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ROLES AND COMPETENCE OF LIBRARIANS IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN AN ORGANISATION

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Abstract

In the global world today, knowledge management practices are recognised as a key function performed in libraries taking into consideration activities such knowledge creation, acquisition, identification, organisation, sharing/transfer, auditing, mapping, preservation repacking among others. These practices were equally applied in organisation where productivity is the key goal and the objectives of the organisation. This article reviews the concepts of knowledge management (KM) from business and library world perspectives. The paper equally explained competence of librarians while identifying the requirements for professional competences needed for KM activities in the organisation. Types of training and qualifications required by a librarian to become knowledge manager were discussed. The librarian played vital role in discharging duties as the manager of the library in any organisation. This paper identified some of the roles of a librarian in knowledge management. Some challenges in knowledge management practices were identified if address will facilitate knowledge management processes in the libraries. The paper concluded that librarians have numerous roles to play in knowledge| management activities because knowledge gathered both from internal and external environment is the lifeblood of the organisation and it is essential for innovation, continuing learning, knowledge sharing, collaboration and for positive change. Possible solutions were provided which if apply will facilitates knowledge management practices in any organisation, improves librarians' participation in service delivery, and address some of the challenges in knowledge management practices as identified.

Keyword: Knowledge management, Competence, Librarians

Introduction

Knowledge management is the process by which an organisation, library or any institution, acquires, gathers, organises, shares and analyzes its knowledge in a way that is easily accessible to employees. Alsalim and Mohammed (2013) referred knowledge management (MK) as the ability to capture available knowledge and harness it to benefit the operation of certain activity or the functioning of a particular society or group. KM is how businesses gather, organise, update, and share information with customers, employees, and business partners. It's also the technology that makes it possible to store, access, and update information. It is the conscious process of defining, structuring, retaining, and sharing the knowledge and experience of employees within an organisation (Andreev, 2024).

Organisations are engaging in KM for several key reasons. These reasons include increasing innovation and creativity; better leveraging knowledge internally and externally for improved worker productivity and customer relations; capturing and preserving knowledge for building the institutional memory of the organisation; and improving efficiency and effectiveness of decision making (Jane, 2007). If an organisation is to be a high-performance organisation, knowledge management plays a critical role in transforming it into a well-oiled, thriving business (Davenport, 2005).

According to Fakandu and Abdullahi (2022), KM's key technologies enable content and workflow management which categorise knowledge and direct it to workers who can benefit from it; search functionality, to let users look for relevant knowledge; and collaboration, to help workers share knowledge. Using "intelligent" agents, knowledge management systems should be able to push relevant lessons learned to appropriate individuals in the library who can best benefit from them in order to build the organisational intelligence of the firm. Data and text mining can also be used to develop user profiles to push relevant information and knowledge from repositories to employees and customers.

As the primary leader of the KM team, the knowledge manager who is the librarian is primarily responsible for managing the organisation's knowledge assets. Depending on the depth and breadth of a particular organisation, this team member may be part of a small, focused group, within the IT department of a relatively small company, or, in a large corporation, the KM may wear one of many hats common to more lateral organisations. Knowledge manager as a job title represents an evolution and blending of library management and data management in the current high-tech world (Gichuhi, 2014). Knowledge managers are sometimes also called digital librarians. These professionals often have computer science degrees or library science degrees with computer science coursework. Knowledge managers introduce and oversee systems that promote process improvement, information gathering and decision-making. Librarians should have technical and organisational skills and experience working with databases and data-management tools.

Competencies support effective performance in work. Competence refers to the capacity to manage and operate the elements of one's surroundings or the tools that professionals need to carry out their work. Competency is the tools needed to complete a task successfully. To

successfully deliver library services to their users, LIS professionals must exhibit certain fundamental behaviours and abilities. The core competences are a collection of criteria and guidelines used by LIS professionals to create strategic plans and goals for future library development. The two important pillars of any individual professional who improves and makes life easier are the 21st- century competencies and skills. Building the professional staffs' competence is made possible by libraries and other nonprofit organisations (Pandey & Prasad, 2023).

As librarians and keepers of companies' intellectual property, these knowledge managers must have data required to transact business. Strong verbal and written communication skills are a must, as is the co-workers is critical to understanding their needs when it comes to types of information required to improve assets. The acquisition of skills relevant to knowledge management is needed by knowledge managers to continue to make improvements in the performance of their institutions and the stocks of human capital. Increasing knowledge resources (like skills) is a strategy for the development of educational institutions in the future, especially lecturers, which provide room for innovation and growth through knowledge management (Wibowo, *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, librarians define, create and manage an information repository in the need to perform daily tasks and to make decisions. Like a traditional librarian, the knowledge manager in the organisation will catalogue this information for ease of retrieval. It is important for the librarian to recognise access-control requirements for specific data categories, ranging from highly confidential to publicly accessible. Librarian also works with information technology colleagues to address and implement these requirements appropriately (Davenport, 2005).

