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Abdurrahman Bello Onifade

Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, onifadeabello@gmail.com

Kazeem Abiodun Akinwade

International Islamic University - Malaysia, akinwadeka@gmail.com

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Knowledge Management System and Tools Required for Effective KM Take-up and Activities in Organisations in Nigeria

*Abdurrahman Bello Onifade**
onifadeabello@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Knowledge management (KM) has become an integral and invaluable asset to organisational productivity in the 21st century. Observations have, however, shown that many organisations in Nigeria do not have knowledge management system (KMS) and do not practise KM; and in cases where KM practices exist, there seems to be indifference on the part of members in using the KMS. Perhaps, this could be due to lack of adequate awareness about the importance of KM practices and or the KM tools required for its effective take-up. This study, therefore, seeks to highlight and examine KMS and the tools required for effective KM take-up and activities in organisations in Nigeria. The methodology for the study was qualitative; relevant literature on the subject matter were reviewed. Findings from the reviewed literature showed that, despite the monolithic roles KM practices have on organisational output and productivity; developing nations like Nigeria have not adequately embraced its practices. Therefore, it is recommended that more research, writings and other fora like seminars and workshops, should be used to raise awareness about KM practices and that the formalised bureaucratic posture of organisations toward KM should be revamped to enable members up their willingness to create, share, receive and use knowledge.

Keywords: Knowledge, Knowledge management, KM system, KM tool, Organisation

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has continued to be characterised by advancement in technological innovations and developments. These developments, directly or indirectly, have influence on the effectiveness and efficiency of individuals, organisations, institutions, governments and nations. More so, since the end of the Second World War, there has been exponential growth in information production; such that ‘information explosion’ became a popular phenomenon. Meanwhile, with the sophistication of information and communication technologies (ICTs), new

* Graduate Student, Department of Library and Information Science, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, +234 (0)805 558 9342

concepts have emerged; thereby stimulating a paradigm shift from information explosion to information proliferation and lately, information overload.

Information and knowledge are two concepts often used interchangeably. Scholars have, however, contended that information serves as a building block for knowledge. Both are intangible phenomena which could be applied to reduce uncertainty, stimulate and enhance decision making or problem solving on a particular issue or subject matter. Kingston et al. (2015) noted that information is obtained when data have been organised or analysed for a particular context and knowledge is based on an understanding of the meaning of that information.

The need to remain relevant and create strategic value in a competitive (business) environment has stimulated the need for knowledge management. The maxim that knowledge is power has become a vital manifestation of the 21st century; such that organisations have come to realise that knowledge is an invaluable asset to their productivity and competitive advantage. Uriarte (2008) stated that knowledge is increasingly being recognised as the new strategic imperative of organisations; although unlike in the past when organisational power was probably hinged on hoarding knowledge to maintain an advantage; the new paradigm is that organisations must share knowledge in order to grow. It has been shown that the organisation that shares knowledge among its management and staff grows stronger and becomes more competitive. This is the core of knowledge management – the sharing of knowledge.

The creation and transmission of knowledge has been an age-long practice. Masic *et al.* (2017) argued that knowledge has been transmitted and managed from time immemorial, but KM became a newly structured concept in the last two decades of the twentieth century. However, KM practices have been in existence prior to this period; even though many organisations misconstrued KM as practices that should be confined to technological application. This perception has gradually been revamped and organisations are beginning to realise that KM is mainly geared towards formal and informal interactions between members of an organisation which facilitate knowledge creation, sharing, use and re-use for organisational benefits.

Observations have shown that many developing countries, including Nigeria, are lagging behind in KM practices. There seems to still be ubiquitous belief among members of organisations that superior power could only be determined by hoarding knowledge from others; not by sharing it. Sadly, this has steadily affected the required

output of organisations in these countries; even though many have embraced application of technologies in their operational activities. Their competitive relevance is being relegated due to lack of KM; especially in an age when innovations continue to emerge with the speed of light. Davenport and Prusak (1998) cited in Oladejo and Arinola (2019) observed that the advent/development of a knowledge management system (KMS) and its application using KM tools will enable decision-makers in organisations to come together to share ideas, make contributions, and reach collective decisions promptly. Furthermore, a KMS is developed and deployed to provide decision makers in organisations with the required knowledge for making effective decisions.

