Issues and Prospects of Knowledge Sharing in Academic Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

An academic library is the heart of a university, without a functional library a tertiary institution cannot be accorded the status of a university, thus a library is established as soon as a university starts full operation. Over the years, academic libraries have been able to generate wealth of information about its operation but just like other organisations, they are yet to be fully explored and re-invented into the system to create organisational knowledge (Towley, 2001). Knowledge is considered a competitive resource for organisations and a strategic capital in the information economy. Towley ,2001 corroborating this in relation to the library, stated that the knowledge and experiences of library staff are the assets of any library and should be valued and shared. This signifies that knowledge is an important asset for university libraries.

Knowledge is primarily of two types: explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is characterized by external appearances and can be expressed in the form of books, the web and documents. This type of knowledge is easy to store and circulate, through the use of technology. Another type of knowledge is tacit Knowledge. This type of knowledge resides in the minds and behaviour of individuals, the internal intuition and common-sense. This type of knowledge is hidden and often is based on experience and difficult to express through technology.

For any academic library to perform its functions effectively, its work areas must include the following: information and communication technologies, automation, networking, internet, administration, cataloguing, acquisition, abstracting, indexing, publishing, marketing of products and services, seminars, workshops, polices, interlibrary loan, staffing, knowledge management and database management among others (Fayose & Nwalo, 2000; Alegbeleye, 2010 & Etim, 2010). Academic libraries are quite interested in using technology to network operations such as administration, cataloguing, interlibrary loan and international bibliographic project. If properly utilized it helps the growth and development of libraries in different
directions. It allows easy integration of various activities, facilitates cooperation, helps to avoid duplication of efforts within the library and among libraries in a network, eliminates some uninteresting and repetitive work and provides marketing opportunity for its services (Fayose & Nwalo, 2000). The option available for now is to include networks, electronic mail and the internet if we must satisfy the information needs of the users in the twenty-first century. Some African universities have seen the need to make use of information technology in order to promote research and enhance excellence.

Etim (2010) supported this assertion when she stated that the need to share and transfer information in Africa is not new. The issue is that in most of Africa, adequate internet access presents a great challenge for university administration. Ogunshola (2004) noted that the proliferation of Nigeria universities, despite the economic recession in the country since 1980 have aggravated the problem for universities and their libraries. On the whole, university libraries in many African countries are faced with dearth of funding for books and journals, staffing difficulties and perhaps a loss of the perception of the library as the centre of academic life and scholarship. Lack of internet access has deprived African universities the latest search for information, web based learning, opportunities to be part of international research teams, and the ability to connect campuses with video conferencing (Etim, 2010).

Longshak (2010) stated that inspite of all these impediments in the implementation of technology in Nigerian libraries, there are reasons to believe that prospects are brighter. Therefore, there is the need for knowledge sharing among librarians in university libraries if we must come out of these challenges.

**PURPOSE OF PAPER**

Today’s libraries emphasis has shifted from ownership of information to access, thus librarians are faced with the task of having to develop themselves in order to meet the ever-changing user needs. This has therefore necessitated that librarians invest in training and professional
development in order to keep pace with constantly changing user needs and information environment. However, studies have shown that there is reluctance to share acquired or experienced information and knowledge among librarians. Because there is no regular or systematic ways of sharing both explicit and tacit knowledge by the librarians, and making such knowledge available to others in order to improve organisational effectiveness and add value to the operations of libraries.

Since knowledge is stored in individual brains, studies have also shown that when librarians disengage from service in libraries or are being transferred from one section to another, they often leave such duties with their acquired and experienced knowledge, as there had been a failure in the system to capture, retain and transfer such knowledge. Such knowledge are often buried in unread reports and filed away in cabinets or totally lost. This study therefore seeks to unravel the type and extent of knowledge sharing among academic librarians. It will also dig into the impediments of knowledge sharing by academic librarians.

The structure of this paper aims to describe the knowledge sharing strategy by some academic libraries. First, is to define purpose or motivation of conducting knowledge sharing, following that is describing the types of knowledge sharing activities, facilities are used in knowledge sharing, documentation process of the knowledge sharing results, and knowledge sharing barriers during the implementation.

**CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

Knowledge sharing is the process of coordinating learning activities whereby individuals, mutually exchange their knowledge and jointly create new knowledge. Knowledge sharing is a process which consists of both, bringing knowledge and getting knowledge. (Yang, 2004).

Each worker can learn from the experiences and practices of the other.

Knowledge sharing among workers worldwide is perceived as one of the most convenient and effective way to obtain knowledge. Knowledge sharing among workers enhances the ability to
seek related help from one another. Knowledge sharing among workers essentially facilitates achieving outcomes of collective learning. Learning and knowledge sharing are intimately connected. The knowing process is a component of sharing, thinking and learning.

In light of this fact, organisations tend to organise, manage and employ what is available from experiences, skills and abilities and the implicit and explicit information accumulated by employees to support the process of making decisions and increase the speed of response and innovation. This trend led to appearance of the principle of knowledge management at the beginning of the nineties. Knowledge Management (KM) can be defined as a multi-strategy concept to attain hierarchical targets by making the best usage of knowledge. There are three fundamental elements of an academic library that needs to be integrated together in order to make management of knowledge compelling. These three basic elements are: people, process and technology. People are considered to be the vital factor in building the organisation which in turn grows by developing their employees. KM helps employees to become flexible and encourage each other. It leads the manager to empower the workers to facilitate and exchange valuable information. Process should contain three major dimensions: effectiveness, efficiency and degree of innovation. It is critical for process to be as clear and straightforward as would be prudent to be well understood by workers in the organisation (Alrashdi 2014). Managing knowledge has become an important subject facing libraries today, and that it should be focused on the following: effective research and development of knowledge, creation of knowledge bases, exchange and sharing of knowledge between library staff/users, training of librarians, speeding up of processing of the implicit knowledge and realization of its sharing. (Shanhong, 2000 & Alegbeleye, 2010).

Knowledge sharing helps workers solve problems, learn new things and increase understanding. Workers can learn from each other and benefit from new knowledge and development by one another. Workers that are able to share knowledge are more productive
and more likely to survive on their jobs than workers that do not (Yang, 2004). Librarians by way of sharing their knowledge, experience, thoughts and beliefs mutually establish their common understanding.

A Knowledge worker is responsible for the creation and growth of innovation, and a knowledge worker should be able to create products and services for the organization and the most important is creating a strategy. (Davenport, 2005). All employees can be categorized as knowledge workers, this is because all employees hold information and knowledge in which it can contribute to the organization, but there is an important condition to make employees as knowledge worker (Rosen, 2011). From the above results, the librarian can be categorized as a knowledge worker as a librarian is the library engine, in which the library progress and drawback are at the hands of the librarian.

To encourage the knowledge creation, a knowledge worker needs to perform knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is not like when we cut a cake into some pieces and distribute them for the entire people who share. But each individual brings a cake and comes back with a bigger one, that is knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is about working together, helping each other, and collaborating, as (Rosen, 2011) revealed that knowledge sharing is not limited to what is given by others, and what we will get, but when there is someone who volunteered to help others (colleagues) to build new capacity which results in action, and knowledge sharing is like a the learning process.

PROSPECTS OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Okonenedo and Popoola (2012) found out that librarians also often share knowledge about new trend in librarianship and by sharing knowledge, they use experience gained in finding solution to their problems on the job. For organizations to succeed with KM practices there is the need for such organisations to be the enablers that could assist KM implementation and the impediments that could prevent its success.
Mayekiso’s (2013) study found that the benefit of knowledge sharing in academic libraries include better-informed staff which in turn leads to better service delivery. In a related study, Anna and Puspitasari’s (2013) study found out that the benefits of knowledge sharing include less duplication of tasks, improvement in productivity and working methods, encouragement to learn more by staff, expertise and knowledge from staff who either resign or retire will also be retained, and there is a continuous learning by everyone in the organization as no knowledge gets lost thereby making the library become an incubator for more and better knowledge, thus promoting innovative ideas which will result in a better service to the users.