Concepts of Knowledge Management

Cyprian (2016) defined KM as the processes of acquiring and sharing intellectual assets. This intellectual asset is the driving force that gives company a competitive advantage with its targeted clients. It improves the generation of useful information and increases the individual and team learning. Successful businesses are collection of distinctive knowledge bases and not the products. According to Hajric (2018), knowledge management is the efficient management of an organisation's knowledge assets to create value and satisfy tactical and strategic needs. It includes the initiatives, strategies, processes, and systems that facilitate and improve the gathering, evaluating, sharing, improving, and creation of knowledge. It is about providing the appropriate knowledge or resources (including people) to the appropriate individuals at the appropriate moment.

Similarly, Lwoga (2011) maintained that KM involves the ability of any communities or group within an organisation to identify and acquire knowledge that is vital to them. This means community should continue to make available knowledge in the most effective manner to people who need it. In support of this, Connell and Voola (2013) stressed that the possession of relevant strategic knowledge and its unceasing renewal in a community enables businesses to gain competitive advantage in the new knowledge economy.

Bharadwaj, Chauhan and Raman (2015) Knowledge Management consists of processes which assist organisations to systematically identify, choose, organise, distribute and share vital

information and skills. The application of knowledge management based on intellectual capital will enable individuals and organisation to create value from intellectual and knowledge-based assets.

Knowledge management skills are required in universities as institutions for knowledge generation and dissemination, and the extent these skills are applied determine the effectiveness of their administrations in achieving their missions. The essence of knowledge management is to create new knowledge and timely apply such to maintain strategic and competitive advantage. Organisations, whether education or business, that succeed in knowledge management are those that view knowledge as an asset and most important resource for developing organisational norms and value, which support the creation and sharing of knowledge (Rowley, 2007). The value of knowledge management in universities relates directly to the effectiveness with which it enables staff and students to deal with the issues and situations of today with a view to effectively envisioning and creating their future.

Benefits of Knowledge Management in an Organisation

Effective knowledge management facilitates quick access to best practices, project information, and key data. It enhances performance and decision-making, leading to improved efficiency and employee satisfaction. Here are some of the benefits of knowledge management:

1. It encourages a culture of collaboration, allowing employees to share expertise and ideas, and work towards common goals.
2. Access to organised knowledge and information helps employees work more efficiently, avoiding duplication of effort and making better-informed decisions.
3. Employees feel empowered and engaged in their work and experience a sense of fulfilment leading to employee retention.
4. It enables faster problem-solving and the generation of innovative ideas, leading to improved solutions and competitive advantage.
5. Having access to accurate and up-to-date knowledge supports informed decision-making at all levels of the organisation.
6. It promotes a learning culture within the organisation, fostering continuous learning and professional development.
7. It ensures that valuable information isn't lost when employees leave or retire, preserving critical knowledge for future use.
8. It effectively streamlines processes, leading to cost savings and reduced errors.

Training and Qualifications for Librarians

Librarians are people-oriented, organised and knowledgeable professionals who promote learning within their communities. They typically complete advanced education and training and earn relevant certifications before entering the field, as their job involves specialised duties. A person can pursue a career as a librarian by earning a first degree, Master of Library and Information Science (MLS), Ph.D. and obtaining professional certifications. Librarians often possess skills related to communication, computer literacy and problem solving, and will pursue professional development throughout their careers. A librarian needs a specific skill set and education to secure employment. The qualification and training needed include:

Decide which type of librarian you want to be: With a variety of librarian specialties available, it can be key to decide what type of librarian you want to become before starting your education. For example, academic librarian, public librarian, school librarian among others.

Complete a Bachelor degree: Once you decide on area of specialization, start completing a bachelor's degree. Since most librarians need master's degrees, having a bachelor's degree first can help you prepare for graduate school and increase your chances of securing admission to a great programme.

Pursue a Master degree: In most cases, librarians need to have a MLS degree before securing a job at a library. Once you have an undergraduate degree, pursue an MLS degree from an institution accredited by professional body. Many MLS programmes vary in specific focus, so check which programme aligns with your career goals. For example, a programme focusing on youth services may be best for those who want to be school librarians or public librarians who work in children's programmeming.

