

## Adoption of Knowledge Management Strategies for Service Delivery in Libraries and Information Centers in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The main objective of this study was to review the literature on the benefits of adopting knowledge management strategies for service delivery in libraries and information centres to improve library and information services delivery. The systematic literature review approach was adopted for the study, and the review revealed the knowledge management strategies adopted in libraries and information centres, service delivery in libraries and information centres, benefits of adopting knowledge management strategies for improving service delivery in libraries and information centres, and inhibitors to knowledge management strategies adoption. However, the study concluded that adopting knowledge management strategies in libraries and information centres is very crucial in as much as the library aims at satisfying the information needs of its clientele and delivering services of high quality. Hence, the study recommends that there should be an institutionalization of knowledge sharing in libraries and information centres, there should be adequate funding for libraries and information centres to meet up with the universal standard of adopting knowledge management strategies, there should be modern ICT infrastructure to enable librarians, and information workers share knowledge electronically. There should be a standard power supply in libraries and information centres to enable them to function effectively and deliver services of high quality, and there should be regular training and retraining of librarians and information workers on the importance and benefits of adopting knowledge management strategies to reshape their mindsets and in turn slice away so many inhibitors to adopting knowledge management.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge Management, Personalization Strategy, Codification Strategy, Service Delivery.

### Introduction

Organizations are witnessing tremendous changes in recent years in improving quality service delivery due to the rapid utilization of knowledge brought about by the swift adoption of knowledge management strategies. Essentially, knowledge management embodies organizational processes that seek a synergistic combination of data and information processing capacity of information technologies and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings. However, as

a way of responding and surviving in the knowledge era of the knowledge-based economy (KBE), libraries and information centres are significantly transforming by adopting knowledge management (KM) strategies in order to become competitive in the provision of services (Mavodza, 2010). Moreover, in today's rapidly dynamic global economy and society, knowledge management has been viewed as a vibrant force and a critical source of success and value creation for organizations of all types that need to be managed painstakingly. As such, libraries and information workers are not divorced from this revolution which has profoundly impacted the mode of providing adequate and reliable information services to the clientele, thereby providing the gateway to a myriad of information sources.

### **Concept of Knowledge**

Knowledge has become a competitive factor that provides an essential cause for individual and organizational success. It is built up from data, information and prior knowledge. Data refer to raw facts without any processing, organizing or analysis that have little meaning and are normally structured but do not bear any information to use them in a particular context (Chini, 2005). Information refers to data accumulated to allow comparison, grouping, and categorizing, which have been processed to be useful (Sensky, 2002). While the term Knowledge refers to a mixture of values, contextual information, insights and experiences that can provide a mental framework that helps evaluate and incorporate new experiences and information (Trivella&Dimitrios, 2015).

Knowledge can be classified into so many ways, but most commonly, it is divided into two parts, i.e. explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (Nonaka& Takeuchi, 1995). Tacit (personalized) knowledge (TK) comes from the individual's mind and is founded on life experiences, reading, learning, environment, beliefs, points of view, technical skills, and other background characteristics. In comparison, explicit (codified) knowledge (EK) can be verbally explained (in formal and systemic language), codified through many sorts of data that can be stored and written down in specified documents. It involves transmittable know-how in formal and systematic language and can be stored and disseminated with technology (Ekore, 2014). Hence, in organizations such as libraries and information centres, analysis, interpretation and utilization of the word 'knowledge' is more relevant than in other social settings because it is charged with the responsibility of acquisition, utilization and dissemination of information to blend in with the new trends in satisfying the information needs of clienteles (Ekore, 2014).

### **Knowledge Management Strategies in Libraries and Information Centers**

Knowledge management strategies are seen as those techniques or approaches used to derive competitive advantage from the control and coordination of organizational knowledge flows. There are two types of KM strategies: system strategy, codification strategy, and human strategy, also called personalization strategy (Atkova&Tuomela-Pyykkönen, 2015).

**I.Codification strategy:** This strategy focuses on codifying and storing explicit knowledge in databases (systems) so that it can be accessed and used by other members of the organization (librarians and information workers). The strategy involves the transformation of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge in order to facilitate flows of organizational knowledge. Hence, it relies on reusing explicit knowledge, including documents such as previous work

project reports, lessons learned, and best practices. However, this strategy aims to codify and store knowledge where it can be easily accessed (database) and used by anyone who needs it.

