Knowledge management and the role of Librarians and Libraries in the digital age in the perspective of Bangladesh.

Sk. Mamun Mostofa

Lecturer and Head, Department of Library and Information Science
*Darul Ihsan University, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-*1205

Abstract

The growth of knowledge management in recent years has become the key concern for librarians and libraries. This paper will appraise the growth of knowledge management and will compare the differences between information and knowledge as well as between information management and knowledge management. It will also inspect the role of librarians and libraries in knowledge management and suggests that librarians in the digital and knowledge age should be in charge of knowledge management in their respective organizations in order to influence the intellectual assets and to ease knowledge creation.

1. Introduction

The concept of "Knowledge Management" was started in the business world during the last decade of the 20th century. It was the business world that first recognizes the importance of knowledge in the "global economy" of the "knowledge age". In the new knowledge economy, the possession of relevant and strategic knowledge and its unceasing renewal enables businesses to gain competitive advantage. The applications of knowledge management have now spread to other organizations including government agencies, research and development departments, universities, and others. With the growing interest in knowledge management, many questions have been raised in the minds of librarians regarding: the difference between information and knowledge; between information management and knowledge management; who should be in charge of information and knowledge management; would librarians and information professionals with appropriate education and training in library and information science be most suitable for the position of "Chief Knowledge Officer" (CKO) in their organizations and what libraries can do in implementing knowledge management. This paper attempts to answer these critical questions from the librarians' perspective.

1.1 Is there a difference between information and knowledge?

Daniel Bell defines knowledge as "a set of organized statements of facts or ideas, presenting a reasoned judgment or an experimental result, which is transmitted to others through some communication medium in some systematic form." As for information, Marc Porat states, "Information is data that has been organized and communicated." Stephen Abram sees the process for knowledge creation and use as a continuum where data transforms into information, information transforms into knowledge and knowledge drives and underpins behavior and decision-making. Below are simple definitions of Data, Information, Knowledge, and Wisdom all of them are available within every organization: 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.

2. The rise of knowledge management

As early as 1965, Peter Drucker already pointed out that "knowledge" would replace land, labor, 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. The thrust of knowledge management is to create a process of valuing the organization's intangible assets in order to best leverage knowledge internally and externally. Knowledge management, therefore, deals with creating, securing, capturing, coordinating, combining, retrieving, and distributing knowledge. The idea is to create a knowledge sharing environment whereby sharing knowledge is power as opposed to the old adage that, simply, knowledge is power."

3. Definitions of knowledge management

Because knowledge management is still a relatively new concept and viewed differently by different writers from different focuses, its definitions vary. In her article, "What is knowledge management?" Jennifer Rowley offers her definition below: "Knowledge management is concerned with the exploitation and development of the knowledge assets of an organization with a view to furthering the organization's objectives. The knowledge to be managed includes both explicit, documented knowledge, and tacit, subjective knowledge. Management entails all of those processes associated with the identification, sharing and creation of knowledge. This requires systems for the creation and maintenance of knowledge repositories, and to cultivate and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and organizational learning. Organizations that succeed in knowledge management are likely to view knowledge as an asset and to develop organizational norms and values, which support the creation and sharing of knowledge."

4. Knowledge management in libraries

As a learning organization, libraries should provide a strong leadership in knowledge management. Below are examples of what libraries can do to improve their knowledge management in all of the key areas of library services.

4.1 Knowledge resources management

Because of the exponential growth in human knowledge in a variety of formats, libraries need to develop their resources access and sharing strategies from printed to electronic and digital resources in concert with their mission and charges. Restricted by limited funding, technology, staff, and space, libraries must carefully analyze the needs of their users and seek to develop cooperative acquisition plans to meet these needs. The changing concept from "ownership" to "access" and from "just in case" to "just in time" should be the goal of a sound resources development strategy. Going beyond explicit knowledge, libraries should also develop means to capture all that tacit knowledge that is of importance to their users, their organizations, and to the internal operation of libraries.

4.2 Resources sharing and networking

Libraries have had a long tradition of resources sharing and networking. These have been greatly expanded by the rapid development of computer, telecommunication, networking, and digital technologies since the 1960s. In the U.S. it is very common for libraries to be a member of several consortia at the same time for various types of cooperative work and resources sharing. The best examples of these are the OCLC Online Computer Library Center and Ohio LINK (Ohio Library and Information Network). The successes of most of these examples in resources sharing and networking are largely the result of the full cooperation and participation of all member libraries without selfishness. Large and major libraries must take the lead in such an endeavor.

4.3 Information technology development

To facilitate the implementation of knowledge management, a well-designed and operational knowledge management system should be in place. Latest information technology should be used as an enabler. In this regard, the library director should consider him/her self as the chief knowledge officer of the entire organization and should work together with the CIO, heads of the planning department, the computer and information technology center, the human resources management department, the finance department, etc. to design and develop such a system. Such a knowledge management system should be built on existing computer and information technology infrastructures, including upgraded intranet, extranet, and Internet, and available software programs to facilitate the capture, analysis, organization, storage, and sharing of internal and external information resources for effective knowledge exchange among users, resource persons , publishers, government agencies, businesses and industries, and other organizations via multiple channels and layers.

4.4 User Services

The utmost goal of knowledge management is to provide users with a variety of quality services in order to improve the communication, use and creation of knowledge. As much as possible these services should be tailored to the interest and needs of each user. Information about each user can be obtained by analyzing the records of user registration, surveys, circulation and interlibrary loans, frequently asked reference questions, and the use of e-journal and digital resources, etc. User satisfaction and needs should be collected through periodic users' surveys. The findings should be used for the planning and re-design of library services. It is very important, however, that user's privacy should always be protected.

4.5 Human resources management

A great amount of expert knowledge is possessed by library staff and users, both in and outside the libraries. In university and research communities such expertise is abundant and should be inventoried, indexed, and updated regularly and be made searchable and accessible through electronic databases created and maintained by libraries. The knowledge and accumulated experiences of library staff members form the intellectual assets of any library and should be valued and shared. An organizational culture for sharing

of knowledge and expertise should be established with appropriate rewards and incentives. Those staff members who share their tacit knowledge and experiences through writing, publishing, lecturing, tutoring, or mentoring should be appropriately recognized and rewarded. An organizational culture which emphasizes cooperation, sharing, and innovation can only be established by strong leadership and commitment from the library director and a shared vision by the library staff.

5. Conclusion

In the business world, knowledge management has been regarded as strategically important for organizations to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors, to add value to their products, and to win greater satisfaction from their customers. In the library world, there is a lesson to be learned from the business world. Knowledge management is as important for libraries as for the businesses minus the competitive, proprietary, and moneymaking concerns. In fact, libraries have had a long and rich experience in the management of information. Many of such knowledge and skills of librarianship can be applied to knowledge management. For any library to succeed in implementing knowledge management will require a strong leadership and vision from the top administration, which can influence the organization's knowledge sharing efforts in a positive way. As libraries enter the knowledge age of the 21st century, we should not take a back seat in the development of knowledge management. Instead, armed with our professional knowledge and experiences, we should be in the driver's seat. Information technology and systems can provide effective support in implementing knowledge management. Librarians should work together with IT professionals and others to develop the appropriate knowledge management systems. It is now time for libraries to reposition themselves in the central stage of and as a leading player in knowledge management.

6. References

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