nurturing, utilization and sharing of employees' tacit knowledge (i.e. know-how, skills, or expertise) (Ajifuruke, 2003). The implementation of an appropriate KM program in a business 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 (Ajifuruke, 2003).

In most organizations, the key professionals involved in KM activities are human resource managers, process and product developers, and information technologist (Taylor, 1996). KM is the explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge (Skyrme, 1998), and includes capturing, organizing and disseminating that knowledge within an organization (Rubenfeld, 2001). KM allows organizations to generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets (Santosus and Surmacz, 2001), and makes it possible to get the right information into the hands of the appropriate people at the time they need it to make decisions (Petrash, 1996).

One of the significant events faced by Library and Information Science (LIS) was the emergence of Knowledge Management (KM) as a business concept during the last decade. According to Gartner Group (1997), KM is "a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving and sharing of an enterprise's information assets". There seems to be a close relationship between LIS and KM, and some authors explain KM is an old concept (Hawkin, 2004), and a new name for what librarians or information professionals have been doing for years (Ajiferuke, 2003), while some others consider that KM is distinct from both librarianship and information management (Devenport, 2004). Knowledge management has been described as librarianship in new clothes (Koening, 1997), or simply a case of new wine in old bottles (Rowley, 1999; Schwarzwalder, 1999; Devenport and Cronin, 2000). The importance of this study is to explore the perceptions of information professionals of Bangladesh on Knowledge management in the libraries of Bangladesh.

KM in Bangladesh

KM has a number of obstructions in its way. Institutional, infrastructural, organizational and psychological obstructions are posing grave challenges to the successful implementation of KM system in libraries. Most of the library users and patrons are still not well aware of the potential and far reaching impact of KM and hence, are yet to contribute as much as they should for making this a meaningful venture. Nevertheless, efforts are underway in developed countries to strengthen KM initiatives in libraries and give this venture a formal and more institutional shape (Haq and Munshi, 2005).

As a developing country Bangladesh is yet to fully comprehend the notion of KM, let alone be benefited from such an endeavor. The information institutions of Bangladesh lack adequate manpower, infrastructure, information resources, financial support, patronization from government and non-government organizations and an educated user base that would play their due roles in making libraries a centre of KM initiatives. Besides, information or knowledge are yet to be considered as key development resources or commodity in Bangladesh, people and the policy makers alike are not fully woken up to the fact that if utilized effectively, information also can act as a strong economic resources like natural gas or oil (Haq and Munshi, 2005).

Library and information professionals of Bangladesh have still a long way to go to better manage their resources with the help of information communication technologies for maximizing the impact and effectiveness of their library resources. Meanwhile, the patterns are shifting rapidly in every aspect of their job. The new media – audio-visuals, television, microforms and computer base communication are in competition with book. Information is being generated faster than libraries are able to organize and store it. Commercial organizations and private companies are getting into the information business. Databases are replacing catalogs (Mahapatra and Chakrabarti, 1999). All this presents a depressing scenario for the libraries and librarians of Bangladesh. Under the circumstances, if the library and information professionals are to keep themselves in the broad picture with their traditional importance and relevance, they must make their presence felt in every stratum of the society and to the forces that shape and reshape the process of social advancement. KM can also give the information professionals their expected control in this quest. It holds great potential for libraries of the country like Bangladesh because it can help library and information professionals in improving their status and turning them into a driving force of the new information age who must be taken into account for sustainable development of the society. Recently, the Department of Information Science and Library Management (ISLM), Rajshahi University has implemented course on KM to provide knowledge on KM among the students. Similarly, the department of ISLM at the University of Dhaka is providing informal courses knowledge on KM.\

Research Objectives

This study explores the perceptions of information professionals of Bangladesh about Knowledge Management (KM). In the current economic climate, organizations are characterized by more knowledge incorporated in the new content, business and services. Library as a social organization has its own tradition to deal with information and knowledge. In a digital environment, the role of knowledge has become even more significant. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study is to explore the views of information professionals of Bangladesh about KM. More specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- To explore the information professionals' ways of knowing about KM;
- To express the views on information professionals on KM is just another fad like TQM;
- To investigate the perceptions of information professionals on KM is a new term for what they are already doing;
- To show the views of Information Professionals (IPs) on Information Management is just another aspect of KM;
- Finally, to explore the perceptions of information professionals' role in KM.

Research Questions

In pursuing the above research objectives, the following research questions (RQs) have been posed that will guide the study:

RQ1. What are the information professionals' ways of knowing about KM?

