Knowledge Management as an important tool in Library Management

Dr. R. Poonkothai

Librarian, Government Arts College, Trichy-22, Tamil Nadu
E-mail: koswami@gmail.com

Abstracts

This article approaches as Knowledge Management as an important tool which can help libraries to better adapt to the new requirements of the digital age and meet users needs. Academic Institutions have significant opportunities to apply Knowledge Management practices to support every part of their mission.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Organizational culture, Academic libraries, KM, KMS

Introduction

In recent years, the importance of KM has been widely recognized as the foundations of industrialized economies shifted from natural resources to intellectual assets. Since 1995 there has been an explosion in the literature surrounding the developing concept of KM. In library and information science, Ranganathan (2011) was the first to advocate that a universe of subjects is synonymous to a universe of knowledge and therefore proposed the concept of knowledge management in libraries. To prove their relevance and value, academic libraries must strive to provide the right amount of information to the right clientele at the right time with a right expense of financial and human resources. Academic Institutions have significant opportunities to apply knowledge management practices to support every part of their mission.

What is Knowledge and Its Types

• Information is visible, independent from action and decision, different in format after processing, physical product, independent from existing environment, easily transferable, and duplicable.
• Knowledge is invisible, closely related to action and decision, different in
thought after processing, spiritual product, identified with existing environment, transferable through learning, and not duplicable.

**Origin of Knowledge**
As early as 1965, Peter Drucker already pointed out that ‘knowledge’ would replace land, labour, capital, machines, etc. to become the chief source of production. His foresight did not get much attention back then. It was not until 1991 when Ikujiro Nonaka raised the concept of “tacit knowledge” and “explicit knowledge” as well as the theory of “spiral of Knowledge” in the Harvard Business Review that the time of “knowledge-based competition” finally came.

In the business world, two types of knowledge have been noted. They are **explicit knowledge** and **tacit knowledge**. Jan Duffy defines **explicit knowledge** as “knowledge that is documented and public; structured, fixed-content, externalized, and conscious” and **tacit knowledge** as “personal, undocumented knowledge; context-sensitive, dynamically-created and derived, internalized, and experience-based; often resides in the human mind, behavior, and perception.” This set of definitions can be applied to all other human endeavors and intellectual activities.

Researchers have now come to agree that knowledge management is more than mere storage and manipulation of information, but a process that requires the commitment to create and disseminate knowledge through the organization (Marshall, Prusak, & Shpilberg, 1996; Parikh, 2001).

In today’s movement towards knowledge management, organizations are trying to best leverage their knowledge internally in the organization and externally to their customers and stakeholders. They are trying to capitalize on their **organizational intelligence** to maintain their competitive edge. ”

**Concepts of knowledge management**
- To create **knowledge repositories**, which store both knowledge and information, often in documentary form.
- To improve **knowledge access and transfer**. Here the emphasis is on connectivity, access and transfer.
- To enhance the **knowledge environment** so that the environment is conducive to more effective knowledge creation, transfer and use. This involves tackling organizational norms and values as they relate to knowledge.
- To manage **knowledge as an asset** and to recognize the value of knowledge to an organization.

**Importance of Organizational Culture in Knowledge Management**
Knowledge is increasingly being viewed as a critical component for organizations. It is largely people based and the characteristics of groups of individuals, in the form of organizational cultures, may play a key role in the factors that lead to either the acceptance or rejection of Knowledge Management Systems (KMS).
Organizational culture is unique for every organization. It is extremely difficult to change and is directly related to the leadership style. Organizational culture is primarily exhibited by the manager or head of the organization or department. Roman, Ribiere, and Stankosky (2004) found that knowledge management projects implemented in a hierarchy culture had a lower rate of success than knowledge management projects implemented in clan, market, and adhocracy cultures. The researchers also found that organizations having stronger cultural values at the organizational and department levels had greater success with knowledge management efforts.

As knowledge is increasingly viewed as a critical activity for decision making (Markus, Majchrzak, & Gasser, 2002; Miranda & Saunders, 2003), organizations are becoming more receptive to using technologies to facilitate knowledge management (Schultze & Leidner, 2002). While it is widely recognized that information technologies have the potential to facilitate knowledge management, the management of knowledge-based systems is an intricate process that involves a complex interplay of technical and social factors.

