
ORIGINAL ARTICLE



**ROLE OF LIS PROFESSIONALS IN CORPORATE
KNOWLEDGE BASED INDUSTRY**

Syed Mohd Shahid

Assistant Librarian , Dhanvantri Library,
University of Jammu.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role Library professionals in knowledge management. It discusses the literature review on the role of Library professionals in the field of knowledge management. This paper also investigates relevance of LIS professionals in Knowledge management industry. This paper discusses new roles and responsibility of LIS professional in knowledge management and change from librarian to knowledge manager. It Provides brief overview on the new opportunities of Library professionals and threats to library professionals from other field professionals in knowledge management.

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing awareness and value of knowledge in its various forms has been recognised in recent years in an emerging discourse known as *knowledge management*. (Quinn, 1992; Wiig, 1993; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Amidon, 1997; Sieloff, 1999; and Hansen et al, 1999). It has seen knowledge as embedded in the experiences, skills, wisdom and capabilities of people, as well as in the processes, routines and the tangible artefacts produced in an organisation. It is a discourse that has captured the attention of scholars, consultants, information providers, software developers, and personnel at all levels of the corporate sector. It is a diffuse and complex debate, providing not only multiple perspectives of what constitutes knowledge management, but also different underpinning assumptions about its nature, contextualisation, role, and indeed, the meanings of its basic terms 'knowledge' and 'management'. For the most part, there is little explication of theoretical rationale or conceptual exploration of what 'knowledge' actually is, and indeed, how it relates to or differs from 'information', let alone an explication of the relationship, if any, between information management and knowledge management. Further, the dynamics of knowledge management is predominantly overlooked. These dynamics involve what or who it actually is that is being managed and how it is perceived within an organisation, its processes, and how this management relates to the structure and

culture of the organisation and the roles of people within the organisation, including library and information professionals.

2. RELEVANCE OF LIS PROFESSIONAL SKILLS IN KM

There is a considerable body of literature that addresses the relevance of the LIS profession's skills base to KM activities (Broadbent 1998; Church 1998; Corral 1999; Loughridge 1999; McGown 2000; Shanhong 2000; Abell 2001; Ajiferuke 2003; Koina 2003; Pantry & Griffiths 2003; Rowley 2003; Ferguson 2004; Henczel 2004; Sinotte 2004; Koenig 2005; Martin, Hazeri & Sarrafzadeh 2006). A 2004 IFLA collection opens with the challenging claim that KM is one of those concepts that librarians take time to learn, only to reflect ultimately on why other fields try to colonise our domains (Hobohm 2004, p.7). LIS interest in KM is also reflected in monograph publications such as the practical text by Sylvia Webb (1998) and the edited collection by Kanti T Srikantaiah and Michael Koenig (2001). Content analysis of the literature that explicitly addresses opportunities for LIS professionals in KM (Rooi & Snyman 2006) suggests five broad roles for librarians in KM: facilitating an environment conducive to knowledge sharing; managing the corporate memory; transfer of Information management(IM) and related skills to a new context, linked to business processes and core operations; development of corporate information literacy; and finally, management of information in a digital/electronic environment.

3. ROLES OF LIS PROFESSIONALS

When working in a knowledge environment, the information professional can have three primary roles and responsibilities:

1. To provide both external and internal information products and services that consistently match the needs of an organization
2. To educate information users to ensure they can access and use the information products and services effectively - hopefully this then maximizes the quality and consistency of organisational knowledge
3. To facilitate the sharing and transfer of knowledge

Davenport and Prusak (2000) discuss in detail the roles which librarians play in organisations. They state that librarians are often the 'knowledge brokers' or 'knowledge gatekeepers', and corporate librarians can be indispensable knowledge brokers because of a combination of their role as information guides and their personal temperaments. Librarians often make people-to-people connections as well as people-to-text connections.

LIS professionals are well placed to take on the role of knowledge managers, the argument goes, because they have been managing knowledge from time immemorial (Butler 2000, p.40; Corral 1999; Townley 2001, p.53). With a view to addressing the issue of whether library and information professionals do indeed have the credentials to lead Knowledge initiatives (or 'interventions', as the KM literature puts it) in their organisations, this project attempts to establish the state of knowledge of KM among LIS professionals, the extent to which they are finding positions in the KM sector, the amount to which they practise exclusive

KM processes in their work and the adequacy of educational preparation and/or professional development opportunities.

Rowley (2003, p.438) sees management of knowledge repositories as one of the three main roles of the knowledge manager and suggests that the processes involved in this 'have traditionally been at the heart of librarianship'. More recently, in a discussion of the contribution of librarians to KM, Ainslie Dewe (2005). of Auckland University of Technology highlighted their role in the fostering of information literacy skills, defining IL(information literacy) as the '[a]bility to identify, access, evaluate, organise and communicate information and knowledge' and seen as a 'Core capability for the knowledge society'.

