

THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN HEALTH LIBRARIES IN UGANDA: A CASE STUDY OF ALBERT COOK LIBRARY, MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The development of knowledge management in recent years has become a key concern for librarians and libraries. Although Knowledge Management is an old concept, we need to recognize the fact that it has been with us but not in its infancy especially in the health libraries. It therefore calls for major change in institutional thinking and acceptance by the librarians that their service must also be subject to continuous improvement.

This paper examines important issues in the development of KM, and how health libraries can become more effective and efficient as information intermediaries. It will also examine the role that KM has played in the Makerere University medical school. The paper concludes that institutional policy, new technologies and the push towards the use of electronic information resources are forcing changes throughout health libraries.

INTRODUCTION

As a sub discipline of the knowledge economy, knowledge management is a new concept that has appeared world wide in recent years. However, proponents of knowledge management argue otherwise, that organizations have been managing their knowledge since dawn of time. Knowledge management requires linkage of information with information, information with activities and information with man so as to realize the sharing of knowledge (Shanhong, 2005). Knowledge Management, from the librarian's perspective refers to effectively identify, acquire, develop, resolve, use, store and share knowledge, to create an approach to transforming and sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge, and to raise the emergency and innovation capability by utilizing the wisdom of the team (ibid, 2005). Knowledge management makes it possible to get the right information into the hands of the appropriate people at the time they need it to make decisions.

Knowledge management is one, but by no means the only, set of concepts concerned with how organizations make the most of their knowledge assets. It can also be seen as a set of techniques and practices that facilitate the flow of knowledge into and within an organization. Since the knowledge management concept is as old as knowledge itself, its important to look at its framework. According to (Machlup, 1980) there are five categories of knowledge which include; practical knowledge, intellectual, small time and pastime, spiritual and unwanted knowledge. One of the major objectives of knowledge management should therefore be to extract the knowledge that exists tacitly in the librarians' minds, increase the sharing of that knowledge and expedite its flow (Parker, 2005).

According to Birkinshaw, 2001, in practical terms, there are three elements to knowledge management. Firstly, the organization should encourage individuals to interact or to share ideas on an informal basis. Secondly, systems are needed to codify the knowledge so that it can be used by others. Most valuable knowledge is tacit (or held so deeply by the individual) that it is so hard to express or write down. The third element is that organizations need to get access to new knowledge from outside boundaries, as a means of updating and renewing their knowledge base. For knowledge management to succeed organizations must consider it as zero-based i.e. to make it work, you need to recognize that you are already doing it both formally and informally through social networks. Knowledge management should focus on generating enough new knowledge than focusing too much on recycling existing knowledge. Organizations should also avoid using managing techniques that end up looking like traditional techniques that have been used for a number of years.

LIBRARIES AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

As libraries struggle with the fall out of the digital age, they must find a creative way to remain relevant to the twenty first century user who has the ability and means of finding vast amounts of information without visiting libraries. The Internet and the introduction of computers will continue to lessen the need to visit libraries. This free information on the web in addition to the escalating costs of library materials, threatens the traditional

mission of libraries, to create and sustain large, self-sufficient collections for their patrons (Troll, 2002). While all organizations (libraries inclusive) require information to guide their strategic decision making, they must provide a service to fill the gap that is developing as a result of the digital age.

There is therefore the need to reposition or enhance libraries to continue acting as knowledge management centers. It should be noted that information technology tools should not be substitutes for social interaction. Most people would prefer to talk to colleagues or reference librarians about latest ideas than to find something written.

Knowledge Management promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, retrieving, sharing, and evaluating enterprises information assets. These information assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, as well as the uncaptured tacit expertise and experience stored in individual's heads" (www.gartner.com).

LIBRARIES AS CENTERS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

As libraries of all sizes and types today continue to embrace digital collections, most of them will continue to offer both print and digital collections for many years to come. The role of knowledge management in libraries therefore will become more important since the development of knowledge economy continues. Human resource management is the core of knowledge management in libraries. In the knowledge economy era libraries must attach importance to training and life long education of library staff, to raise their scientific knowledge levels and ability to acquire knowledge. Knowledge management requires not only knowledgeable employees but also specialized knowledge workers.

The major role of knowledge management in libraries is to promote knowledge innovation, which is the core of knowledge economy society. Therefore, as bases for collection, processing, storage and dissemination of knowledge, they represent a link in the scientific system chain. A number of libraries take part in scientific research processes; they should act as bridges for turning results of knowledge innovation into realistic

productive forces. This can further be promoted through relationships between libraries and users, which can strengthen knowledge internetworking and enhance knowledge flow. Libraries as bases of knowledge innovation should carry out researches on development and application of information resources.