Pursue a Ph.D. degree: Once you have a Master degree, pursue the PhD degree from an institution accredited by professional body. This would add to the qualifications and become more professional.

Gain experience: It can be beneficial to pursue relevant professional experiences while you study to practice vital skills and learn to do common tasks. Working in a library also provides an opportunity to network with others in the field, which can help you find professional development opportunities or a job in the future. Be enthusiastic, ask questions and keep in contact with your network after finishing your MLS.

Pursue professional certifications: Many nationalities have their own requirements for certification and licensure. Librarians should review his own nationality requirements to determine what additional steps needed to take. Example, Certified public Library Administrator sponsored by the American Library Association (ALA), this certification is best for librarians with at least three years of supervisory experience who want to advance their leadership skills.

Competence of Librarians in Knowledge Management

The competencies assume a basic infrastructure of competencies required by all professionals, such as skills related to communication, reading, writing, and mathematics. Behavioral guidelines on approachability, interest, listening/inquiring, searching, and follow-up are incorporated throughout. Competence in fulfilling the duties of a librarian in knowledge management requires several skill sets. Interpersonal and communications skills help librarians understand what patrons need. Computer skills are essential because library management and cataloguing are becoming increasingly demanding. This is more so as library and information services in the developed countries are mostly electronically driven. To be a competent librarian, the librarians use problem-solving skills to find solutions to patrons' questions. Reading-cum-comprehension skill is a must as well, because the job requires reading to track down information. To handle change, librarians must be adaptable and able to apply knowledge to new practices. Employers seek confident individuals with excellent organisational and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, Bhaki (2008) and Nnandozie (2015) made a detailed list of

other skills required from librarians to be competent in knowledge management practices. These skills are summarized as follows:

Listening skills: The librarian must have good listening skills as he/she must interact with different types of users all the time. By carefully listening to users, the librarian can identify the exact requirement and then provide the matching service accordingly.

Communications skills: Command of the language especially English and regional one will improve the communication. Good communication skills also require understanding people, self-confidence. With this, the librarian can achieve lot and solve problems too.

Interpersonal skills: Librarians must deal with all levels of people like management, users, colleagues, vendors, etc. To deal with each of them in rightful manner requires interpersonal skills. When a person works in large organisations, it is most important to build rapport with all departments, which helps in managing the library and providing better services to everyone.

Public relations: Librarians need to use public relations very effectively to attract users in any organisation through various ways. It also helps to bond with users and vendors too. Besides, public relations harness the librarians' ability to work with other professionals.

Customer service: Customer is the user and to satisfy his information needs is customer service. The librarians are always giving attention to their users and providing services through current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI) or other specialized services. Customer service emphasizes the customer satisfaction, which guarantees that user will always come back to the organisation.

Leadership skills and Teamwork: Librarian should be able to have collaboration connection and skills. Hence it is required to have leadership skills to manage and guide the team from time to time, as every subordinate is important for carrying out their work efficiently for smooth running of the organisation.

Negotiating skills: These skills are required on special occasions such as handling bulk purchases, specialized databases subscription with vendors, etc. negotiation skills are also required in delicate situations like library committee meetings or avoiding undue demands from arrogant users etc.

Writing skills: The librarians are sometimes asked to submit written research proposals, business proposals and project reports. This requires good writing skills. Today there are many library professionals who are contributing to various publications even in-house or even by blogging for sharing their experiences and helping users.

Project management skills: Librarians in the corporate sector many are part of some project team and assigned specialized jobs such as knowledge management or digital institutional repository. These require dedication, understanding of the project, time management for completion of work, teamwork and reporting back the results etc.

Presentation skills: The presentation skills are required in report writing, library committee meetings and even in daily work, which represents the library management overall for users. It not only emphasizes individual skills but also from library department or unit presentation.

Teaching skills: This is essential for new user orientations or in case new services are introduced such as online database searching. It also includes motivating reading habits among employees, who are the users (Kakada, & Shafi, 2023).

Role of Librarians in Knowledge Management

Librarianship' has now taken on many different names due to various roles played in information and knowledge management. Library determines the nature of duties or assignments discharged by librarians in knowledge management. For instance, there is difference in role based on type of libraries and the duties of librarians. Librarians are responsible for acquiring, organising, managing and distributing library resources within an institution of learning. This category of information professionals ensures that library resources and services provided meet the needs of all its users. Academic librarianship is a people-focused role, requiring individuals to manage learning resources while keeping the library users' needs in mind (Rao, 2018). Duties vary considerably according to the size of library, but typically include:

a. Acquiring, selecting, developing, cataloguing and classifying library resources
b. Developing and promoting the library's resources to users
c. Providing reference services
d. Managing budgets and resources
e. Supporting independent research and learning
f. Developing IT facilities
g. Providing information literacy skills
h. Ensuring that library services meet the needs of library users
i. Managing budgets and resources

Similarly, public librarians acquire, organise, promote and disseminate a wide range of information resources development. They also provide a wide range of information on business, the community, careers, learning public in accessing the Internet and other web-based services. Public librarian also works with other agencies and bodies, such as museums and educational services, to develop services and initiatives in the community (Aguolu & Aguolu, 2002; Nnadozie, 2007; Ifidon & Ifidon, 2007).