RQ2. What are the views on information professionals of Bangladesh on KM is just another fad like TQM?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of information professionals of Bangladesh on KM is a new term for what they are already doing?

RQ4. What are the views of information professionals of Bangladesh on Information Management (IM) is just another aspect of KM?

RQ5. What are the perceptions of information professionals' role in KM?

Research Methodology

The study has been carried out through postal survey (A letter was posted to the information professionals) based on a pre-structured questionnaire. The respondents have been selected from each division of Bangladesh. The respondents have been selected from each division of Bangladesh using random sampling method and based on their professional experiences in the field of library and information science. The geographical distribution of the sample shows that it includes 30 (37.5%) in Dhaka, 10 (12.5%) each in Khulna, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi, and Barishal division.

Table 1: Geographical distribution of the sample

Name of the divisions	Number of respondents	Percentage of the respondents
Dhaka	30	37.5%
Khulna	10	12.5%
Chittagong	10	12.5%
Sylhet	10	12.5%
Rajshahi	10	12.5%
Barisal	10	12.5%
Total	80	100%

A short, well-structured both open and close ended questionnaire was sent to the respondents by post. We sent 80 questionnaires all over Bangladesh and received 40 responses from them and the response rate was 40 percent (See Fig. 1). After having the responses from them, the collected data has been analyzed. In this survey, we have chosen the highest number of information professionals (respondents) from Dhaka division.

Results and Discussions

Profile of the respondents (n=40)

Geographical distribution of the respondents

Figure 1 indicates that the highest number of responses, 25 (31.25%), came from Dhaka Division where the highest sample size was 30 (37.5%) in the same division as shown in table 1. The second highest responses, 5 (6.25%), were received from Rajshahi, followed by Chittagong 3(3.75%), Sylhet 3(3.75%), Khulna 2(2.5%), and Barishal 2 (2.5%).
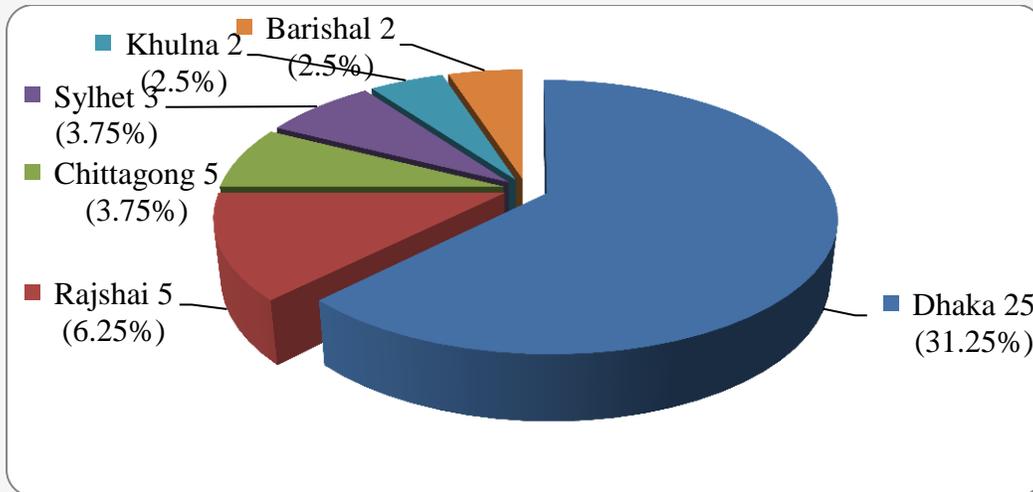
Figure 1: Geographical distribution of the respondents