The foregoing underscores the need for KM in organisations; especially in developing countries like Nigeria. There seems to be dearth of KM practices in many organisations because it appears these organisations are probably not in the know of how to establish KMS or unable to identify the suitable KM tools required for the purpose. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is to highlight and examine knowledge management system and the tools required for effective KM take-up and activities in organisations in Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

Knowledge management plays strategic role to organisational competitive advantage, productivity, relevance and protection against loss of corporate memory. Observations have, however, shown that many organisations in Nigeria do not have knowledge management system and do not practise KM; and in cases where KM practices exist, there seems to be indifference on the part of employees in using KMS. Could it be that these organisations and or their employees are unaware of the valuable importance of KM to their operational activities and output? Or could it be that they do not know the necessary KM tools required to establish a functional KMS? Search through available literature has also shown that KMS and KM tools have not been adequately researched within the Nigerian context. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines knowledge management system and the tools required for effective KM take-up and activities in organisations in Nigeria.

3. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. highlight the importance of knowledge management in organisations;
- ii. examine how knowledge management system is established in organisations;
and
- iii. identify KM tools required for effective KM take-up and activities in organisations.

4. Review of Related Literature

Knowledge management has come to stay in the 21st century and the earlier organisations and their members realise this fact, the better. This is because just like information is regarded as the currency of democracy, knowledge has become the currency of this age and its judicious management by individuals and organisations would likely continue to be a determining factor to foster organisational output, growth and intellectual creativity. Nonetheless, it would be apt to grasp what KM really means, the process of establishing KMS and the KM tools required for organisations to initiate KM activities.

4.1 Understanding Knowledge Management

Knowledge is an intangible asset which has been recognised lately as a key to economic prosperity of people, organisations and nations. This is a reason there has been invariable awareness in formal and informal discourses about concepts like ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘knowledge society’. Moghalu (2013) stated that knowledge, not characteristics such as physical attributes or social class, traditional groups such as farmers and craftsmen, or individual production, is the driving force of economic activity or social transformation. More so, the importance of knowledge has received special, global acknowledgment since the phrase ‘knowledge society’ was coined and popularised by the leading American management guru of the 20th century, Peter Drucker, in his famous lecture “Knowledge Work and Knowledge Society: The Social Transformations of this Century”, delivered at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government in 1994.

The two main types of knowledge are tacit knowledge (personal; in the people’s heads) and explicit knowledge (codified; written or documented). Whenever knowledge is referred to, most people tend to think of codified and documented knowledge like patents, databases, manuals, white papers, etc. While explicit knowledge is important, what is even more important and value-adding from the

perspective of competitive advantage is the tacit knowledge which is embedded in the minds of the people. The tacit knowledge is intuitive, contextual, linked to experience, past memories and at times tasking to codify, document and communicate. It is estimated that this tacit knowledge constitutes between 70% and 80% of all knowledge in an organisation; and it is difficult to identify, quantify, and convert into real value, unless a structured approach is adopted to manage knowledge.

On the other hand, due to how knowledge about some activities is more important than others in organisations, two other forms of knowledge have been identified by Uriarte (2008), which are: *core knowledge* and *enabling knowledge*. The kind of knowledge that is critical to the attainment of the organisation's goal and the fulfillment of its strategy is called 'core knowledge'; while knowledge needed for maintenance of the effectiveness of the organisation is known as 'enabling knowledge'.

Knowledge management does not have a universally accepted definition; hence, it has been subject to various theoretical and empirical meanings and interpretations by scholars and experts. Perhaps, the reason for this should not be far-fetched as there has also been a long debate about the interchangeable use of information and knowledge. According to Uriarte (2008), KM is the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and sharing it within the organisation. KM is the process through which organisations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets. That is, KM is concerned with the process of identifying, acquiring, distributing and maintaining knowledge that is essential and beneficial to an organisation.

KM, according to Rosenthal-Sabroux and Grundstein (2008), is defined as the management of activities and processes geared towards the utilisation and creation of knowledge in an organisation, considering the economic and strategic, organisational, socio-cultural, and technological dimensions. Nunes et al. (2017) referred to KM as the practices that enable an institution to optimise its academic (teaching and research) and administrative activities as well as to reinforce the utilisation and sharing of data and information for decision-making purposes. Girard and Girard (2018) stated that KM is the availability of needful knowledge to, and its accessibility by, senior executives to make important corporate decisions.

