

Knowledge Management Competencies Required for Library and Information Professionals in 21ST Century Nigerian Libraries

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Abstract

This paper discusses knowledge management competencies required for library and information professionals in 21st century Nigerian libraries. The advent of internet and related technological development has transformed and influenced library practices. There is a vast amount of knowledge in various areas and its management is very vital in the provision of quality information services, making effective decisions, improving the overall performance of the employee and becoming more relevant to their parent organization. The paper gives an overview of the emerging field of Knowledge Management (KM) and the competencies required by information professionals in the KM practices in 21st century Nigerian libraries. It goes further to discuss the concept of KM, examines the roles of library and for successful KM application and what determines a 21st century library. It concludes that in Nigerian libraries, with the exponential growth of human knowledge in a variety of format, librarians should be prepared to meet the information needs of their numerous users, locate and develop useful websites and knowledge based sources for their clients. Also, libraries should develop means to capture all the tacit knowledge that is embedded in people's skills and competencies as well as the explicit knowledge found in the working processes of information professionals in the libraries.

Keywords

Knowledge Management, Knowledge Competencies, Library Professionals, Information Professionals, Nigerian Libraries

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1. Introduction

The advent of internet and related technological development has transformed and influenced library practices. There is a vast amount of knowledge in various areas and its management is very vital in provision of quality information services, making effective decisions, improving the overall performance of the employee and becoming more relevant to their parent organization. Knowledge Management (KM) emerged as a result of some of the practices considered important, which are applied in both business, non-profit and public sectors.

According to IFLA [13], Knowledge Management (KM) is a process of creating; storing, sharing, applying and re-using organizational knowledge to enable an organization achieve its goals and objectives in terms of resources, documents and peoples skills. It is a system that facilitates learning, innovation and sharing knowledge assets to achieve the strategic objective of an organization [Rowley, 28]. There are two foundations of KM; they are the management of information flow and the application of people competencies, skills, talents, thoughts, ideas, intuitions, commitments, innovations and imagination [Broadbent, 6]. Information professionals are those who use processed information

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(knowledge) in their day to day activities to advance vision and mission of the organizations and also recognize the importance of people as a key information resource.

1.1. General Overview of Knowledge Management

KM is a combination of people, process and technology but the skills and expertise which are employee's knowledge are most important to organization. In this case, the term knowledge covers both the explicit documented knowledge and the tacit knowledge. The focus of KM is to manage tacit knowledge which is embedded in employees in the form of their experience, know-how and expertise. This is because tacit knowledge is where the interesting knowledge resides in an individual employee in the organization and it is the one most valuable that leads to breakthrough. Any organization that knows how to manage its knowledge well will do better than those that does not. This shows that knowledge sharing is the key source of competitive advantage of an organization.

In most organization, the key professionals involved in KM activities are the human resources managers, library and information professionals, information technologist, process and products developers, psychologist [Townley, 30]. It involves professionals from wide variety of disciplines because it is multi- disciplinary in nature and it cuts across several fields of human research and professional endeavours as in computer science, business management, library and information science, among others. The idea of KM is to create a knowledge sharing environment whereby sharing knowledge is power. Rowley [27] opined that organizations that succeed in KM are likely to view knowledge as an asset and to develop organizational norms and values which support the creation and sharing of knowledge. Mphidi and Snyman [19] noted that converting personal knowledge into corporate knowledge for sharing purposes is the ultimate application of KM in an organization as this will reduce the risk involved in the loss of knowledge when the person leaves the organization. The main tool for information professionals to achieve their goals is technology as it is a critical tool in which the information professionals harness to accomplish their goals.

KM is essential to the growth of the organization. The application and use of internet and computer technologies by organizations in storing, retrieving, disseminating and sharing explicit knowledge and information within and outside the organization has helped to accomplish organization's goals. Technology has changed the way library and information products and services are rendered. This technology has also changed the information behaviours, as people believe that they can find everything they need

through the internet.