Possible Challenges in Knowledge Management Practices

Unsupportive technology: Knowledge management software should have the right features to support the requirements and strategy used in your organisation. Outdated or inadequate systems may hinder knowledge-sharing and collaboration, making it difficult for employees to access and contribute to the knowledge base (Nnandozie, 2015).

Lack of employee time: Employees may have daily workloads, deadlines, and priorities that limit the time available to contribute to knowledge management activities. This can make it challenging for employees to dedicate sufficient time to capture, document, and share their knowledge effectively.

Resistance to change: Implementing knowledge management initiatives often requires a cultural change within the organisation. Some employees may resist changes to their established work practices and may be hesitant to adopt new knowledge-sharing tools or methods.

Duplicate or false information: When many users contribute to a knowledge base, it's crucial to ensure the quality and integrity of the knowledge management system. Without proper validation or verification, there's a possibility of inaccurate or redundant information being stored in the knowledge base.

Lack of management contribution: Successful knowledge management requires strong commitment and support from management. If leaders don't prioritize or allocate resources to knowledge management initiatives, employees may not actively participate or contribute their knowledge.

How to Overcome Challenges in Knowledge Management

By recognizing these challenges, organisations can create a plan to address them and create an environment that fosters and drives effective knowledge management practices:

Develop clear objectives: Establishing clear objectives is essential to guide your knowledge management efforts. Define specific goals and outcomes you want to achieve depending on your organisation's needs to provide a focus and direction for your knowledge management initiatives.

Implement a strategy: Develop a well-defined knowledge management strategy that aligns with your organisational goals. Identify the key areas for knowledge management and outline the process, resources, and timelines required for successful implementation.

Train your employees: Provide training on effective knowledge capture, documentation, and sharing techniques to equip your employees to contribute effectively. Invest in training employees on using knowledge management tools and platforms to maximize their benefits.

Encourage a knowledge-sharing culture: Create an environment that values and encourages knowledge sharing to facilitate open communication and exchange of information. Foster a culture where employees feel safe and motivated to share their expertise and experiences.

Recognised employee contribution: Recognizing and appreciating employee contributions encourages continued engagement and participation in knowledge management activities. Acknowledge individuals or teams who consistently share valuable knowledge or contribute to improving the knowledge base with incentives, rewards, or simply with a public mention.

Deploy the right knowledge management tool: Select and implement a knowledge management tool that aligns with your organisation's needs and objectives. Choose a tool that's easy to use,

secure, and scalable, with integration capabilities to ensure it remains effective and efficient (Quarchioni, Paternostro, & Trovarelli, 2022)

Conclusion

This study major focus was on meaning and role of librarians in knowledge management practices. The paper also explored the organisation of knowledge and knowledge management practices. It ended with a survey of the skills required by librarians in knowledge management practices to remain relevant in the emergent knowledge economy. Competence required to be part of knowledge management in an organisation involved personal and educational qualities. These include obtaining a first degree, second degree and PhD as the educational qualification while other skills include communication, writing, leadership, teamwork, presentation and teaching skills among others. However, there are challenges militating against effective knowledge management practices which can be addressed based on the solutions identified in the study.

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Dr. Ali Muhammed Fakandu's academic journey began at Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, where he earned a Diploma in Library and Information Science, Bachelor Degree in Library and Information Science/Political Science and Master degree (MLS). He obtained his Ph.D. (Information Science) from Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. These experiences ignited his lifelong commitment to advancing the role of librarianship as a profession. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Dr Fakandu is a renowned scholar with over thirty-five (35) publications both national and international. His area of interest is Knowledge management. He is a certified librarian of Nigeria (CLN), and information scientist with a passion for empowering academic communities through knowledge organisation and access. With many years of post-graduation experience, He started his career as Librarian II in a special library at Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON), Abuja. He joined the service of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto at Abdullahi Fodiyo Library Complex for nine (9) years. He is presently the Departmental Examination Officer in the Department of Library and Information Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.



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