These various definitions of KM could be generalised with the view that KM refers to the process of conscious coordination of knowledge assets, with the intent of preserving and sharing created knowledge in a network of collaborators. It is a conscious coordination because it requires and involves the willingness of members to share and receive knowledge for personal growth and organisational efficiency. Oladejo and Adabale (2016) noted that knowledge assets include people's skill/expertise, business process, operation procedures, community values or norms, organisational databases for storage, organisation, exploitation, innovation, and optimisation of organisational goals. The major variables contributing to the motivations for KM include the problems inherent in storage of historical knowledge on paper and that of experimental knowledge in the minds of experts. These knowledge assets are vulnerable to staff turnover, natural disasters, or even death; hence the need for KM initiatives.

Knowledge plays an invaluable role in any organisation's innovative outputs, efficiency and survival. KM involves a logical approach of ensuring knowledge residing in an organisation's human and material resources can be found when needed and made readily accessible by others for more benefits. Daft as cited by Corso et al. (2003) noted that KM consists of the systematic effort of finding, organising and giving access to the organisational intellectual capital and of feeding a culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing so that organisational activities can be based on existing knowledge. Likewise, Drucker cited in Beerkens (2008) suggested that the key to personal and organisational growth is to work *smarter* rather than *harder*. It is the realization of this very principle that drives KM because it helps to harness the wealth of knowledge that is in existence and building new knowledge based on it.

KM in several organisations still seems young; even though many organisations have their own knowledge assets. KM involves using the ideas and experience of employees, customers and suppliers to improve an organisation's performance; building on the ideology that what works well leads to better practice, strategy and policy. Benjamins (2001), however, looked at KM from three perspectives: results-oriented, process-oriented and technology-oriented. According to Benjamins, a *results-oriented* definition may state that KM is 'to have the right knowledge at the right place, at the right time in the right format.' On the other hand, a *process-oriented* definition may describe KM as 'the systematic management of processes by which

knowledge is identified, created, gathered, shared and applied.’ And a *technology-oriented* definition may present a formula for KM as ‘business intelligence + collaboration + search engines + intelligent agents.’

Yaacob et al. (2010) opined that KM ultimately aims at identifying what relevant knowledge is available through a knowledge audit; identifying where it resides; creating an environment conducive for its sharing and capturing; and employing mechanisms and tools that codify and store it in a manner that it could be accessed in order to generate new knowledge. This researcher, in addition to the aforementioned definitions, sees KM as the application of management principles such as planning, organising, leading and controlling to the creation, generation, sharing, use and re-use of organisational tacit and explicit knowledge to achieve set goals and value-added productivity.

4.2 Knowledge Management System

A system usually consists of different but interrelated parts or components working together to achieve set objectives. There are numerous types of system: economic system; political system; information system; knowledge management system; to mention a few. Most systems are characterised by features like organisation, integration, interaction, interdependence and central objective.

Adoption of KM practices in any organisation comes with establishment of a system that supports the purpose of KM; particularly one that enables members of the organisation to access and share knowledge. This could be referred to as knowledge management system (KMS). Kumar and Gupta (2012) explained that KMS is for managing knowledge in organisations as a means of supporting creation, capture, storage and dissemination of information. The idea of a KMS is to enable employees to have easy access to the organisation's knowledge, such as documents based on facts, sources of information and solutions. Nonetheless, the KMS is not a one-way activity; rather it is a give-and-take process – that is, members of the organisation should be willing to share and receive knowledge from one another.

Organisations are established to achieve some set goals and objectives and the output of activities toward the attainment of these set goals could be increased or hindered by the availability of required knowledge (i.e. know-how) or lack of it. In a bid to set up KMS in organisations, some tools are usually required to enable the KM practice

flourish. These KM tools are the apparatus which enhance and accelerate knowledge creation, capturing, sharing and use among members of an organisation. The KM tools equally connect members of an organisation easily with their desired knowledge which could be domiciled in explicit sources or in others as tacit knowledge.