In the 21st century libraries, librarians are expected to thrive in the digital environment where they will be actively involved in the acquisition, application, use and implementation of new technologies in their organization with their new skills and competencies to fit with their changing roles. The 21st century library is an era of innovative technological development in libraries. There is the problem of information overload and the information professionals are needed more than ever to filter, disseminate and share action able information with users.

Competencies are human behaviours (skills) that lead to successful performance in the organisation, these competencies are essential to KM practices. It is important to note that librarians and other information professionals in the organization could contribute to the knowledge roles and responsibilities by having the right competencies and skills. Choo [9] suggested that information professionals need to understand what knowledge is, what the nature and structure of organization knowledge is and what distinguishes it from other forms of knowledge. In this way information professionals will have to change and develop in a way that will affect their new roles and responsibilities.

Librarians and Information professionals with ICT skills are viewed as agents of knowledge transfer and advocate for information accessibility. According to Brophy [7], 21st century libraries and information professions are facing at least three major paradigm shifts:

- I. The transition from paper to electronic print
- II. Increasing focus on customers, performance measure, benchmarking and continuous improvement being an economic resource as well as sharing knowledge
- III. The third shift comes from new form of work organization such as end-user computing, work teams, outsourcing, downsizing and re-engineering [Kenney, 15]

The author went further to capture the essence of shifts in the libraries, their programs and the functions with the following assertion: "Yesterday's libraries were all about books, tomorrow's libraries will be all about readers", "Yesterday's libraries were all about getting information, tomorrow's libraries will be all about creating and sharing information".

In 21st century library, there is a paradigm shift from traditional library to digital library, library co-operation to resources sharing network/consortia; technology application is the major driving force which enhances e-learning, open access and open sources, information literacy, knowledge management and knowledge repository. The 21st century library must be "library without walls" in which collections do not exist on paper, microform or other tangible form at a

physical location alone [Reitz, 26] rather collection is replaced with e-books-journals, and internet. 21st century library must be electronically accessible in digital format via computer networks because access is no longer restricted to the user in terms of time and distance. Therefore, the utmost goal of KM is to effectively apply an organization's knowledge to create new knowledge, new innovations and improve organizational performance so as to achieve and maintain competitive advantage. The application of KM activities by information professionals is a viable means in which libraries could improve their products and services in this knowledge economy.

1.2. Concept of Knowledge Management

Many scholars have defined KM in line with the way it affects their fields. The truth is that there is no straightforward definition of the concept. KM has been created as a valuable business concept that gives an organization an edge over its competitors. According to Alavi and Leidner [3], this practice of KM emerged in the business world and non-profit and public sectors like government agencies, research and development departments, universities and others. Mchombu [18] defined KM as a disciplined approach to managing all knowledge processes found in human collectives (a set of people with common goal). The main issues behind the application of KM are to create the process of valuing the organization's intangibles assets in order to leverage knowledge internally and externally.

In the same vein, KM can be regarded as a discipline that promotes integrated approach to identifying capturing, evaluating, retrieving and sharing all of organization information assets. According to the author, this access may include databases, documents, policies, procedures and previously not captured expertise and experience in individual worker. It is assumed that KM is what we do to accomplish our goals faster and more effectively by delivering the right knowledge to the right persons at the right time in the right context. KM is a multidisciplinary subject and various scholars like: Nonaka [21], Ajiferuke [2], Ezeani et al [10], Okere and Ekere [22] and Aharony [1] posited KM as a process that involves transforming knowledge resources through capturing, identifying, organizing and storing in order to improve organizational effectiveness. It offers the opportunity to create knowledge to leverage an organization's intellectual capital and knowledge assets and these assets require proper management if the organization would want to remain relevant in the global competitive environment. The essential part of this concept is knowledge and it is the most vital resource of any organization next to human beings.