**II. Personalization strategy:** This KM strategy usually involves sharing tacit knowledge through direct contact with the person (face to face) in possession of this knowledge. By contrast, the personalization strategy is based on a “person-to-person” approach and delivers customized services often practiced by organizations such as libraries and information centres that provide highly customized solutions to unique problems. However, this strategy, unlike the codification strategy, happens when you give people (librarians and information workers) access to codified information by encouraging active discussions and knowledge sharing between them and not the knowledge objects in a database. Hence, this strategy aims to organize direct communication between employees.

However, the following are some alternatives to determine a proper knowledge management strategy to adopt by libraries and information centres Lee, Hong & Suh, 2016)

- **Social Networks**

This refers to a more formal and structured institutional capacity for knowledge sharing, especially those in spheres that are critical to the organization. Social networks are one of the most common tools of Web 2.0-4.0 technologies that support collaboration, knowledge sharing, interaction and communication among users in different places who come together with a common interest or goal (Balubaid, 2013).

- **Communities of Practice**

Communities of practice (Cops) are formal and informal groupings of people who voluntarily share similar interests and goals. They are another way of organizing work interactions between employees such as librarians and information workers which are very effective in leveraging knowledge flows through the use of the internet or intranet discussion groups or other computer-mediated communications facilities, such as blogs to tap into the knowledge that is generated and held collectively (Keong & Al-Hawamdeh, 2002).

- **Job Rotation**

This is a form of staff development to improve their professional skills, which increases motivation to share knowledge on technical skills that arose from rotations between different areas of the library. Jarvi and Uusitalo (2004) reveal that staff benefited from job rotation by acquiring competencies and skills by sharing experiences and expertise.

- **Knowledge Repositories**

This strategy facilitates the documentation of relevant operational knowledge in order to mitigate attrition challenges and aid in the learning period for new employees. It facilitates the documentation of relevant operational knowledge in order to mitigate attrition challenges and aid in the learning period for new employees (Business Consulting Services, 2003).

- **Staff training/Human Resources Development**

This approach encourages a one-to-one instruction mode of sharing knowledge between librarians and information workers, which is the best and the most common in library training. Hence, Cabrera and Cabrera (2005) emphasize that training is useful in retaining organizational knowledge and intellectual intelligence.

The use of extensive training and development programs could help employees to gain skills and build confidence to interact and share tacit knowledge with others. Hence, Cabrera and Cabrera (2005) emphasize that this approach encourages a one-to-one instruction mode of sharing knowledge between librarians and information workers, which is the best and the most common in library training.

- **Mentorship Programs**

Mentorship is one-way knowledge in an organization can be shared or transferred, whereby the mentor demonstrates how an activity is to be performed. In mentoring, the mentor demonstrates how an activity should be performed and can enhance the learning experience. Hence, Mentorship programs as a KM strategy enable senior employees to share their knowledge, specific insights and skills with their juniors quickly, such that when the experienced employees leave the organization, the knowledge would still be retained (Level & Mach, 2005).

- **Succession Planning,**

Succession planning is a KM strategy which attempts to plan for the right number of skilled employees to cover retirements, death, serious illness or promotion and any new positions which may be created in future organizational plans. It is a long-term approach that takes up an important part of an organization's human resource management, which can improve leadership development (Durst & Wilhelm 2012).

### **Service Delivery in Libraries and Information Centers**

Libraries and information centres are dedicated to providing free and equitable access to information for all, be it in written, electronic or audiovisual form. They embrace the social responsibility to offer services that bridge social, political and economic barriers and traditionally make a special effort to extend their services to marginalized people. Therefore, service delivery refers to activities that generate value and benefits customers (clientele) within a specific time and place. It also refers to delivering services and products to customers or clients (Lovelock & Wright, 2002).