The idea of a KM system is to enable employees to have ready access to the organisation's knowledge-base by sharing knowledge in such a way that would lead to more effective outputs and new or improved ideas that would reflect in the quality of decision making of members. Alavi and Leidner (2001) emphasised that KMS is a system developed to support and enhance the organisational processes of knowledge creation, storage/retrieval, transfer and application. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that information technology (IT) does not reflect KMS in its wholeness; it is only one important aspect of a KMS which also relies on human skills for successful operations. More so, IT infrastructures merely organise what the knowledge or skills are and where in an organisation they may be found; thus, simply having IT infrastructures does not ensure success of KMS on its own.

Marshall and Rossett (2000) stated that KMS is basically composed of two complementary parts: technical and the other, social. The technical component seeks to capture, package, and distribute tangible and documented knowledge; while the social side enables collaboration, connection, and reflection among users of the system to willingly share, receive and use knowledge. KMS collects all relevant knowledge and experience in an organisation and makes it available whenever and wherever it is needed to support operational processes and enhance managerial decisions. According Kumar and Gupta (2012), the knowledge in a KMS could be referred to as the understanding that an individual has gained through education, experience, discovery, intuition and insight or a combination of instincts, ideas, rules and procedures that guide actions and decisions. It is an intangible asset that is unique and can be used to achieve strategic benefits or advantages. This is because knowledge has more competitive significance than physical assets in a multinational organisation that relies on unique competencies and methods. Also, unlike other physical assets of an organisation, knowledge is not subject to the law of diminishing returns as the physical assets, but increases in value as people share it.

Managing knowledge, especially tacit knowledge is a challenging task. Therefore, KMS is all about managing organisation's knowledge effectively by sharing and

having a systematic activity for creation of knowledge and exploiting it for the market and benefit of the organisation. It has become more imperative that organisations preserve, harness, adapt, and disperse indigenous knowledge assets through KMS. Mavodza and Ngulube (2012) noted that as societies and organisations are becoming more and more knowledge-based, the organisations that adapt to and appropriate the value of knowledge and utilise their knowledge assets would predictably be more successful than those that are not.

Since KM is the effective management of information system on one hand and people system on the other hand, what KMS does in any organisation is to provide collaborative capabilities, using a variety of tools to facilitate sharing of explicit and implicit knowledge among employees. KMS is also meant to change people's behaviour to make their experience and expertise available to others. This involves a process that helps organisations identify, select, organise, disseminate and transfer vital information and expertise existing in an unstructured manner but that are part of organisational memory.

The main objective of KMS is to identify knowledge and explicate it in a way that it can be shared in a formal manner, and thus enhancing its re-use. It helps in transferring the intellectual assets of the firm to value processes such as innovation and knowledge acquisition. It is meant to improve an organisation's ability to execute its core processes more efficiently by capturing intellectual assets for the tangible benefits of the organisation. Organisational databases, for example, serve as a storage model for managing explicit knowledge — operational data, documentation, and the like. However, it is limited as expertise knowledge is difficult to articulate for storage purposes. Therefore, Dhamdhare (2015) noted that a KMS provides techniques for externalising hidden knowledge in organisational experts' minds and preserving such knowledge for future reuse to facilitate problem-solving and decision-making processes. In most organisations, KMS helps in improving the way by which information, knowledge assets, and its application to problem-solving to support decision-making are gathered and shared.

Further, KMS does not only make the source of information and its documentation readily accessible in an organisation, but also provides a gateway to solutions and competencies. Laoufi et al. (2011) stated that KMS serves the purpose of making available the right information and knowledge to the right people in a timely manner

to ensure the right decisions are made. More so, effective decision-making is a function of whether the required knowledge is available or not, and in case of availability, how the knowledge is accessible and how it is applied. Likewise, Oladejo (2014) observed that ability to solve a problem is hinged on an individual or organisation's experience and utilisation of appropriate information in his/her environment. Thus, a person's problem-solving and decision-making capability is a function of his/her personal knowledge and experience. Hence, a KMS aids effective decision-making of individuals and or organisations.

For a KMS to be effective, Greenberg and Barone (2003) emphasised that people in an organisation must both *donate information* to the system and *receive information* from it. The tendency for employees to refrain from using the knowledge that is available to them results in poor performance, called the "knowing-doing gap". There are several reasons for not using KMS; the most dominant is the tendency for employees to be afraid of expressing their ideas or of seeking ideas from others. Likewise, the effectiveness of KMS and its efficiency for the operational activities of any organisation largely depends on some KM tools, which have been occasioned by ICT and other socio-cultural factors. Some of these KM tools required in organisations about to take-up KM practices are discussed below.