Knowledge is actionable information which is formulated in

the minds of individual through experience. Organizations capitalize on their organizational knowledge to maintain their competitive edge. We have the explicit knowledge which resides in an organization in terms of reports, documents manuals procedures. It can easily be communicated, shared, transferred and disseminated. Tacit or implicit knowledge is that knowledge that resides in the brain. It is highly personalised and difficult to communicate and share [Nnadozie, et al, 20]. It is pertinent to note that knowledge management is implored to utilize and exploit the organization's knowledge through the application of employee's skills, experiences, ideas, intuitions, commitments, motivations and imaginations in order to create new line of products and services. All these are done to reduce duplication, improve productivity and save cost.

1.3. Knowledge Management Processes

A lot of scholars proposed different set of KM processes because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the concept. Pan and Scarbrought [24] proposed five processes which include knowledge generation, processing, storage, dissemination and use/re-use. Seleim and Khalil [29] classified it into four processes: knowledge acquisition, knowledge creation, knowledge transfer and knowledge application. Some other studies that discussed the KM processes include Kucza [16] Alavi & Leidner [3], Bhatt [5], Nonaka [21], they mentioned various approaches regarding KM processes, these processes are obviously the backbone of Knowledge management, while Al-selim and Mohammed [4] grouped it into four interrelated processes: generation process, storage process, publication process and application process.

1.3.1. Knowledge Generation

A healthy organization generates knowledge. All activities bring to light knowledge which is new; whether to the individual, to the group or to the world. Knowledge generation process is not only to generate new knowledge but also about replacing, validating and updating the firm's existing knowledge. Organizations may prefer to acquire knowledge from other services and adopt it for their own use.

1.3.2. Knowledge Storage

This entails retention of knowledge and its conservation; it sustains organizing and facilitating access to and retrieval of knowledge when needed. This process represents organizational repository. Knowledge created may easily be lost if proper steps are not taken to secure it. Knowledge storage involves capturing, transcribing and coding knowledge. Knowledge storage is a process that makes it safe and easily accessible whenever it is needed to solve a particular problem in the human society.

1.3.3. Knowledge Publishing

What is important in knowledge publishing is to ensure the information reaches the individual who is looking for it at the right time. Knowledge publishing is mostly seen as the valuable assets of 21st century. The goal of Knowledge publishing is to make people register and then share knowledge with the rest of the members from one format to another. Sharing knowledge is all about communicating, sharing and understanding knowledge within a group of people looking for information in the right time. Dissemination enhances the spread of knowledge both within and outside the organization.

1.3.4. Knowledge Application

This is the final stage in the KM processes and it is considered the most important one among the process. Without application, KM is useless. Knowledge application is synonymous to knowledge utilization. It simply means putting knowledge to effective use in order to solve problems. The value of knowledge expands when it is shared. Knowledge application refers to the actual use of knowledge that has been created, packaged, captured, retrieved and disseminated aimed to achieve organizational goals.

1.4. Knowledge Management Competencies for Libraries and Information Professionals

Despite the job specification and description of knowledge and abilities sought by employers, it is also clear that information professional possesses skills and competencies to enable them function well in achieving corporate success. Competencies are relevant to an individual's job responsibilities, roles and capabilities.

2. Competency Defined

Competency is the capability of an individual to apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills and abilities required to successfully perform a given set of tasks in a defined work setting. According to CARL [8], competencies serve as basis for skills standard like the level of knowledge behaviours, skills and abilities that their organizations require their staff to practise for success in the workplace. It is the applied skills and knowledge that enable people to successfully perform their work.

For librarians and other information professionals to successfully provide quality filtered and actionable information, they require two types of competencies namely personal and core competencies. Professional competencies relate to the information professionals' knowledge of information resources, access, technology, management and

the ability to use this knowledge as a basis for providing the highest quality information service while in personal competencies they must be able to communicate effectively by presenting ideas clearly, negotiate confidently and persuasively.