Background of the Respondents

Large majorities (62.5%) of the respondents are male and 37.5% of respondents are female, which is not surprising as the profession is dominated by male information professionals. Almost half of the respondents are between 36 and 45 years old. Figure 2 indicates that with the remaining ones almost evenly split between the age brackets 26-35 years and 46-55 years. In terms of educational qualifications, most of the respondents (87.5%) have a master's degree in library and information science. In addition to the degrees, some of them have also attended workshops or continuing education courses in order to update their knowledge.
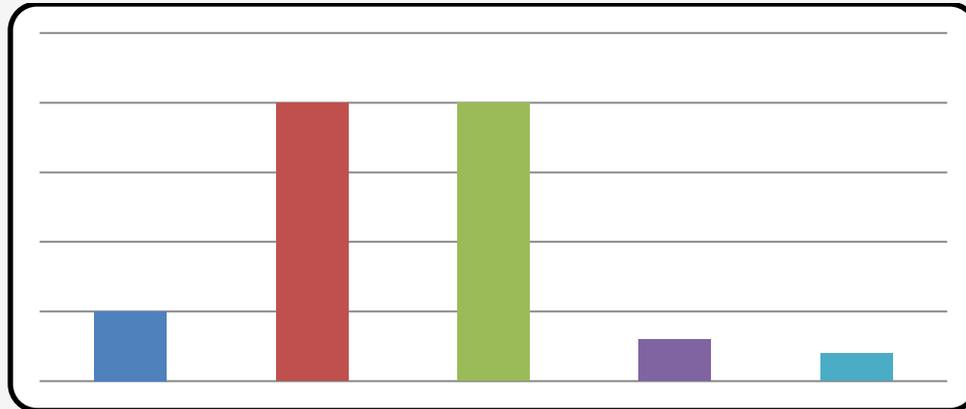

Figure 2: Age of the respondents

Perceptions of Information Professionals

Most (90 percent) of the respondents of the survey first read about KM in the literature, but none had taken any courses on it as indicated in figure 3. Only 5 percent of the respondents had attended a workshop on KM. Even though knowledge management is a hot topic in the literature of information technology and science in Bangladesh but no university or institution is formally offering this program in Bangladesh.
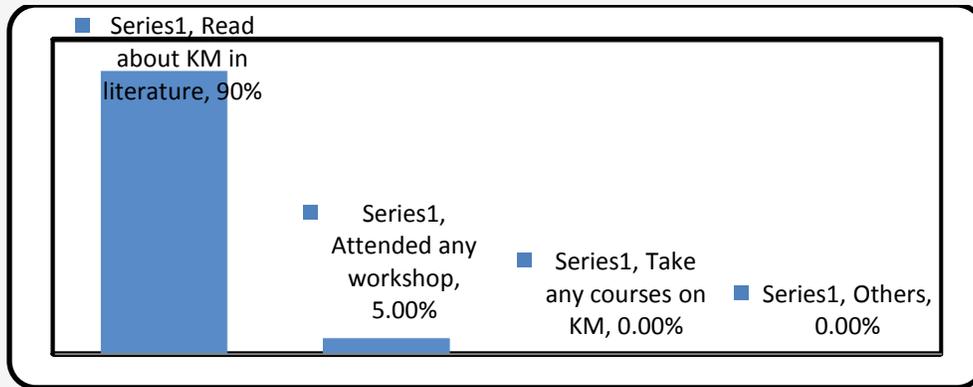
Figure 3: First perception about KM

In response to the RQ "KM is just another fad like Total Quality Management", majority (43 percent) of the information professionals of Bangladesh agreed that KM is just another fad like Total Quality Management (TQM) as reported in figure 4. 33 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that KM is just another fad like TQM. 13 percent of the information professionals disagreed, and 8 percent of the information professionals of Bangladesh strongly disagreed that KM is just another fad like TQM. Only 5 percent of the r respondents were not sure that KM is just another fad like TQM.
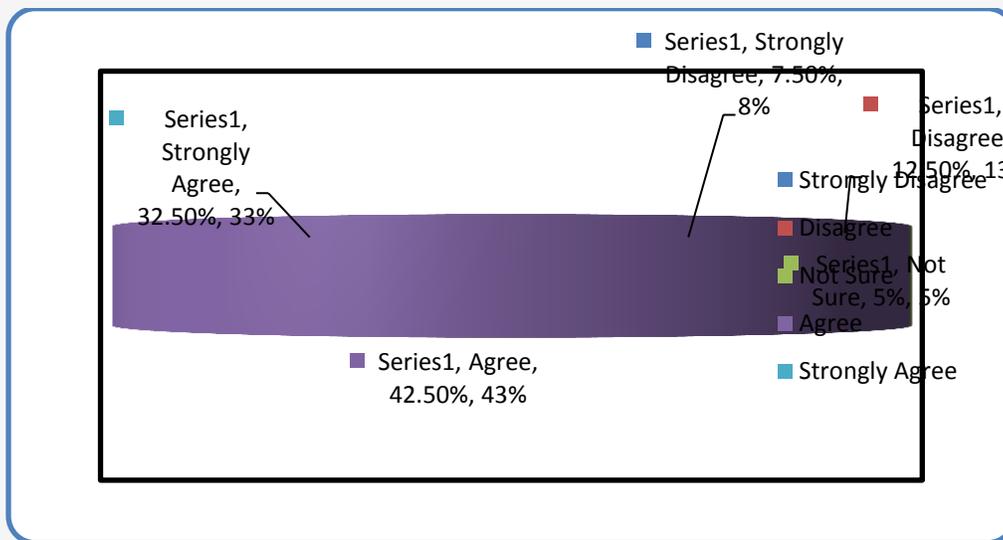