Knowledge, which is information that exists in the minds of individuals, is inextricably linked to knowledge management systems. The emphasis on this human component may not be as prominent in other information systems, and suggests that we incorporate constructs, such as organizational culture, to match the nature of this technology.

Knowledge Management & Academic libraries

Knowledge Management is a process aimed at creating, identifying, sharing and using knowledge at the level of an organization. Knowledge management in Academic Institutions can be applied in five key areas such as research, curriculum development, alumni services administrative services and strategic planning (Kidwell et al. 2000).

According to Townley (2001), librarians have developed and applied many KM principles in the provision of library services. Reference, cataloging, and other library services are designed to encourage the use of scholarly information and thus increase the amount of academic knowledge used in higher education.

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.

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 (Wen, 2005; Thanuskodi, 2010). This is especially true of countries
like India with a rapidly developing economy. Knowledge Management is a viable means in which academic libraries could improve their services in the knowledge economy.

**Knowledge Management Tools For Academic Libraries**

The continuing education through professional training courses or workshops plays a significant role in the implementation of knowledge management in all contemporary organizations (Sanchez, 2001). Libraries are no exception, especially as in their case the pace and the volume of changes which they have to deal with is doubled by the complexity which satisfying the information needs and requests of users through up to date products and services (Octavia-Luciana Porumbeau 2010). A community of practice was defined by Stewart (1997) as a ‘group of professionals within a corporation who are informally bound to one another through their exposure to a common class of problems and common pursuit of solutions. Members within the community of practice freely exchange knowledge which creates an even greater resource base of knowledge. Information Technology (IT) serves as a powerful enabler and provides effective and efficient tools for all facets of knowledge management including capturing, sharing, and applying knowledge (Gandhi, 2004). New technologies have dramatically transformed the library world too. It can also support knowledge sharing by facilitating people to locate as well as communicate each other (Roknuzzaman et al. 2009).

Knowledge Management in an academic library therefore is to ensure an all-round improvement of library staff’s capacity; promotion of relationships between libraries and library users; it promotes knowledge innovation, strengthening knowledge inter-networking and quickens knowledge flow. Other objectives are highlighted below.

**Implementations of Knowledge Management in Academic Libraries**

A knowledge management initiative in libraries becomes imperative in order to harness the wealth, wisdom, expertise, and experiences embedded in the heads of such employees before they leave the library. This can be achieved through brainstorming, open discussions, and provision of fertile ground for creativity, sharing of ideas, organizing workshops, conferences, mentoring, web archiving, digitization, and identification and collectively addressing problems and finding solution. Therefore there are a number of approaches that academic librarians should follow and harvest the tacit and explicit knowledge of workers to the full advantage of the library. These include acquisition of modern tools, updating skills and standardization, knowledge creation, knowledge capturing, knowledge sharing, and skills in ICT.

**Conclusion**

Library professionals believe that professional education and training programs,
community of practices, information technology and knowledge sharing are the important tools of knowledge management for academic libraries. 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. Libraries, with limited budget and human resources, should utilize the current management structure and technology to implement Knowledge Management, either bottom-up or top-down. With a concerted effort, Knowledge Management will help to increase libraries’ operational efficiency and cater to the ever-increasing needs of our clientele.

As knowledge workers, they must extend their expertise beyond collection management to knowledge acquisition and management. They have to extend their expertise in selecting, organizing, and preserving information. They must be willing to move outside the walls of the traditional library and work assiduously with technologists, faculty, and students. This means that librarians are no longer merely custodians of information; rather, they will act as knowledge managers who will work with users in collecting and analyzing strategic intelligence, act as trainers and consultants to transfer knowledge throughout the organization. It is therefore essential for management in organizations to look for means to gain, maintain, and leverage knowledge to achieve a lead to higher levels of success for organizations.

References

8. Lee, Hwa-Wei, Knowledge Management and the Role of Libraries hlee@lc.govhttp://www. white-clouds. com/icle/cliej/cl19lee. htm (accessed 14. 03. 16)