Today, the changing role of information professionals has brought in new set of competencies and as such they must work harder to make themselves proactive and do their best to reaffirm competencies for the job at hand. Information professionals of the 21st century must be multi-skilled and be ready to work in a virtual environment with information technology tools and technologies. Hill [11] confirmed that it will become clear that information professionals should possess online skills, quick reference skills and communication skills, etc. Knowledge management is a multi-dimensional discipline and requires a demanding mix of skills and competencies.

Library and information professionals relate knowledge management mainly through their abilities in organizing and classifying information which they need to be more creative, imaginative in application of their competencies and to make critical decision in meeting the information needs of their clientele. Competencies required by library and information professionals can be classified into the following:-

I. Corporate Mind-set:

Information professionals must be capable to shift to what is known as strategic mind-set. For information professionals to survive and prosper in today's competitive labour market needs, corporate mind-set is necessary. The information professionals must have the ability to support, promote and ensure alignment with the organization's vision and values. Also they have to understand how an organization must change in light of internal and external trends and influence. Information professionals need to change their mind-set of what it used to be in the library and gain new skills products and services.

II. Outsourcing Capabilities:

Library and information professionals must have the competencies of advising the organization either to outsource or not to outsource number of technical processes, content deployment, and Information Technology maintenance while considering the expertise available in such areas. Libraries outsource activities that they deemed as non- core and low value.

III. Leadership & Management Competencies:

Organizations are undergoing major changes with regards to their strategic planning, decision making, and organizational relationship with employees. Information professionals should have management competencies to effectively

manage and guide group efforts to meet the needs and demand of their users and management. Quality services are only possible when you have quality leader and good management practices are visible. Achieving total quality management in terms of leadership is emphasised in all the literatures consulted.

The information professional must be thorough and must have the ability to foster diversity and be able to influence others, support their ideas, proposals, projects and solutions. Information professionals must put in place quality management and best practices for better delivery of products and services. They also need project and risk management competencies that will guide them to understand the advantages and disadvantages of any action as well as planning, organizing and managing resources to successfully complete specific projects objectives within a certain time frame. These competencies will enable them to always partner and collaborate with stakeholders and relevant communities.

IV. Dealing with Information Resources Vendors:

Information professionals should use their competencies to advise the organization on copyright and intellectual property issues and compliances. This is crucial in information professional works. They must have the skills to deal with issues of pricing, licensing and contract negotiation with a number of vendors with whom the organizations plan to acquire their information resources. They must have the ability to follow-up with vendors to ensure that agreements and commitments have been fulfilled.

V. Marketing and Public Relations:

Library and information professionals need to have competencies for marketing and nurturing partnerships to develop new programs and to market the library products and services, both formally and informally through internet. They also have the ability to develop, maintain and strengthen relationships inside and outside the organization.

VI. Competitive Intelligence:

Information professionals in organizations need to have intelligence competency to enable them contribute towards gathering information, communicating results to management for decision making. Rehman [25] listed key characteristics of an Intelligence Analyst as self-directing, intuitive thinking, focus on problem solving and logical skills to mention but few.

VII. Strategic Planning and Decision Making:

Information professionals required competencies to align their plans along strategic directions of the organization to achieve its goals and objectives, building strategic maps,

implementing and managing staff performance, ability to effectively recruit, select, develop and retain competent staff. An information professional must have the strategic planning and decision-making skills in other to engage in new strategic initiatives and innovation for enlightening the users, managers and different groups.

VIII. Information Technology (IT) Competencies:

Information professionals should have an advanced internet and IT skills strategies that will give them the ability to find quality online resources, ability to troubleshoot and ability to provide reference services through e-mail and other social networking tools. These Information technology competencies will enable the information professionals to guide users in intelligent information access, selection of source and resources and decisions on information application tools, technologies and policies for the organization. They provide technological tools that will facilitate current awareness services, email alert, packaging of information to meet specific demands of the use of databases.