In another study, Semertzaki (2012) posited that knowledge sharing facilitates better decision making, utilizes the existing computer systems, encourages the free flow of ideas and knowledge, improves customer service satisfaction, and boosts revenues. It also enhances the value of existing products, reduces costs in human labour and hours, streamlines operations, helps to make better use of employees’ working time, and improves the collective-organization memory.

Maponya’s (2004) study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal library found out that, although there were some forms of informal sharing of knowledge among staff, yet there is lack of a system that promotes knowledge sharing in the library. Moreover, the library had no written policies or a plan of action intended to accomplish knowledge sharing activities. There is however reported instances of the successful application of knowledge sharing activities in the academic library. Jantz (2001) study also found out that in order to adopt the knowledge sharing practice in the library, the library had departmental libraries managed by reference librarians that developed a database known as common knowledge database for the management of the tacit knowledge of the employees. The study further established that the objective of the database is to enable tacit knowledge acquisition and sharing to improve and facilitate reference service through improved communication with the ultimate goal of becoming one library
There are a large number of electronic tools to facilitate knowledge sharing in an organisation and some of which are electronic mail, internet, intranet, web portal, e-mail mailing list, social network media such as Facebook, collaboration technology tools such as audio visual tools, twitter and so on.

POLICY THAT SUPPORTS KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Policy makers, stakeholders and knowledge brokers (including researchers) all have a great deal they can learn from one another. Policy makers need to have access to good quality knowledge or information about the library. Policy makers need different kinds of information in order to make well informed decisions.

Policy on knowledge sharing in the library is visibly absent in their visions and mission statements. An example of a health system information is as follows and this can be adopted in academic libraries.

- Describe a problem or policy objective
- Present policy options to address the problem or achieve the policy objective
- Identify implementation considerations (barriers and strategies to address them).

KNOWLEDGE SHARING TECHNIQUES

Based on the knowledge sharing tools, it mentions that there is no one particular strategy for successful knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing strategy should be adapted to the conditions and the context in which the organization is located. It is better to choose strategy by involving the audiences; because of the successful of knowledge sharing depends on the role and contribution of the entire audiences. There are some alternatives to determine a proper knowledge sharing strategy, those are (1) choose knowledge sharing strategy by looking at a variety of strategies, not depend on one strategy, (2) defines the purposes of knowledge sharing,
pay attention on knowledge broker and leader in knowledge sharing, (4) and determine the knowledge sharing strategy (Tsui, 2006).

**FORMAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING TECHNIQUES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

This study identified the following techniques for KS among the LIS professionals.

(i) **Meetings:** Mushi (2009) found that in Tanzania public university libraries meeting is exercised as a means of KS.

(ii) **Workshops:** A KS workshop should be supported as a part of a larger learning strategy (Hewlitt & Lamoureux, 2010).

(iii) **Training sessions:** Fong and Chu (2006) founded internal training courses as a KS practice in the SMEs construction organizations (Fong & Chu, 2006).

(iv) **Seminars:** Anna & Puspitasari (2013) discovered seminars in the KS objectives of three Indonesian University Libraries.

(v) **Knowledge fairs:** Knowledge fair is designed to present information on a chosen theme. You can use several technical means to present your information to the target group.

**INFORMAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING TECHNIQUES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

Abdul-Rahman and Wang (2010) highlighted six knowledge management techniques that can be used in academic libraries:-

(i) **Open Offices:** This is an office setting that doesn’t give room for so much privacy that locked doors give. Here everyone can see every one but the offices can be demarcated with a transparent glass.

(ii) **Coffee rooms:** This is a kitchenette where staff / librarians can come have their snack and drink coffee. Here there are no formal settings. Everyone sits around the coffee tables and chats freely thereby sharing knowledge indirectly.

(iii) **Gyms:** Everyone knows the essence of keeping fit. Some organizations have introduced a gym long ago but most academic libraries are yet to follow tis trend.
While staff are working out, the tendency to discuss about work related issues is very high and knowledge can be shared informally just through discussions.