Quality service delivery in modern libraries and information centre settings is critical because of the rapidly changing preferences and the emergence of multiple customer/clientele segments with different tastes, values and patterns. A study by Kadir (2000) on service quality in Malaysia indicated that clients' service improvement should be prioritized to achieve performance and provide quality service. In view of libraries and information centres, Damanhuri (2005) in a study asserts that clients' satisfaction means the ability of librarians and information providers to manage and share knowledge strategically that would enhance a good and lasting relationship with users through qualitative service delivery. Thus, the quality of knowledge shared is measured based on the approach used by Chiu (2006), which is relevance, easy to understand, accuracy, completeness, trustworthiness and timely, which in turn gives librarians and information providers the ability to provide fast services, of high quality and offer satisfaction to the customer. Hence, KM strategies and service innovation become an effective way for an organization such as libraries and information centres to accelerate their growth rate and profitability (Chen, Tsou & Huang, 2009). Therefore, to achieve a competitive service position, libraries and information centres as service organizations must deliver services and products in new and creative ways, applying their specialized competencies in the form of knowledge and skills to the public through embedding knowledge management strategies (Vargo&Lusch, 2008).

## **Benefits of Adopting Knowledge Management Strategies for Improving Service Delivery in Libraries and Information Centers in Nigeria**

In a knowledge-based organization such as universities, colleges, polytechnics, libraries, and information centres, adopting sound knowledge management strategies is very important and beneficial because most of the employees are knowledge workers that seek to deliver effective and efficient service. However, the following are some benefits of adopting knowledge management strategies for improving service delivery in libraries and information centres (Garfield, 2014).

**I. Improve productivity:** adopting KM strategies enables librarians and information workers to enhance their productivity in service provision by providing them with all the necessary knowledge and information required to satisfy their clients' queries without wasting much time and energy.

**II. Makes best problem-solving experiences reusable:** When the knowledge of more experienced team members is not properly shared with new employees, they can lose valuable time seeking solutions to the same problems their predecessors first encountered. Hence, Howlett (2019) reveals that consistently adopting strategies would serve as a blueprint or mirror for solving subsequent problems of similar nature.

**III. Providing methods, tools, templates, techniques, and examples:** Methods, tools, templates, techniques, and examples are the building blocks supporting repeatable processes and procedures. These consistently streamline work, improve quality, and ensure compatibility across libraries and information centres.

**IV. Enhanced customer service delivery:** An all-inclusive knowledge base is a valuable tool so that an employee (librarian) gets empowered to respond to a comprehensive range of customer queries. Hence, knowledge sharing and cross-collaboration between librarians and information workers would help to increase the value (service) presented to the clientele Yahyapour (2015).

**V. Cost savings:** One of the core benefits of knowledge management is the money it saves. However, Garfield (2014) states that savings can come from reducing the time employees (librarians and information workers) spend searching for information, reducing the number of systems needed to store knowledge, eliminating errors caused by lack of information, and eliminating duplicated work or research.

**VI. Promote innovation and cultural change:** Knowledge management encourages the sharing of ideas, collaboration and access to the latest information. It also allows librarians to stimulate innovation and the cultural changes needed to evolve the organization and meet changing information needs of its clientele Inkinen (2016).

**VII. Avoid redundant effort:** No one likes repetition. However, people do so all the time for many reasons. Avoiding effort duplication can save you time and money; it keeps employees motivated and streamlines work. So, by adopting KM strategies, librarians and information workers can have more time to invent something new.



**VIII. More active learning:** Knowledge management, particularly in knowledge sharing, yields improved learning outcomes. This is because the knowledge originates from the everyday experiences of employees (librarians and information workers) directly.

**IX. Communicating important information widely and quickly:** Libraries and information centres suffer from information overload from various sources. However, knowledge management helps address this problem through personalized portals, targeted subscriptions, RSS feeds, tagging, and enterprise search engines (Whelan, 2011).

**X. Retaining employees' memory/expertise:** When an experienced colleague retires or moves on, it is often a sad occasion. Yes, you will wish them well and sign the giant card, but losing a valuable team member can be hard. Hence, adopting sound KM strategies would curb this loss through personalization and codification strategies (Carcary, 2011).

### **Inhibitors to Knowledge Management Strategies Adoption**

The difficulty of adopting knowledge management strategies among librarians may be related to multiple factors influencing the free flow and utilization of knowledge. Dewah and Mutula (2016), in their study of knowledge retention strategies in public sector organizations in sub-Saharan Africa, establish several inhibitors to managing knowledge assets that included lack of appropriate technology, limited shortage of skills, lack of incentives or rewards to share knowledge; and limited commitment from senior management. However, basically, inhibitors to adopting knowledge management practices and strategies arise from a combination of individual, organizational and technological factors (Assefa, 2013).