It can be generally observed that Information Technology enhances knowledge management, the long discussion of IT and KM has given the information professionals the opportunity to bridge the gap between the developed and under developed countries believing in the notion of access to right knowledge at the right time in the right context. Makori [17] confirmed that technological innovations has affected the role and responsibilities of the information professionals, changed working relationship and communication patterns as well as provided additional functions and services to the existing information services.

IX. Interpersonal Skills:

This competency encompasses various skills. Information professionals must have the ability to get along, listen and interact positively with co-workers and clientele. For them to exhibit their skills, they must be able to communicate effectively, conveying the importance of libraries to their users and parent institutions and empowering the users through training to be self-sufficient. They must be able to work effectively with face of change, making well informed decisions when faced with uncertainty, being a mentor to employees by providing useful advices collaborate and share knowledge, ideas and expertise with diverse population and feedback to new employees to help them attain success in their field. Information professionals with good skills and competencies markets, promotes their expertise, services, digital collection and facilities of the library to a variety of clientele and making case to the administration for the need to recognize library as a vital institution for research, teaching and learning.

X. Information Literacy Skills:

Information Professionals are exhibiting their skills and competencies by teaching information literacy skills to enhance access and utilization of information resources and searching skills. They are also researchers in their various fields contributing back their own expertise to the employees actively creating a survival skill in the information age. Makori [17] opined that information literacy skills are needed to enable one to use information and information communication technology effectively and to access appropriate digital resources. Kavuliya [14] observed that to ensure digital libraries are fully utilized, there is need to develop learning and education as a lifelong process through information literacy programmes.

2.1. Knowledge Management Competencies Expected of Librarians and Information Professionals in 21st Century Nigerian Libraries

Competency building for knowledge management in libraries and information professionals in this information age is very important and critical factor to attain success in modern information centres. Ugwu and Ezema [31] in their study showed that librarians required skills for knowledge management strategies. CARL [8] as well as Husain and Nazim [12] highlighted the following professional skills needed by librarians and information professionals for knowledge management practices. These were adopted for this paper and they include:

- I. Change Management skills
- II. Interpersonal skills-Communication, presentation and writing skills
- III. Records management skills
- IV. Public relation/marketing
- V. Mentoring skills/coaching
- VI. Leadership skills & strategic and restructuring skills
- VII. Negotiation skill/Decision making
- VIII. Teaching/learning skills
- IX. Project Management skills
- X. Collaboration/teamwork/partnership skills
- XI. Information Technology skills
- XII. Innovation/Initiatives
- XIII. Risk management skills.

Thus, librarians and information professionals in Nigeria in this information age need to have new sets of competencies and new mind-set in order to contribute positively to their

organization's success.

2.2. Role of Libraries and Information Professionals in Knowledge Management Practices

The emergence of Knowledge Management in libraries has contributed to a growing recognition at management level of the crucial importance of knowledge to the success of the organization. Libraries play the role of extra activities by identifying existing knowledge resources, locating the sources and resources and delivering it to end users. Library and information organizations have assumed new role in the creation of databases, knowledge-based system, digitalization/electronic document management, creation of virtual libraries, Meta data and development of intranet, information packaging and delivery, in order to meet with demands of Information era as well as being relevant in today's knowledge-based environment.

Libraries perform an intermediary function between information producers and end-users. According to Owen [23], this function is performed in two ways; the first is that the library acts as a clearing house for information producers because they don't need to offer their products to individual rather than to only libraries which now distribute the publication to booksellers and suppliers. This acts as an efficient instrument to make available limited set of relevant publications out of the entire volume of publications available in the market. So, libraries are moving towards a role as suppliers of networked services for digital information resources. Libraries thereby act the role of selective filter and quality instrument for making those publications which are relevant and of sufficient quality available to end users.