The change from librarian to knowledge manager is clearly ongoing; however, a deeper look at the direction that the Internet is taking research reveals the possibility of more far-reaching changes. As many business processes move to the Internet, the use of information will become integrated with the systems and services. In this environment, information as a distinct function or resource may no longer exist. To adjust to these more far-reaching changes, information professionals must search beyond current bounds (e.g. librarian, information, knowledge management) and think in terms of benefits to their organizations. Right now, information can be used to enhance competitiveness and productivity. If information is to be seamlessly integrated with transaction processes, then someone must scope out work-related behaviors to ensure that

it is done in the most efficient and effective manner. And, if equal information and technology is available to everyone, then competition rests on the ability to interpret and apply these tools. Clearly the impending shift to knowledge management (and beyond) represents an exciting change for library and information professionals. However, it's an opportunity that requires a great deal of preparation, and a new way of thinking.

4. NEW ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LIS PROFESSIONALS

New roles and responsibilities are emerging for LIS professionals. Rooi and Snyman (2006) for example, refer to the librarians' functions in facilitating an environment conducive to knowledge sharing, managing the corporate memory, promoting higher link with business processes and core operations, the development of corporate information literacy and management of information in a digital/electronic format. Hawamdeh (2003) observes that the role of knowledge professionals is one of facilitators and communicators. He observes the expansion of LIS territory and adds that information professional's role need redefinition to deal with all types of knowledge within the organization (Hawamdeh, Suliman 2005).

The traditional role of librarians as intermediaries should make them more valuable in KM environments, and facilitate their potential contribution to the development of such environments, for example through the encouragement of knowledge sharing. In this regard, Broadbent (1997) mentioned that "Librarians were generally driven by a desire to provide access to information sources, and they matched this desire with values that assumed information sharing is a good thing, which are critical for the practice of knowledge

management". As Conolly and Matarazzo (1998) observed in the context of a changing library profession and in line with increased recognition of the value of the shared collective knowledge of organisations, it is becoming clear that corporate librarians are now being charged with the mission to explore and employ new and innovative methods to promote sharing and to better manage information.

Referring to a number of cases of successful KM implementation involving a significant contribution from libraries, The Library Association (LA) pointed out the common ground among a new crop of knowledge management programmes. This was based on the central role of information professionals in mapping organizational knowledge resources, and in encouraging a culture shift in knowledge-sharing practice in business centres (LA 1999).

5. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

To provide empirical evidence of the role of information professionals in KM programs, Aiyepoku (2001) conducted a survey, supported by a number of interviews of information professionals working in Canadian companies. The results of this research revealed a considerable degree of involvement by information professionals in KM programs. Information professionals in knowledge management programs played a key role in a number of areas, including the design of the information structure, development of the taxonomy, and content management of the organisation's intranet. Other roles included the provision of information for the intranet, gathering competitive intelligence, and providing research services as requested by the knowledge management team.

6. OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS

Knowledge management represents an opportunity in that it creates new roles and responsibilities for libraries and LIS professionals, but it can also be seen as a threat. This is because if LIS professionals refuse to gain new skills and involve themselves effectively in knowledge management practice they will risk becoming irrelevant to their organisations, and will probably lose out in competition for employment to people from other industries.

Despite the wealth of literature in the area of knowledge management and the library and information professions, the literature is less voluminous on the higher level contributions that LIS professionals might make to knowledge management. Also, it is still unclear from the literature how in specific ways, the LIS professions might prepare for, engage in and exploit the opportunities presented by knowledge management. It seems that LIS professions have made slow progress in identifying what KM means to them and more precisely its implications for their expertise, education, training and cultural traits if they are to become serious players in knowledge management. It is certainly not clear from the literature how claims that library and information professionals might be better knowledge managers than people from other fields could be justified. (Ferguson, 2004).

7. CONCLUSION

As librarian one must extend their expertise beyond collection management to knowledge management. The librarians have to extend their expertise in selecting, organizing, and preserving information to new forms of less formal, unpublished material, we must be willing to get outside the set of routine activities and the walls of the conventional library and work more directly with technologists, faculty, and students. It means librarian's roles should not be limited to being the custodians of information but they will work as knowledge managers who will work with users in collecting and analyzing strategic intelligence and to act as trainers and consultants to transfer knowledge throughout the organization (Asogwa, B. E. (2012).

Librarians have important role to play in overcoming the digital divide, and making reference and sharing global knowledge. Information and knowledge are growing in quantity and accessibility. Future decision-makers will be presented with unique new tools for development in many fields. Results of this could be revolutionary in fields such as agriculture, health, education, human resources and environmental management, or transport and business development.

