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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT THROUGH LIBRARY SERVICES FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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Abstract

Knowledge Management is the explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge and its associated processes of creating, gathering, organising, diffusion, use and exploitation. Knowledge Management is about people and therefore, goal directed. Knowledge Management practices adopt total quality management concepts and best practices. The paper discusses the sharing of knowledge, knowledge versus information and the role of libraries in its organization.

Introduction

The knowledge economy is a new concept that has appeared worldwide in recent years. Knowledge Management as a sub-discipline of the Knowledge Economy, is a completely new concept and method of management. It works for converting intellectual assets of workers and staff members in the organization into higher productive forces - competition power and new value. Knowledge Management requires linkage of information with information, information with activities and information with man in order to realize the sharing of knowledge (including tacit and explicit knowledge). The conventional functions of a library are to collect, process, disseminate, store and utilize document information to provide service for the society. In the knowledge economy era, the library will become a treasure-house of human knowledge, participate in knowledge innovation, and become an important link in the knowledge innovation chain. In the 21st century, the library will inevitably face the new subject of Knowledge Management.

Data … Information … Knowledge … Wisdom, so goes the ladder of learning. Libraries have always been the supporting rungs in the ladder of learning from time immemorial. There was never a doubt that libraries facilitate effective learning and support the teaching-learning process. It would be a mere repetition of facts if history of libraries from ancient times was to be reviewed. It is also a fact that library professionals have, since the beginning, undertaken roles and responsibilities that transcend the frontiers of traditional librarianship.

Definition

There are numerous definitions of KM to be found at conferences, in print, and on the Web. The following are a representative sample, beginning with one of the most widely cited,

"…a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, managing and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These information assets may include databases, documents, policies and procedures as well as previously unarticulated expertise and experience resident in individual workers." (Gartner Group Inc, October 1996)

"Knowledge Management is the explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge and its associated processes of creating, gathering, organizing, diffusion, use and exploitation. It requires turning personal knowledge into corporate knowledge that can be widely shared throughout an organization and appropriately applied." [1]

'Knowledge' in this context is also a somewhat elusive concept, defined in various ways by different gurus. Thomas Davenport and Laurence Prusak offer the following pragmatic description of knowledge in organizations.

"Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organisations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organisational routines, processes, practices, and norms."[2]

Davenport and Prusak distinguish 'knowledge' from 'information', and information from 'data', on the basis of value-adding processes which transform raw material (for example, transaction records) into communicable messages (such as documents) and then into knowledge and other higher-order concepts. (For convenience, they include 'wisdom', 'insight', etc. in their working definition of organisational knowledge.) These value-adding processes include in the first instance contextualisation, categorisation, calculation, conversion and condensation; and in the second, connection, comparison, and conversation. Other commentators - notably Thomas Stewart - dismiss the notion of a data-to-wisdom hierarchy as bogus and unhelpful in this context, on the grounds that "one man's knowledge is another man's data".[3]

The importance of knowledge has come to the forefront with many business understanding that the value-propostiton for them was in the core business knowledge. This core business knowledge includes knowledge about processes, products, services, vendors, customers and employees that the employees themselves have. In this backdrop, organizations started the identification and nurturing of sources of knowledge within the organization. The

organizations realized that there were basically two main types of knowledge, tacit and explicit. Explicit knowledge was something that organization could manage in terms of formatting, storing, organizing and sharing. The challenge was the tacit knowledge. The only solution for tacit 'K' was to create channels where sharing could happen rather than managing the tacit knowledge.

Applications typically fall into the following broad categories

Knowledge databases and repositories (explicit knowledge) - storing information and documents that can be shared and re-used, for example, client presentations, competitor intelligence, customer data, marketing materials, meeting minutes, policy documents, price lists, product specifications, project proposals, research reports, training packs;

Knowledge route maps and directories (tacit and explicit knowledge) - pointing to people document collections and datasets that can be consulted, for example, 'yellow pages'/'expert locators' containing CVs, competency profiles, research interests;

Knowledge networks and discussions (tacit knowledge) - providing opportunities for face-to-face contacts and electronic interaction, for example, establishing chat facilities/'talk rooms', fostering learning groups and holding 'best practice' sessions.