Figure 4: KM is just another fad like Total Quality Management

Half (50 percent) of the respondents strongly agreed that KM is a new term for what information professionals are already doing as shown in figure 5. 42.50 percent of the respondents agreed that KM is a new term what information professionals are already doing. Only 7.50 percent of the information professionals of Bangladesh not sure that KM is a new term what information professionals are already doing.
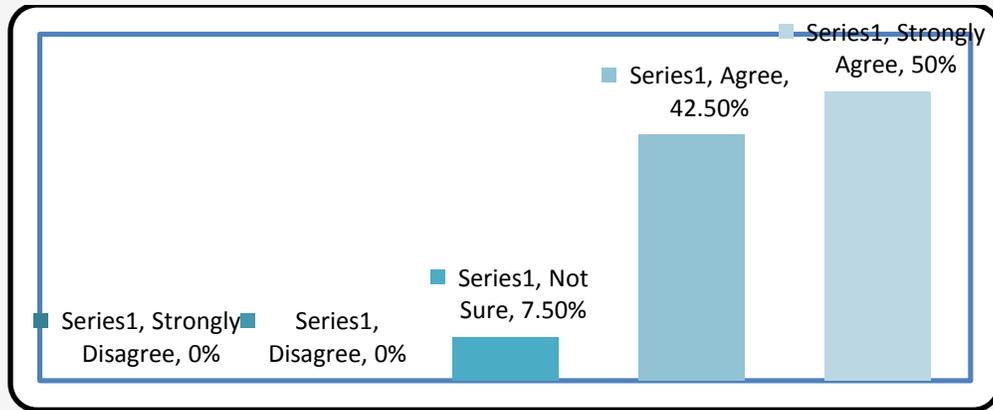
Figure 5: KM is a new term for what information professionals were already doing

Another RQ "Information Management is just another aspect of KM" was posed to the information professionals of Bangladesh. In response to this question, majority (65 percent) of the respondents strongly agreed that Information Management (IM) is just another aspect of KM as indicated in figure 6. 27.50 percent of the information professionals agreed that IM is just another aspect of KM. Only 5 percent of the respondents disagreed and 2.50 percent of the information professionals of Bangladesh not sure that IM is just another aspect of KM.
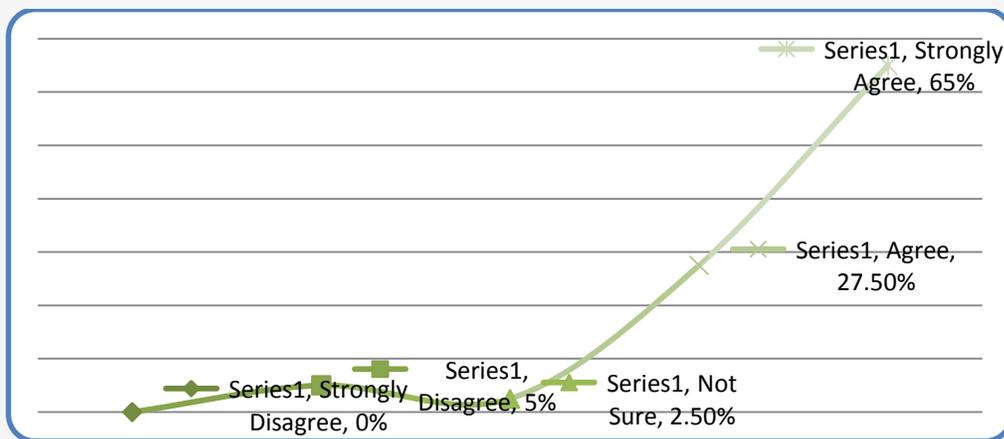

