
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT : LIBRARIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Purushothama Gowda M

Mahesh V Mudhol

“Where is the Wisdom we have lost in Knowledge
Where is the Knowledge we have lost in Information”

T. S. Elliot

Abstract

This paper mainly focuses on knowledge management and role the librarians in managing the knowledge or information. The paper begins with the existing debate on the very concept of knowledge management and looks at some recent papers and arguments on the issue. The paper also focuses on key issues like characteristics, components, knowledge resources, key elements, process of knowledge management. The second part of the paper, mainly concentrates on the librarian's role in the knowledge management. Here challenges, issues involved qualities of the successful knowledge manager (Librarian) and the areas to be improved in order to became a successful knowledge manager are discussed.

Keywords :

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is a form of Information, which can exist only within an individuals' mind. It being subjective, cannot be directly transferred or communicated from one person to another, but must be converted into Information first. Information is then regarded as the objective and therefore communicable and recordable form of Knowledge. Knowledge Management has structural and functional basis in the Information Management or Information Resource Management. The main difference is the high degree of dynamic activity involved in the Knowledge Management.

Information Resource Management is all about recognizing the value of Information resource. Here main problem lies in handling /managing the various information resources, specially the resources which provide tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is that knowledge which can't be communicated in words, i.e., the Knowledge that is retained in the mind of human. In this scenario Knowledge Management appears to be a facet of Information Resource Management. Because, in the present competitive era every organization/industry is trying to tap the knowledge, which human resources of the organization and organization itself possess. It is a difficult task as it is impossible to document tacit knowledge. But here one has to take into account the subtle difference between Information and Knowledge.

2. WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ?

According to Webster's Dictionary, knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association. Knowledge may be recorded in an individual brain or stored in organizational processes, products, facilities, systems and documents. Knowledge Management is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets. Most often, generating value from such assets involves sharing them among employees, departments and even with other companies in an effort to devise best practices. It is important to note that knowledge encompasses both tacit knowledge (in people's heads) and explicit knowledge (codified and expressed as information in databases, documents, etc.)

According to Aslib the scope and definitions and activities under the denotation of Information Resource Management is totally encompassed by Knowledge Management, which is the latest context in the Information arena and a nature extension of the ideas of Information Resource Management. Both the Knowledge Management and Information Resource Management involve similar processes such as acquisition, creation, and renewal, archival, dissemination.

In simple terms Knowledge Management means, management of Knowledge. Knowledge management enables the creation, communication and application of Knowledge of all kinds to achieve goals. (Source: - The Knowledge Management tool kit –Amrit Tiwana) Knowledge Management can be defined as “the art of creating value of an organization’s intangible assets”. [Intangible assets are: Human centered assets, Intellectual Property assets, Infrastructure assets, and Market assets.]

Knowledge Management provides access to experience, knowledge, and expertise that create new capabilities, enable superior performance, encourage innovation, and leverages existing information and knowledge assets of the organization, facilitates information and knowledge dissemination across boundaries and integrates the information and knowledge into day to day business process.

3. PURPOSE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The entire purpose of Knowledge Management is to gain significant returns out of the data and information you produce and the way in which you produce it. Apart from the daily key tasks like collection of new materials, selection for inclusion in database, inputting data, indexing, searching and retrieval and delivering the output to the end-user, some additional tasks like data cleaning or deletion of redundant records from the database and check for the systems security, setting up links with other internal functions, creating relevant links with external sources, and updating any manual of procedures specific to the operations going on in the organization. From this knowledge, librarians can build a Web front end to allow users to access the information in a quick and easy way

- Is to gain significant returns out of the data and information we produce and the way in which we produce it.
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Some additional tasks like data cleaning or deletion of redundant records from the database and checking for the systems security. Creating links with external sources and updating any manual of procedures specific to the operations going on in the organization. From this knowledge, Librarians can build a web front and can allow user to access the information in a quick and easy way.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

By analyzing the different detentions of Knowledge Management , Awad and Ghaziri (2004) outline the following characteristics of Knowledge Management:

- Knowledge Management deals with knowledge from external as well as internal sources including documents and databases
- Knowledge Management system embed and store knowledge in business process, products and services
- Knowledge Management systems' objective is to promote growth, transfer and share of knowledge within the organization

- Knowledge Management systems aim to assess on a regular basis the knowledge assets of the organization and its impact

Arguing for the novelty of concept of Knowledge Management and the corresponding tools and techniques, Awad and Ghaziri argue that the goal of Knowledge Management is to present a balanced view of how computer technology captures, distributes, and share knowledge in the organization by linking human experts and documented knowledge in an integrated system

5. KEY ELEMENTS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Following are the important components of Knowledge Management: -

1. People management – recognition of skills of people
2. Process management – links into the identification and deployment of practices may be associated with Business Process Reengineering.
3. Information Management

6. IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of Knowledge Management requires

1. High-level commitment to change.
2. Human Resource of organization.
3. To and fro communication in the hierarchical structure of management.
4. Understanding among the staff.
5. Keeping track of the process of workflow in the organization.

The Knowledge Management system should be able to provide information relevant to the ongoing projects at the right time and in the right context.

7. PROCESS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Davenport (1993) explains that knowledge management process is about acquisition, creation, packaging, and application or reuse of knowledge. Some examples of each of these types of knowledge management process are:

- **Knowledge Acquisition:** finding existing knowledge, understanding requirements, searching among multiple sources.
- **Knowledge Creation:** research activities, creative processes in advertising, writing books or articles, making movies, and so on.
- **Packaging:** publishing, editing, design work.
- **Applying or using existing knowledge:** auditing, medical diagnosis;
- **Reuse of knowledge for new purpose:** leveraging knowledge product development processes, software development.

8. APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

8.1 Librarians as knowledge managers

Librarians have major advantage as Knowledge Management players, by enhancing the efficiency in the quality of the services they provide. Training should be provided to the end-users and the library staff to use any sources available in the library, with the help of sound IT support. Equally valuable will be constant two-way communication with all levels of management and regular interaction across disciplines. This will lead to a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and allow maximum coordination of skills and knowledge. Staff involved in the operation and maintenance of the knowledge core will need to keep themselves up-to-date with what is going on both inside and outside the organization.

Questions to be asked include the following :

- What new projects are coming?
- Which additional areas of business might the organization be considering?
- In the wider marketplace, what are its competitors doing?

Answers to such questions will determine the content requirement of databases with in the knowledge management function. There will also be a need to keep up-to-date with new ways of organizing information in terms of creating records and making the most of indexing tools; learning about new software products and evaluating them for particular tasks. Wherever possible join the user groups, which relate to your organization's interest; this will provide you with a network of contacts with whom to raise questions, exchange experiences and discuss areas of common concern.

Tools of Knowledge Management consists 70% of services and 30% of Technologies. Librarians provide these 70% services. This indicates the role of Librarians as Knowledge Manager. Where their functions are: -

- Providing services to the user community
- Sharing of information and understanding of user needs.
- Analyzing documents, classifying and sorting them for easy retrieval.
- Building the index etc.

8.2 Some of the qualities of a librarian to become a successful knowledge manager

- Providing services to the user community
- Sharing the information and understanding the user needs
- Theoretical and practical experience in designing and implementing information systems
- Analyzing the documents, classifying and storing them for easy retrieval
- Knowledge of current advances in information systems and technologies and their application in libraries.
- Building the index, using standard vocabulary
- Ability to effectively teach end-users, individually and in groups.
- Having knowledge of the digital library concepts, current and new advances in the scholarly communication systems, electronic publishing, and creating knowledge databases.

8.3 Where a traditional librarian can improve ?

- Focusing on the quality of information provided, which tends to lead to continuous improvement in achieving the objectives.
- Being open and acting responsive to the changing environment.
- Analyzing whole library activities or systems thinking.
- Being a strong promoter of diversity in the workplace.
- Establishing trusting and respectful relationships with customers and staff.
- Developing the skills of continuous learning from the lessons learned or best practices.
- Effectively communicating with the colleagues and customers.
- Keeping track of all possible sources where one can have access to information.
- Experience in using, managing and troubleshooting computer systems and networks, MS Windows, the Unix operating system, TCP/IP protocol, other related protocols, the Internet, and World Wide Web.

8.4 Challenges of knowledge management

- **Intellectual Capital:** - managing of tacit knowledge is not easy. Because, we don't know what is in human mind. It is not possible to document tacit knowledge.
- **Culture:** - Because of narrow mindedness or insecurity majority of people don't want to share their knowledge; some people don't want to interfere they want to stay neutral and they are away from knowledge sharing.
- **Obsolescence:** - There are types of information which gets obsolete as soon as it is generated for ex: Stock market information. Because of these types of ever changing information it is difficult to give this information quickly to capable user.
- **Overloading:** - Knowledge gets accumulated. If obsolete information is not removed it leads overload. And it is difficult to identify which is useful from this information.
- **Technology:** - Due to rapid changes in technology it is difficult to communicate the knowledge to the user because, technology helps Knowledge Management to a large extent. Technology is tool for Knowledge Management.
- **Structure:** - Structure of Knowledge management should show overall economy. Whether to follow centralized or decentralized system.

8.5 Issues involved

- Knowledge maps: - This involves building an actual map of a special databases, which points towards the resource./required data.
- Acquisition: - Acquisition along with external sources should also be extended to internal sources of knowledge. The librarian works with the knowledge team to survey the various in house documents to identify and digitize, like standards, reports, and reports of technical discussions.
- Categorizing: - The knowledge which is located inside or outside has to be represented in a way which is suitable for access or transfer on the basis of controlled vocabulary in a hierarchy.

- Narratives: - Extracting and diffusing the success stories and technical anecdotes from resource persons.
- Managing databases
- Capturing tacit knowledge

9. CONCLUSION

The Knowledge Management is not managing or organizing books or journals, searching the Internet for clients or arranging the circulation of materials. However, each of the activities can in some way be part of the Knowledge Management spectrum and process. Knowledge Management is about enhancing the use of organizational knowledge through sound practices of Knowledge Management and Organizational learning. Thus Knowledge Management is a combination of Information Management, Communication and Human Resources.

Librarians are predisposed to sharing information, and consider sharing information as their mission; they are both effective and customer-oriented. Librarians understand the ways in which people communicate information needs and their patterns of information use. Librarians, in future, would move from the background to the center of the organization. They would shed their traditional role as part of a support group, uninvolved in any critical functions, to a prominent position to jointly hold the reins of knowledge management with users and technical experts

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About Authors

Dr. Mahesh V. Mudhol is a senior Lecturer in Library & Information Science in University of Mangalore. He has vast experience of teaching. He has published several number of papers in national conferences & seminars.

E-mail : maheshmudhol@yahoo.com

Dr. Purushothama Gowda M. is a Sr. Asst. Librarian, Mangalore University Library, Mangalangothri, Mangalore-574 199. Karnataka (India).

E-mail : purushotham@mangaloreuniversity.ac.in