

Knowledge Management and its Applications for Developing a Learning Institution: Views from Selected Technical Universities in Ghana

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Abstract - The qualitative paradigm approach was adopted to assess knowledge management and its application for developing a learning institution focusing on the views of selected Technical University Libraries in Ghana. The study used interviews and observations to collect data. About 12 respondents were targeted, however, 10 were interviewed. Information gathered covered issues of level of awareness, skills and ability and challenges of knowledge management activities among the librarians. The study underscored that the librarians are aware of knowledge selection, organizing, sharing, capturing and ICT skills but the challenge is that of organizational mission, vision as well as inadequate budgetary allocation.

Keywords - *Information Management, Technical University Libraries, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Capturing, Challenges of Knowledge Management.*

1. Introduction

The knowledge management (KM) basically means a systematic coordination of people, technologies, processes and organizational structure in order to add value to the organization's already set goals. This is evidence through the reuse of the already knowledge and innovation of the existing human resource. This harmonization is achieved by way of the creation, sharing and application of knowledge as provided in (DALIKIR, 2005).

Budd (1998) empathized that, universally; academic libraries face extraordinary challenges in the 21st century. Academic libraries are service oriented in nature and therefore are subject to the same sort of influences that many service organizations must deal with. This is supported by Mahmood (2003) who posited that, the

changing setting of academic life stresses new capabilities in academic librarians especially the skills and ability of knowledge capturing, sharing, and dissemination among others.

Maponya (2004) posited that, the basic goal of KM within libraries is to pull the available knowledge that may help academic librarians to carry out their tasks more efficiently and effectively. KM in totality is also aimed at extending the role of librarians and information workers to manage all types of information and tacit knowledge for the benefit of the library. KM can assist alter the academic library into a more efficient, information sharing service organization.

2. Statement of Problem

It is obvious that the setting in which the academic library is operating is changing. This is visibly in terms of challenges and opportunities. As a result the academic libraries need to respond to these challenges in order to better serve the needs of the entire academic community. One way of doing that is embracing in KM activities, that is, creating, capturing, sharing and utilizing knowledge to achieve the library goals. However it seems much is not done in this perspective of the information professional's work (Maponya, 2004).

Adopting KM is a viable means in which academic libraries could improve their services and become more receptive to the requirements of users in the academic atmosphere. It is therefore paramount for the academic libraries to distinguish the knowledge, its staff and create a setting in which their expertise can be appreciated and

pooled. The study investigates the knowledge management and its application for developing learning environment. should be rare.

3. Objectives of Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the KM and its applications for developing a learning institution. The study is pivoted on selected Technical University Libraries (TULs) in Ghana. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the awareness level of KM among librarians in TULs
- To assess the skills of KM applications in TULs
- To identify the challenges of KM applications in TULs

4. Research Questions

The research was guided by finding answers to the stipulated research questions below:

What is the level of awareness of KM among librarians in TULs?

What are the skills of KM applications in TULs?

What are the challenges of KM applications in TULs?

5. Literature Review

Foo et al (2002) intimated that the evolution of KM economy has resulted in a climate of change for the academic library. Maponya (2004) also concluded that the evolving information knowledge has impacted all organizations, including academic libraries. Though the usual function of the library is to collect, process, disseminate, store and utilize information to provide services to the university community, it is urgent that the library staff finds means of packaging the information in a suitable way. According to Yacob and Jamaluddin (2010) libraries should be enthusiastic to fully realize that information needs of the users, within the knowledge – economy by accurate and applicable bibliographic and physical access and offer referral to the host of information.

Moraes de Bem and Coelho (2003) were of the view that there have been numerous barriers in the implementation of KM in libraries. The common visible means in libraries are used of blogs, wiki tools, shared classification systems,

social networks, and soon. Raga et al (2009) explores how information technology and related automatic systems can support libraries endeavor towards better execution in KM. The study concluded that adequate budgetary support, professional training and proactive position are key factors for an effective knowledge management strategy.

Ali and Khan (2015) on the perception of KM among L/S professionals: a survey of central universities in North India intimated that KM skills should be imparted among L/S professionals so that they can stretch their understanding, change their lives schemas, among others. Sarrefzadeh (2005) posited that KM is now extensively familiar as a key factor in organizational success and as such is of relevance to libraries. KM is relevant to and has considerable relevance with library and information professionals.

Kim (1999) pointed out that, KM practices aim to draw out the tacit knowledge people have, what they carry around with them, what they observe and learn from experience, rather than what is usually explicitly stated. It is important for academic libraries to determine and manage their knowledge assets to avoid duplication of efforts. KM process involves the creation, capturing, sharing and utilization of knowledge. Knowledge in the context of academic libraries can be fashioned through understanding the user needs and requirements as well as considerate the university's curricula.

Tang (1998) posited that from the library's perspective, knowledge creation implies participating more in user's reading and studying by identifying information needs. In order to succeed, academic library services must link with the university's academic programme or curricula. Academic librarians can become part of the knowledge creation process through participating in the teaching and research activities of the university.

Knowledge creation in this context should involve all the management effort through which the academic library consciously strives to acquire competencies that it does not have both internally and externally. Capturing and acquiring knowledge is crucial to the success and development of a knowledge-based organization. Organizations often suffer permanent loss of valuable experts through dismissals, redundancies, retirement and death (Probst, Raub & Romhardt 2000).

The motive for this is that, much knowledge is stored in the heads of the people and it is often lost if not captured elsewhere. The definite way to avoid communal loss of

organizational memory is to identify the expertise and the skills of staff and capture it. Academic libraries need to develop ways of capturing its internal knowledge, devise systems to identify people's expertise and develop ways of sharing it. Formal processes of capturing knowledge can include collating internal profiles of academic librarians and also standardizing routine information-update reports.