Knowledge vs Information

The challenge of Knowledge Management is to determine what information within an organization qualifies as "valuable." All information is not knowledge, and all knowledge is not valuable. The key is to find the worthwhile knowledge within a vast sea of information.

1. Knowledge Management is about people. It is directly linked to what people know, and how what they know can support business and organizational objectives. It draws on

human competency, intuition, ideas, and motivations. It is not a technology-based concept. Although technology can support a Knowledge Management effort, it should not stop there.

2. Knowledge Management is orderly and goal-directed .It is inextricably tied to the strategic objectives of the organization. It uses only the information that is the most meaningful, practical, and purposeful.

3. Knowledge Management is ever-changing. There is no such thing as an immutable law in Knowledge Management. Knowledge is constantly tested, updated, revised, and sometimes even" obsoleted" when it is no longer practicable. It is a fluid, ongoing process.

4. Knowledge Management is value-added. It draws upon pooled expertise, relationships, and alliances. Organizations can further the two-way exchange of ideas by bringing in experts from the field to advise or educate managers on recent trends and developments. Forums, councils, and boards can be instrumental in creating common ground and organizational cohesiveness.

5. Knowledge Management is visionary. This vision is expressed in strategic business terms rather than technical terms, and in a manner that generates enthusiasm, buy-in, and motivates managers to work together toward reaching common goals.

6. Knowledge Management is complementary. It can be integrated with other organizational learning initiatives such as Total Quality Management (TQM). It is important for knowledge managers to show interim successes along with progress made on more protracted efforts such as multiyear systems, developments infrastructure, or enterprise architecture projects.

Knowledge Management Practices in Higher Academic Libraries

Information analysis and consolidation is the premier concept for Knowledge Management. Collecting appropriate and quality information, (in the context of usability) using the technology for systematic organization and its delivery to meet the specific requirements of the User Community (both in demand and anticipation). Though it seems to be a new practice carried out in this Knowledge Economy, particularly in multi national corporate environment, Dr.S.R.Ranganathan, Father of Indian Library Science, has recommended and discussed with his generic term 'documentation'. Consolidating details of pieces of information from scholarly publications, web resources, scanning popular magazines, dailies even via listening and watching mass media and recording the information to transfer it as a knowledge or skill so as to disseminate personally. Some of the practices like e-mail alerts, using library web pages, circulation of documents, and participation in mail forums, web blogs, instruction on e-resources and data bases, posting and subscription of RSS feeds and Web 2.0 technologies in LIS are Knowledge Management initiatives in Universities and Higher Academic Libraries. Above all, identifying the tacit knowledge in corridor discussions and through professional meetings and sharing to the academics in a formal and informal way is one of the best method of knowledge sharing in the libraries. This need the involvement of the library personnel to have better interaction with academics of the institution and vice versa.

Conclusion

As discussed above, Knowledge Management involves the understanding and perception of Librarian and Library professionals about the information and its facets in documentary, institutional and human resources. It is about process involved in sharing of the

knowledge practices in Higher Academic Institutions. Continuous and consistent involvement of library professionals in accessing the information from various sources, its systematic organization, scientific professionals and repackaging of the information in the desired models so as to communicate to the individuals and specialized groups to meet their specific needs at right time is the essential part of Knowledge Management in higher education. Special libraries, corporate libraries are taking the lead role in knowledge sharing practices. University and Higher Academic Libraries are yet to strengthen the processes and methods of Knowledge Management practices by having a separate unit so as to enable the role of Library and Information Services in the pursuit of academic excellence of faculty and scholars.

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