Figure 6: Information Management is just another aspect of KM

In response to the RQ "Information professionals have important roles to play in KM", most (65 percent) of the responded information professionals of Bangladesh strongly agreed that information professionals have important roles to play in KM as revealed in figure 7. Similarly, 35 percent of the surveyed information professionals of Bangladesh agreed that information professionals have important role to play in KM.
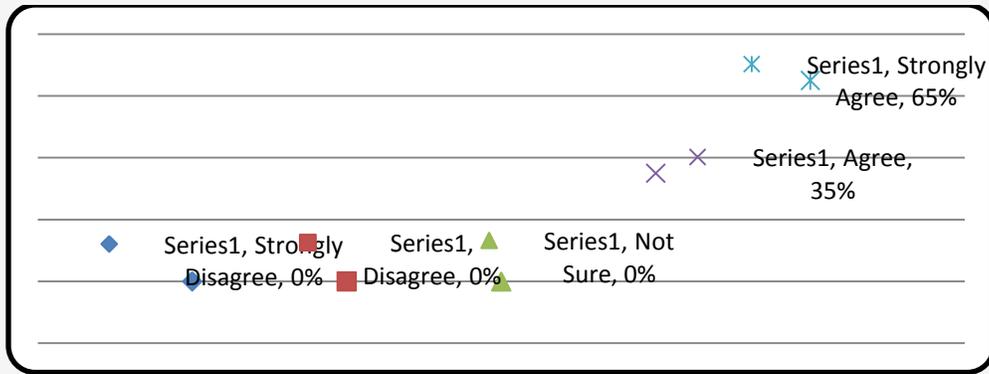
Figure 7: Information professionals have important roles to play in KM

Finally, a RQ "Information professionals are regarded as the most key members in knowledge management" was posed to the information professionals of Bangladesh. 53 percent of the recommended information professionals of Bangladesh strongly agreed that information professionals are the most key members in KM as expressed in figure 8. 45 percent of the surveyed information professionals agreed that information professionals are the most key members in KM. But 2 percent information professionals are not sure that information professionals are the key members in KM.
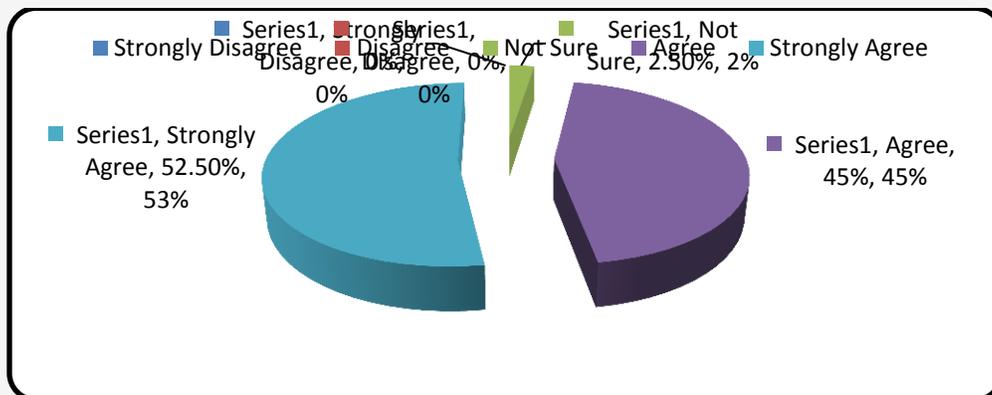

Figure 8: Information professionals are regarded as the most key members in knowledge management

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to explore the views of information professionals of Bangladesh on Knowledge Management in the libraries of Bangladesh. The results of the research show that 90 percent of the respondents first read about KM in literature, but none had taken any course on KM. Almost half (43 percent) of the information professionals of Bangladesh agree that KM is just another fad like TQM. The findings also yield that 50 percent of the respondents strongly agree that KM is a new term for what information professionals are doing. Similarly 65 percent of the information professionals strongly agree that IM is just another aspect of KM. However, 53 percent of the respondents strongly agree that information professionals are the most key members in KM.

It is obvious that the perceptions information professionals of Bangladesh about KM are reported in different points of view as they have no adequate knowledge on KM. Because there is a high degree of scarcity of literatures as well as various studying opportunities on KM. Therefore, the Government of Bangladesh as well as the higher educational institutions should provide better educational opportunities on library and information science discipline as well as on KM. Moreover, the Library

8

Association of Bangladesh (LAB) along with other professional institutions should organize national and international conference on KM for the better understanding of the knowledge of the information professionals of Bangladesh. Moreover, the study suggests that the Department of Information Science and Library Management of Dhaka University and Rajshahi University should introduce KM forma courses either in graduate level or in post graduate level, as there is a limited scope for the information professionals of Bangladesh to learn about KM.

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9

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