REFERENCES:

- Abell, A. & Oxbrow, N. 2001. *Competing with knowledge: The information professionals in the knowledge management age*. London: Library Association Publishing.
- Ajiferuke, I. 2003. Role of information professionals in knowledge management programs: Empirical evidence from Canada. *Informing Science Journal*, 6, pp. 247-57.
- Amidon, Debra M (1997). *Innovation strategy for the knowledge economy: The Ken awakening*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Asogwa, B. E. (2012). Knowledge management in academic libraries: librarians in the 21st century. *Journal of knowledge management practice*, 13(2), 1-11.
- Aiyepoku, WO 2001, 'Grafting marketable KM skills into education for information in Africa', *Education For Information*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 19-33.
- Butler, Y 2000, 'Knowledge management- if only you knew what you knew', *The Australian Library Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 31-44.
- Broadbent, M. 1998. The phenomenon of knowledge management: What does it mean to the information profession. *Information Outlook*, 2(5), pp. 23-36.
- Broadbent, M. 1997. The emerging phenomenon of knowledge management. *Australian Library Journal*, 46, pp. 6-24.
- Church, D. 2004. From librarian to knowledge manager and beyond: The shift to an end-user domain. [Online] Available at: <http://www.sla.org/chapter/ctor/courier/v36/v36n2a1b.htm> [Accessed 27 April 2005]
- Connolly, S & Matarazzo, J 1998, *Knowledge and special libraries*, ButterworthHeinemann, Bostong, MA.
- Corrall, S. 1999. Knowledge management: Are we in the knowledge management business? *Ariadne*, 18, pp. 16-18.

-
- Dewe, A. 2005. Knowledge leadership in a university context. In: Proceedings of Educause Australasia [Online] (2005). Auckland, New Zealand, April 5-8, 2005.
- Davenport, T.H. and Prusak, L. 2000. *Working knowledge: how organizations manage what they know*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Mass.
- Ferguson, S. 2004. The knowledge management myth: Will the real knowledge managers please step forward?' Challenging Ideas: ALIA 2004 Biennial Conference, Queensland, September 22-24, 2004.
- Hansen, M T, N Nohria, and T Tierney (1999). 'What's your strategy for managing knowledge?' *Harvard Business Review* 77(2):106-16.
- Henczel, S. 2004. Supporting the KM environment: The roles, responsibilities, and rights of information professionals. *Information Outlook*, 8(1), pp. 14-19.
- Hawamdeh, S 2003, *Knowledge management: Cultivating knowledge professionals*, Chandos, Oxford.
- Hawamdeh, S, Froehlich, TJ, Srikantaiah, T, Chaudhry, AS, Chang, Y & Morales-Arroyo, MA 2004, 'Challenges in knowledge management education', in ASIST 2004: Proceedings of the 67th ASIS & T Annual Meeting, Information Today Inc
- Hawamdeh, S 2005, 'Designing an interdisciplinary graduate program in knowledge management', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, vol. 56, no. 11, pp. 1200-6.
- Hobohm H. (Ed.) 2004. *Knowledge management: Libraries and librarians taking up the challenge*. IFLA Publications, no. 108. Munich: Saur.
- Koenig, 2005, 'KM moves beyond the organization: The opportunity for librarians', *Information Services & Uses*, vol. 25, pp. 87-93.
- Koina, C. 2003. Librarians are the ultimate knowledge managers? *Australian Library Journal*, 52, pp. 269-272.
- LA, TLA 1999, *Knowledge Management; our Competitive Future: building the Knowledge Driven Economy*
- Loughridge, B. 1999. Knowledge management, librarians and information managers: Fad or future? *New Library World*, 100(6), pp. 245-253.
- Martin, B. et al 2006. Knowledge management and the LIS professions: Investigating the implications for practice and for educational provision. *Australian Library Journal*, 55(1), pp. 12-29.
- McGown, K.A. 2000. Knowledge management in the twenty first century: The role of the academic librarian. Doctor of Education thesis, University of Saint Thomas at Minnesota
- Nonaka, I and Takeuchi H (1995). *The knowledge-creating company, how Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pantry, S. & Griffiths, P. 2003. Librarians or knowledge managers? What's in a name, or is there a real difference? *Business Information Review*, 20(2): pp. 102-09.
- Quinn, J B (1992). *Intelligent enterprise: A knowledge and service based paradigm for industry*. New York: The Free Press.

-
- Rowley, J. 2003. Knowledge Management-the new librarianship? From custodians of history to gatekeepers to the future. *Library Management*, 24(8), pp. 433-40
- Rooi, HV & Snyman, R 2006, 'A content analysis of literature regarding knowledge management opportunities for librarians', *Aslib Proceedings*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 261-71.
- Shanhong, T. 2000. Knowledge management in libraries in the 21st century. Paper presented at the 66th IFLA Council and General Conference, held in Jerusalem.
- Sieloff, C G (1999). 'If only HP knew what HP knows': the roots of knowledge management at Hewlett-Packard.' *Journal of Knowledge Management* 3(1).
- Sinotte, M. 2004. Exploration of the field of knowledge management for the library and information professional. *Libri*, 54(3), pp. 190-198
- Srikantaiah, T.K. & Koenig, M.E.D. (Eds.) 2001. Knowledge management for the information professional. Medford, NJ: Information Today, for the American Society for Information Science.
- Townley, C. 2001. Knowledge management and academic libraries. *College and Research Libraries*, 62(1), 44-55.
- Webb, S.P. 1998. Knowledge Management: Linchpin of Change: Some Practical Guidelines. London: Aslib.
- Wiig, K (1993). *Knowledge management foundations*. Arlington, Tx: Schema Press.