(iv) Assistance from the subject expert: Peer assist is a technique used by a project team to solicit assistance from peers and subject matter experts regarding a significant issue the team is facing (Norton, & Rathod, 2008).

(v) Learning lesson by solving problems: After Action Review (AAR) is a technique to evaluate and capture lessons learned upon completion of a project. It allows project team members to discover for themselves what happened, why it happened, and how to sustain strengths and improve on weaknesses (Young, 2010).

(vi) Telling stories about experiences: Storytelling (narrative) is emerging as an important informal method of communication and is regarded as important to convey experiences of work whilst communicating shared knowledge and learning and maintaining organizational memory (Coakes, & Jack, 2004).

(vii) Sharing experiences with juniors: Mentoring is a learning relationship between two employees. Mentors are experienced employees who share their knowledge, experience and ideas with less experienced employees, or associates (Canadian International Development Agency, 2003).

(viii) Guiding employees to learn new skills: Dainty, Qin, & Carrillo (2005) mentioned coaching as an approach to KS in large construction organizations.

(ix) Forming Group among the People of Same Interest: Communities of Practice (CoPs) have emerged as one of the most researched and widely praised techniques for KS (Bartholomew, 2005).

TOOLS USED IN KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

This study revealed the following tools that can be exploited by the LIS professionals for KS.

(i) Internet/Intranet/Extranet:
Extranet is an Intranet with limited access to outsiders, making it possible for them to collect and deliver certain knowledge. This technology is very useful for making organizational knowledge available to geographically dispersed staff members and is therefore used by many organizations (Egbu, et al., 2003).

(ii) E-mail/Group mail: Hwang and Kim (2007) measured one cultural dimension, collectivism, and found that one's collectivism was positively related to their attitude toward using the group email function in an online classroom management system to share knowledge (Hwang & Kim, 2007).

(iii) Video conferencing/Tele conferencing/Video sharing: Ghani (2009) mentioned video conferencing as a tool for managing tacit knowledge. If participants met one another for the first time during a videoconference, or a teleconference for that matter, the interactions were much more awkward and slower, and the knowledge that was exchanged tended to be less significant. Social network sites have medium media richness because they enable both text-based communication and the sharing of videos, pictures and other forms of media.

(iv) Blogs/YouTube/Facebook/Twitter: Blogs certainly play an important role in social networking systems that aim at supporting knowledge sharing and learning. There are a growing number of systems on the internet where content can be easily created or made available. People can for example post content they created themselves like videos (e.g. http://www.youtube.com) (Coenen, 2006). Hosein (2013) reported that twitter help find experts in their field through the process of following people who they may not necessarily have met in person, but who broadcast interesting insights. He also outlined that the performativity of Facebook allowed knowledge workers to keep abreast of what is happening in their personal networks. Even though it may not be directly related to their work, it still helps them when they need to reach out to these social ties for work-related knowledge problem (Hosein, 2013). The academic librarians can adapt these tools.
(v) Wikis/Groupware/Online discussion forums: Libraries and academic institutions have been using Wikis for group learning, for sharing knowledge, experiences and open source products, and also to provide subject guides (Frumkin, 2005; King & Porter, 2007; Payne, 2008). Dalkir (2005) mentioned groupware and discussion forums as the tool of knowledge sharing and dissemination phase under the communication and collaboration technologies (Dalkir, 2005).

(vi) Web portals: There is an important role for portals in supporting knowledge sharing and team collaboration, but unless users and their willingness to use the portal are considered from the beginning, the contribution of a portal to knowledge leadership will be limited (Tatnall, 2005).

(vii) Electronic databases: Knowledge sharing can be supported by the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for example online databases, data warehousing/knowledge repositories and intranets (Hsu, 2006).

(viii) Online knowledge directories: Information of the knowledge resources shared in the community can be registered with the coordinator for search or resource directory services in the community, such as to which subject the piece of resource related to and possible use of the resource. In addition, user feedback on the knowledge resources they received can also be put into the knowledge resource’s profile, in the form of comments or rating.

(ix) Website: As the web increasingly becomes a common resource people turn to when seeking information, websites become critical to knowledge sharing.