4.3 Knowledge Management Tools

The KM tools for organisations engaging in KM practices are apparatus which facilitate knowledge creation, processing and sharing among members. According to Uriarte (2008), in order to fully implement a KMS and derive the maximum benefits there is need to provide two elements: one, a technological infrastructure composed of computers, networks and databases; and two, software applications installed in distributed environments. These two elements are usually referred to as knowledge management tools. These tools are designed and built to enable easier and faster use of important functionalities, such as document management, collaborative online workshops, superior search engines and the like, which are vital for the management, safeguarding and harnessing of knowledge. The effective deployment of these tools within a KMS can improve collaboration and working environment, enhance competitive advantage and responsiveness, and increase overall productivity in the pursuit of achieving set organisational goals.

KM tools are used to create, organise and share the knowledge that can be found, most of the time, in a document, a project report, or a memo from one employee to another. There are a number of software applications that are able to create a web of repositories, search engines and virtual spaces where knowledge can be stored, retrieved and shared. Ideal Km tools should be characterised by features like mobility and flexibility which allow users to interact with the system from any place at any time. Likewise, such tools should be user-friendly and readily available, lest employees jettison their use.

Uriarte (2008), however, identified some of the typical tools that are used in KM solutions; which include: document management system; enterprise portal; knowledge map and skills management; information database and lessons learned system; collaboration tool; and communities of practice. Each of these KM tools is briefly discussed below.

4.3.1 Document Management

The most common repository of information and knowledge in organisations are documents; which are usually generated on daily basis for almost all (ongoing) operational activities. Proposals, contracts, fact-finding business or technical reports, memos, letters, adverts, receipts of transactions, etc., are examples of documents within an organisation; which can serve as bedrocks for knowledge management. Interestingly, the systematic management of documents when done with conscious intent saves an organisation considerable resources; financially and otherwise.

Meanwhile, document management is composed of four basic elements: it records discussions and emails and archives documents; second, it organises these electronic correspondences in a hierarchical or network framework; third, it provides search engines for the retrieval of the desired documents; and fourth, it enhances content security by allocating appropriate levels of access to each document. Also, this as a KM tool has two key functions: first, it provides content; and second, it facilitates content management and access. These two functions have significant positive impacts on the efficiency of the organisation.

4.3.2 Enterprise Portal

Enterprise portal is a valuable KM tool which brings together people, processes and the diverse knowledge contained within an organisation. This tool enhances

integration and presentation of knowledge such that employees and or even partners or customers of an organisation can access required knowledge from multiple sources to enhance decision making and problem solving. It often works like a web-based user interface which allows individuals to customise knowledge contribution and sharing; especially with colleagues and other professionals.

4.3.3 Knowledge Map and Skills Management

People have been identified as the most invaluable assets of any organisation. Despite the surging development of artificial intelligence, not all human activities can be roboticised. Therefore, adequate management of people's skills, experiences, interests and capabilities is critical to preservation of corporate memory and organisational survival. Knowledge map and skills management serves as a KM tool for the efficient localisation of expertise within an organisation; whereby living professionals provide informed advice and share expertise with colleagues which could be lost due to attrition, resignation, retirement or even death.

The skills management system is usually a web-based tool that allows employees to share and update their skills and interests. This makes it easier for others using the tool to locate people with particular skills which may be essential to their professional activities or growth. For example, in a university setting, stating the specific areas of interest and skills of all academics in a particular department will facilitate identification of potential supervisors by graduate applicants. This can also enhance collaboration for interdisciplinary research in institutions of higher learning as academics can easily identify colleagues whose areas of interest and or expertise align with theirs. And this has been a common practice in many developing countries. Sadly, Nigerian universities as organisations of learning are still lagging behind in this realm, save a few.