In this information age, library could be virtual and it could be playing intermediary role between knowledge requirement of both internal and external users and the information sources available on the global internet. This concept of knowledge mediation implies an intermediary role of libraries in matching users need to available knowledge contained in information sources irrespective of where and in what form these resources are available. Libraries and information professionals play the role of overcoming the digital divide and as such sharing global knowledge thereby bridging the gap.

Moreover, library and information professionals play the role of gatekeeper in handling organization document and formal knowledge. Information professionals are proactive and more dynamic trying to transform themselves with more skills and competencies which will enable them enhance the organizations goals and objectives. Information professional possesses tacit knowledge that is critical in the performance of their duties. According to Choo [9], they are skilled at

selecting and searching information sources, evaluating the quality of information, summarizing important functions and have the know-how to analyze information needed and relate and package the information formed for a specific project or problems.

Likewise, library plays the roles of repository of knowledge, preservation of posterity, intellectual output of the society both in print and electronic format. Hence, library and information professional play key roles in collecting, storing, organizing and disseminating knowledge to organizations and the society. They are now partners in knowledge management programmes and connecting people to the information they need.

Besides, library serves as a potential educational force functions. Libraries are social institution charged with the responsibility of disseminating knowledge to the people without any discrimination and providing information for research and access to knowledge. They also take to teaching information literacy skills to enhance effective accessibility to appropriate digital resources. Yaacob, Jamaluddin and Jusoff [32] suggested that libraries can participate in enhancing their knowledge management function in some critical areas and services such as knowledge resource management, resource sharing and networking and information technology development, user's services and human resources management. They opined that information professionals need to move forward in line with the new shift toward knowledge management if they do not want to become obsolete. They should provide a strong leadership, strong Information Technological tools and infrastructure to support KM structures in their organizations.

Finally, libraries and information professionals play the role of manager of recorded information, managing people's knowledge because they are the most valuable information assets in any organisation. In managing people's knowledge, the information professionals will keep alive communication practice as well as providing access to human resources. This is done through provision of current awareness materials, recording community activities and archiving these materials so that it can be preserved for use.

Therefore, the application of KM principles and practices in libraries are very important to information professionals in their bit to play their various roles whether it is practiced presently or not. But the fact remains that it has much to offer to the management of libraries and information professionals.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Knowledge management programmes will develop libraries

and offer innovations and ideas that will brings about potential benefits for new products and services as well as reducing cost of business operations. Library and information professionals have numerous roles to play in knowledge management activities because information gathered both from internal and external environment is the lifeblood of the organization and it is essential for innovation, continuing learning, knowledge sharing, collaboration and for change alignment. Also library and information professionals have to acknowledge the importance of Knowledge Management by viewing Library as a knowledge- based organization where the organization and maintenance of recorded knowledge is practice as old as civilization itself. They should assume an effective role in knowledge management and human resources management initiative and equip themselves with technological skills that will be useful for their jobs. They need to be proactive, aggressive in taking decisions, creating new knowledge and be ready to change to gain competitive advantage over other information institutions.

The use of information technology in the 21st century library has transformed the growth of intranet or portals, rise of electronic communication, storage of information and retrieval there by bridging the digital divide. Change is inevitable, library and information professionals have been in the business of discovery knowledge, collaborating and sharing knowledge, gathering, filtering and analyzing knowledge. Nigerian Libraries and information Professionals should pool their resources together to create an awareness of the concepts of knowledge management in libraries.

In Nigerian libraries, with the exponential growth of human knowledge in a variety of format, they must analyze the needs of their users, locate and form useful websites and knowledge sources from the internet for their clientele. Libraries should develop means to capture all the tacit knowledge that is embedded in people's skills and competencies as well as the explicit knowledge found in the working processes of information professionals in the Libraries. Skills and competencies of library and information professionals are beneficial to knowledge management initiatives in libraries. Therefore, the utmost goal of knowledge management is to provide users with a variety of quality products and services in order to improve the communication, use and creation and share knowledge.

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