(x) Instant messaging/Online chatting: Academic libraries use IM to provide virtual reference services, improve access of other services and provide the latest information to students. Fong and Chu (2006), in their study of knowledge sharing in the UK contracting companies, identified informal chatting as a knowledge-sharing approach.

ISSUES OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES
The difficulty of knowledge sharing among people may be related to multiple factors that influence the sharing of knowledge. Riege (2005) discussed individual, organizational, and technology barriers to knowledge sharing. Individual barriers may include lack of social skills, cultural differences, and lack of time and trust. Organizational barriers may include lack of infrastructure and resources, accessibility, and physical environment. Technological barriers include reluctance to use applications that do not meet user’s requirements and unrealistic expectations of Information technology systems.

There are several factors that influence individual readiness for knowledge sharing. These factors range from physical objects, such as tools and technologies to abstract concepts, such as motivations and providing incentives to encourage knowledge sharing, organizational culture, national culture, organizational resources such as time and space and access to knowledgeable people in an organization. Other factors are self-efficacy, self-esteem and organizational commitment (Alam, Abdullah, Ishak, & Zain, 2009). The availability of modern required tools and technological equipment are major factors that tend to influence the sharing of knowledge behaviour in an organization. Technological tools availability tends to foster the readiness and ease of sharing knowledge among staff members in an organization. According to Zain (2009) providing incentives is a way of motivating staff in an organization to continually, influence knowledge sharing within the organization. Staff in an organization tends to participate fully once they know there is a reward for them at the end.

The availability of time and space, having the right access to people with the wealth of knowledge and experience are other factors that can influence knowledge sharing behaviour among staff. Especially tacit knowledge which resides in an individual requires the presence of people with wealth of knowledge and experience in an organization to share such knowledge. Knowledge sharing is very vital to any organisation and a panacea for knowledge creation and innovation. Innovation is thus fostered by knowledge sharing through the free
flow of ideas. Knowledge sharing helps to improve access to, and transfer of, organizational knowledge. This often takes place by creating an experts’ network comprising of individuals with desired expertise, thus creating a community of interest.

CONCLUSION

Organizations and academic libraries alike depend on the collection of data pertaining to the purpose of the domain in which they operate. Internally, each functional part of the library works with data collected from the different types of the systems used (Laudon & Laudon, 2000). Academic libraries collect data and process them. Most organizations use knowledge, for example, regarding their target audience, to gain a competitive advantage which comes through knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is an activity through which knowledge is exchanged among people or organizations. The most effective result of using knowledge sharing practices is to improve workers’ skills and knowledge, Librarians should be quite interested at knowledge sharing based on the importance associated with knowledge sharing. Although, the practices of knowledge sharing among librarians academic libraries are quite low, knowledge sharing practices can been improved through focusing on knowledge sharing in ICTs/networking, conferencing/workshops, cataloguing among others. Knowledge sharing is useless unless it used by all employees in the library. When knowledge product is rarely used by the employees to help them with the work, solve problem, or make innovation in the library, it means that the knowledge sharing is less successful. Knowledge reuse is very useful in the creation of a product or idea; and through the knowledge reuse can foster library innovation without having to repeat the process from the beginning (Oshri, 2006).

RECOMMENDATION

In the light of the reviews of this study, the researcher is proffering the following recommendations:-
1. Knowledge sharing should be encouraged among librarians and policies that supports it should be made and adhered to. It should be included in the mission and vision statements.

2. Seminars for both old and fresh librarians should be vigorously carried out to create further awareness of knowledge sharing among librarians.

3. The areas of networking as subject of knowledge sharing should be addressed since librarians need to share ideas in both formal and informal settings.

4. Involve the leaders/managers and knowledge brokers as much as possible to support the successful of knowledge sharing.

5. Provide the right rewards/incentives that can spring the knowledge creation among staff.

6. Encourage open access to all the knowledge products that is created during knowledge sharing through the Internet, so that all parties can mutually learn from the results.

7. Encouraging the creation of knowledge (documentation) as well as providing access to those knowledge for future use.
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