4.3.4 Information Database and Lessons Learned

The information database helps to capture the experiences gained by people working in an organisation; especially in those vital areas which improve productivity. Likewise, the Lessons Learned serves as a knowledge base which invariably constitutes the memory of the organisation. These KM tools facilitate the process of capturing and diffusing knowledge in any organisation; and seem very beneficial in

organisations where mistakes can be very costly and avoiding them in the future provides considerable savings. Importantly, these tools are exceptionally effective in organisations where best practices need to be repeated and disseminated as much as possible to maintain competitive advantage.

4.3.5 Collaboration Tool

The collaboration tool is usually online workspaces which can be likened to meeting room where individuals working together share ideas, knowledge and experiences about their operational activities. This KM tool incorporates the use of internet browsers and other software applications to create, share knowledge and simplify work procedures. This tool enhances individual's access to colleagues' tacit knowledge and could be used in sharing updates with partners of an organisation.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are usually a mix of individuals with complementary skills and expertise working on related or same activities. These are people working together as a team; and to whom communication is vital for achieving their individual and collective objectives. The communities of practice are useful tools for the practical actualization of KMS. However, even though members may be separated by physical and geographical locations; they are connected virtually to enable them share knowledge and exchange experiences.

5. Methodology

The descriptive research method was used for this study; therefore, a qualitative methodology was adopted. The researcher consulted and reviewed relevant literature published on the subject matter; mainly electronic books and journal articles. The electronic resources were mainly accessed and downloaded from JSTOR and ResearchGate. Using a conceptual approach, the researcher reviewed the content of the literature to elicit the development of knowledge management, knowledge management system and knowledge management tools.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

KM practices have become invaluable ingredients to organisational relevance, growth and productivity in the 21st century. This reality cannot be over-emphasised especially with the continuous emergence of technological innovations; which are products of skills and human knowledge in organisations. Importantly, the emergence of concepts like ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘knowledge society’ has made it imperative for organisations that want to matter creatively to embark on KM practices and adopt adequate KM systems. Knowledge as a factor of production has occasioned a paradigm shift away from natural factor endowments such as land, labour and other natural resources. Therefore, this study has established the meaning and importance of knowledge; how KM practices could catalyse organisational effectiveness and efficiency in Nigeria; and the necessary KM tools required for organisations to establish KM system in order to prevent loss of corporate memory which could be caused by attrition – resignation, retirement of professional personnel or death.

Further, every organisation should be in the know mind that KMS is characterised by two components: technology and socialisation. Even though technology is often emphasised and seen in some quarters as the soul of KMS, the socialisation component is very vital as it stimulates and catalyses the willingness of members working together to share, receive, use and re-use knowledge. This is tandem with the view of Keramati and Azadeh (2007) who believe that the main factors responsible for commitment to knowledge management success are knowledge sharing, knowledge creation and knowledge transfer. And this cannot be possible if human willingness to do so is lacking in any organisation.

Consequently, based on the glaring reality that knowledge has become an invaluable asset of this age, this study recommends that:

- There should be a formal establishment of knowledge management system (KMS) with necessary KM tools which will mandate KM practices; to enhance knowledge creation, sharing and use in organisations in Nigeria. This is possible when there is an organisational culture which adopts a formal KMS based on mutual understanding between members of the organisation. This makes members to see KM practice as organisational asset to get competitive advantage ahead of others in the same line of business operations. Therefore, when the overall organisational culture shifts to one of full KM practice, it will prevent loss of corporate memory and enhance productivity in the organisation.

- Staff of organisations should be more enlightened about the importance of KM practices to the efficiency and productivity of delivering services to users. Specifically, staff should be exposed to necessary KM tools that will facilitate knowledge sharing and its diffusion to all parts of the organisation.
- There should be an organisational culture of reward and motivation for knowledge workers in organisations in Nigeria; those whose KM practices contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation. This will go a long way to enjoin all members to embrace KM practices and in turn stimulate organisational growth towards meeting set goals and objectives.
- The bureaucratic postures of managers of organisations in Nigeria, especially government-owned organisations where hoarding knowledge is perceived as power should be revamped; and a democratic leadership should be adopted to enable members have the willingness to create, share, receive and use knowledge.
- Information professionals should raise awareness about the importance of KM practices in organisations in Nigeria through research, writings and other forums like seminars, workshops and conferences. Also, this study is limited to KM system and KM tools; therefore, further research should be conducted on the apt strategies for implementing KM practices in organisations in Nigeria using the identified and other KM tools.

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