Huseman and Goodman (1999) pointed out that there are times when a society does not possess certain knowledge inside and does not have the skills to find it. As a result, academic libraries find themselves unable to progress the know-how that they need. Extra knowledge must therefore be acquired somehow if it is felt it will be useful to the goals of the academic library. The academic library as an organization may want to look outside its own boundaries to outsource or acquire new knowledge. From the point of view of KM, outsourcing may be described as replacing external know-how for internal know-how (Probst, Raub & Romhardt, 2000).

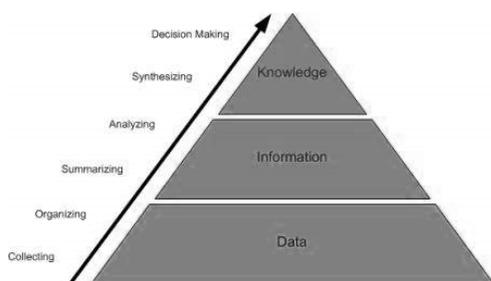


Figure 1 Pyramid Representation of Knowledge Management

The study employed qualitative research design utilizing selected Technical University Libraries (TUL) in Ghana as the pivot of the study. The TULs were Ho, Koforidua, Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast and Takoradi all in Ghana. The researchers used them because no study of this kind has been done with regard to KM. Participants were selected from units such as Acquisitions, Cataloguing, Circulation, and ICT as well as Reader Services. The mailing list served as a sample frame in this regard. Interviews and observations were used to collect the required information and data.

About 12 respondents were targeted, however, 10 were interviewed. For in-depth information about the current KM in the selected Technical University Libraries (TULs) in Ghana, the researchers adopted the interview approach.

The Head Librarians and Senior Members in the respective units mentioned earlier were interviewed because of their critical role in the management of their libraries. The interview lasted for about 20-30 minutes. The researchers also observed certain KM activities for additional information. The information obtained from the interview was analyzed qualitatively through the principle of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA).

6. Discussion of Findings

6.1 Awareness of Knowledge Management among Librarians

When the librarians were asked on the awareness of KM, it came to light that most of them are very much aware of the term KM. It was further proved to ascertain the level of their awareness of the term KM; the librarians were of the view that though they are aware of the term KM their level of awareness is not that much. This attested to the view of authors like Foo et al (2002), Maponya (2004), Yacob and Jamaludin (2010) who posited that unless the skills and knowledge of KM highly developed among librarians, they cannot apply to fully in their work.

6.2 Skills of Knowledge Management among Librarians

To ascertain the skills of librarians about KM, the librarians agreed that KM strategies are essential skills that modern librarians should know and comfortable in applying them in their quest to disseminate knowledge in the library, during the interview it came to light that, the essential strategies that librarians should pose on KM are knowledge sharing, knowledge capturing and Skills in ICT. They further added that, for librarians to work effectively and efficiently when it comes to KM are acquisition of modern tools that is knowledge management tools, having skills and training in ICT, adoption of universal procedures and standardization as well as expert skills of knowledge creation. This revelation is not much different from the findings of other authors like Ali and Khan(2015), Raga et al(2009) and Mahmood (2003) acknowledge that having skills in the application of KM activities is crucial among librarians.

6.3 Challenges of Knowledge Management Applications in Libraries

When the librarians were contacted, they all agreed that the application of knowledge management in libraries is not done without challenges. They were quick to add that, numerous challenges are associated with the application

of KM. When they were questioned on the various challenges, it was confirmed that, organizational challenges, for example: lack of management commitment, lack of alignment with organizational goals, for example: different strategic plan for both parent organization and libraries.

Besides, inadequate budgets in libraries, for example: inadequate budgetary allocation on the parent organization's budget estimates. Moreso, low interest of librarians in KM, for instance, librarians is only interested in the traditional functions of the library and not KM activities. Furthermore, technological challenges, for example: lack of state of the art information technology centers as well as specific content, for example: the actual content to create, share or disseminate were listed as the challenges. These are not contrasting what other researchers like Ali and Khan (2015) and Mahmood (2003) had echoed that the application of KM activity is always associated with a lot of challenges.

Table 1: Survey Table of Study

| Objectives | Research Questions | Outcome of Study |
|--|--|---|
| Awareness level of KM among TULs Librarians in Ghana | What is the awareness level of Librarians in TULs in Ghana | Librarians Awareness level is not appreciable |
| Assessing the skills of KM applications in TULs in Ghana | What are the skills of TULs in Applications in Ghana | Librarians have the skills in the applications of KM but not totally utilized |
| Challenges of applying KM in TULs in Ghana | What are the challenges of applying KM in TULs IN Ghana | Librarians face numerous challenges in applying KM in TULs |

Source: Survey Results, 2016

7. Conclusion

The study was on the assessment of KM and its applications for developing a learning institution in Ghana focusing on selected Technical Universities in Ghana. The study revealed that librarians to be able to apply the concept of KM need to have skills of the routine procedures in KM application. The research also draws the attention that though the librarians are aware of the term and concept of KM, they lack the required skills and knowledge that could assist them in applying in developing a learning institution like a Technical University. Besides, the findings ascertain that there are a

lot of challenges that are impeding KM application which needs urgent attention.

Recommendations

The study recommends among others base on the findings that the allocation of library budgets should be increased; magement should also show full interest by organizing training programmes and workshops for librarians on KM activity. Besides, there should also be collaboration among librarians especially those with experience to share knowledge on KM application. In addition, the parent institution should also try to provide all the needed tools and equipment to assist the librarians in the process of KM applications.

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