Information technology as a tool for knowledge management is indispensable in the application and exchange of knowledge in libraries. Since knowledge acquisition is the starting point of knowledge management in libraries, the application of information technologies enlarges the scope of knowledge acquisition; it also enhances the speed and reduces the knowledge acquisition cost (storage and retrieval).

CONTENTS AND TECHNOLOGIES OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN HEALTH LIBRARIES

Libraries are supposed be knowledge repositories, they therefore store both knowledge and information in both print and electronic form. Libraries use diverse media and other channels to disseminate various new knowledge they may acquire. It is therefore necessary to strengthen knowledge management dissemination by uninterruptedly strengthening the creation of libraries' own information resources (Shanhong, 2005).

Knowledge innovation in libraries which refers to the production, diffusion and transfer of knowledge as well as of networks systems, is one of the contents of knowledge management. Its role is to enrich and enlarge both the theoretical and practical research fields in health and information science through pursuing new trends in both fields. Through innovation management with the evolution from traditional libraries to digital ones, libraries should build technical facilities to support knowledge management. To improve access and transfer of knowledge technologies such document scanning, sharing tools etc. are central.

Other contents of knowledge management in libraries include human resources, where staff is expected to have great amounts of expert knowledge. This can be meaningful only if it is shared with users and amongst fellow staff. Their knowledge and experiences should be shared

through writing, publishing and training. Since such valuable experiences tend to be accumulated over time, attention should be paid to favorable working conditions that will contribute to staff retention.

ALBERT COOK MEDICAL LIBRARY

The library was established by Dr. Albert Cook in 1924. Later, when the Faculty of Medicine was established in 1946, the library started serving higher medical education.

The Library houses an archive of the Sir Albert Cooks original handwritten patient records dating as far back to 1900. In 1965, the medical library was named after its founder, hence its official name "Sir Albert Cook Memorial Library". It is Uganda's major Biomedical/Health Sciences Library. In 1990, SatelLife introduced the library to electronic resources using e-mail. This opened the doors to accessing current literature and facilitating document delivery. The library mission is to meet study, teaching and research information needs for sustainable national and regional development.

COLLECTION

The library's rich collection includes serials, books, archives, CD-ROMs, slides, photographs and video tapes. The library is in the process of converting its manual catalogue to an online one by adding its stock to the Makerere University Library Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Some of the Albert Cook Library stock is available from the OPAC. It also has over 55,000 volumes of bound journals/periodicals, and about 100 current print titles as well as access to online full-text e-journals. It has a collection of reports from the Ministry of health, Non-Governmental Organisations in Uganda, and the World Health Organization (WHO) publications.

The library holds about 25,000 books/monographs, and a collection of dissertations/theses. It also has about 300 volumes of medical archives "The Sir Albert Cook Collection". This is a rich collection of archives comprising of Dr. Albert Cook personal library collection, Mengo hospital

records dating from 1897, Church Missionary Society documents, early textbooks and dictionaries of medicine, pamphlets, and reports photographs. These have attracted researchers and scholars from all over the world. The library provides a free literature search service from a number of medical/health databases which include AIDSLINE, Cochrane, HINARI, Medline, POPLINE an index database of Uganda Health Literature, Africa Index Medicus (AIM).

THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN ALBERT COOK MEDICAL LIBRARY

The value of Knowledge Management relates directly to the effectiveness with which the managed knowledge enables the members of an institution to deal with today's situations and effectively envision and create their future. Health sciences libraries in Uganda have all gone a step further to ensure that knowledge is managed and effectively utilized.

- Albert Cook Library has become a key knowledge management center in health sciences and has quite a number of information resources. These range from print to electronic and its now moving to the digitization of its resources through the Uganda Science Digital Libraries (USDL). In collaboration with the Main Library, Albert Cook has embarked on digitizing its local content collection using the DSpace software. The content includes research reports, dissertations and theses, as well as refereed articles published about Uganda. So far the Albert Cook Library started with content collection, and is now entering the content into DSpace. This can be viewed at www.dspace.mak.ac.ug/8080/dspace.
- With careful analysis of its users' needs, the library has strived to acquire some of the resources through its partners, for example: DFID/British Council and Kent, Surrey and Sussex Health Libraries and Knowledge Services and Dreyfus Health Foundation. The partners have facilitated information sharing through exchange programs, and also technical, financial and infrastructure support.

- Through the Online Public Access Catalogue (http://libis.mak.ac.ug:8000/cgi-bin/gw_42_20a/chameleon and the library website (<http://www.makerere.ac.ug/mulib/acooklib>), which serves as a portal for most sources of relevant knowledge a number of its electronic resources can be accessed. This has been made easy by the availability of information and technological infrastructure.
- The library is a knowledge reservoir of most medical literature in Uganda. The availability of a number of databases in its collection enables a number of users' accessibility. These have been indexed and archived and will soon be available in digital form. Use of the traditional methods of cataloguing and classification and now the availability of the Virtua system, a number of print and electronic resources are easily accessed.
- ~~ACL~~ has also had a long tradition of resource sharing and networking. This has been enhanced further by developments in IT. The formation of a Consortium of Uganda University Libraries (CUUL) will further enhance the cooperation and interlibrary lending that has been in existence. Both individual researchers and institutions will continue to benefit from this knowledge management role.
- To facilitate the implementation of knowledge management, ~~information~~ technology infrastructure has been put in place. With the support of a number of development partners and the Government of Uganda, computers and other infrastructure including the intranet and Internet are now available. These ensure that the acquisition, organization, storage and dissemination functions of the library are handled fast and easily.
- End user training programs have also played a vital role in organizing the medical school's knowledge which in turn impacts on educational and research processes in the school. An online tutorial has been designed for fresh students and staff of the medical school. The Albert Cook website has a link to the tutorial. This tutorial is meant for those who miss the physical training at the beginning of

- every academic year. Visit the tutorial at <http://www.makerere.ac.ug/mulib/acooklib/acmtutorial/index.htm>
- The provision of quality services is one of major objectives of this library, and through circulation, the usual user queries and interlibrary loans, lots of health information has been efficiently and effectively disseminated. This has further been enhanced by the availability of such services as current awareness service and selective dissemination of information. This has improved the quality of service delivery and research.
 - Albert Cook Library employs quality staff who process and repackage health information and are able to share the same with their clients. Professional staff continues to index information received from both internal researchers, students and academicians and other research communities. The library values its staff as knowledge assets and with their experience; they assist in offering and sharing health information. Health librarians have been active participants in health care promotion and some have played a number of roles in educational and clinical research. In some cases they have also partnered with those who serve in the medical profession. Through regular training, tutoring and mentoring of staff and students, utilization of information resources has been tremendously improved.
 - Albert Cook Library acts as a national health library in Uganda. It is therefore responsible not only for dissemination of health information to other health libraries and researchers but also availing them with health literature. Libraries like the Ministry of Health Resource Centre, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Library and other health centers countrywide have been beneficiaries of such literature.

CHALLENGES

Despite the success so far realized a number of problems continue to inhibit knowledge management practices in the library.

- In Albert Cook Library like most libraries in the developing countries small budgets continue to deter the growth of both print and electronic resources. This is coupled by the growing numbers of students who find the infrastructure unable to support both students' and academic staff research. Therefore, technologies that support the creation/acquisition, organization and dissemination of knowledge in the knowledge management system are dogged by the above.
- The rapid increase in communication technologies and information has created an overflow of information and knowledge. Cultural, social, and technological changes and economic pressures have produced a fast-changing environment, particularly in the work place. This calls for more qualified and experienced staff that will be able to meet the demands of knowledge management work; integrating and coordinating different disciplines that are the foundations of knowledge management.
- Like any other East African country, Uganda has of recent been faced with electric power shortages. This has led to power supply interruptions which affect use of computers, leading to limited utilization of electronic information.

THE WAY FORWARD

Albert Cook Library should be seen to be a valuable vehicle for developing, sharing and managing health information. It should avoid "reinventing the wheel" and continue to generate knowledge in response to health problems and every opportunity that arises geared towards knowledge management should be exploited.

The library should continue to raise awareness of knowledge management among its staff in particular, other health librarians and their institutions. It should continue to provide training in information technology and identify

and continue to share best practices. It's the mission of most health libraries to vigorously promote evidence-based practice and dissemination of research results that will continue to promote knowledge management.

CONCLUSION

Today, the public has begun to understand health libraries in new ways, this new understanding will continue to impact among other things, expectations of health librarians in the twenty first century. Those in this field should be aware that, to be successful, the health librarian must possess knowledge, skills and abilities that were not expected in the past. As health librarians we also have much to learn from the emerging roles of the health sciences and concentrate on the many ways in which we might assist users in the process of transforming information into knowledge. It must be appreciated that health science library resources both print and electronic are critical to most Universities' missions. Hence as keys to the centrality of our libraries, we have many different roles to fulfill in knowledge management. The existence of health libraries in the 21st century is threatened by new technologies that are empowering the individual, whether it is in the laboratory, clinic or the community, to gather access to information without the need to refer to experts for assistance. Despite this assertion "there is life after death"; the roles of the health libraries and health librarians are still needed for effective and efficient access to information resources.

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