### **Individual Inhibitors to Knowledge Sharing amongst Team Members**

Lack of awareness about the importance of adopting knowledge management strategies and practices hinders knowledge sharing among organizational team members. This is because those that know are not visible, and those who need knowledge do not know those who have it (Wendling, 2013), lack of trust among team members (librarians and information workers) is the biggest barrier impeding the adoption of KM practices and strategies thereby impeding sharing and utilization of knowledge with each other (Phung, 2016). Team members' unwillingness to share or hoard knowledge is a dominant barrier to adopting KM approaches (Khalil & Shea, 2012). Atkova and Tuomela-Pyykkönen (2015), in a study, posit that knowledge management is complicated by the nature of the two types of knowledge and the fact that explicit knowledge tends to be easier to transfer than tacit. Riege (2005) notes that lack of time dedicated to knowledge management is a common barrier to adopting KM strategies. Thus, the availability of time affects a team member's (librarian) attitude to sharing or withholding knowledge (Assefa, 2013).

Assefa (2013) indicates that communication skills include both verbal and codification skills. Hence, team members need to be able to both express their ideas verbally and document them in writing if they are to perfectly utilize KM practices and strategies. According to Wendling (2013), the relationship between members of a virtual team, especially between members of its different sub-teams, has an influence that could present a barrier to adopting knowledge management practices. Motivation has a strong influence on the knowledge management adoption behaviours of team members (librarians) (Phung, 2016). Hence, team

members (librarians and information workers) may not want to share their knowledge with others simply because they are not motivated enough (Khalil & Shea, 2012). Moreover, Jeenger and Kant (2013) believe that the fears and attitudes (culture) of team members are important factors that influence the successful adoption of knowledge management.

### **Organizational Inhibitors to Knowledge Sharing**

Kant and Singh (2008) warn that a lack of organizational structure can discourage KM activities and approaches, which certainly hinders knowledge sharing. Suppiah and Sandhu (2011) claim that hierarchical structure is bureaucratic that hampers adopting KM approaches. Hence, the structure that does not support individuals to communicate vertically is not knowledge-sharing friendly. Long and Fahey (2000) point out that 84 percent of knowledge management projects fail due to a lack of management support, and as a result, knowledge creation, utilization and sharing are hampered. Yao, Kam and Chan (2007) point out that a lack of motivation and a reward system discourages people from creating, sharing, and using knowledge. However, the lack of funds dedicated to the initial investment, development and running/operational maintenance costs of knowledge management systems is a major financial barrier to adopting KM strategies (Jeenger & Kant, 2013).

### **Technological Inhibitors to Knowledge Sharing**

Technology is an enabler for knowledge management activities; if it is not properly designed and managed, it becomes an inhibitor to knowledge sharing. This happens when there is exists a lack of technological infrastructure, when technology is complex to use, and lack of skilled staff to design applications, make use of, and also support the technology. Lack of common knowledge infrastructure and social networks discourage the smooth adoption of KM strategies (codification strategy) (Paquette & Desouza, 2011). In addition, complex and unfriendly systems create communication gaps that hamper knowledge management activities (Ghobadi & Mathiassen, 2016). Furthermore, ICTs that are inadequate in meeting team members' expectations can also impede knowledge management activities due to a mismatch between team members' expectations of what ICTs can do for them and what ICTs can actually deliver (Marouf & Khalil, 2015). Therefore, ICTs can become a barrier to adopting knowledge management strategies unless assessments and efforts are regularly made to ensure that team members' knowledge-sharing needs are met.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that in the information age, the adoption of knowledge management strategies geared towards the improvement of quality service delivery in libraries and information centres has become a necessity. However, the study found that enabling knowledge management strategies was the basis for success and survival in as much as libraries and information centres want to escalate the quality of their service delivery. Hence, adopting knowledge management strategies can be improved by institutionalization knowledge sharing in libraries and information centres and providing the necessary funding and ICT infrastructure to enable librarians and information workers to share their tacit knowledge as this would help to enhance and ascertain a high level of client's satisfaction which is the primary objective of librarianship and information provision.

## Way Forward

Based on the study review and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:-

1. There should be an institutionalization of knowledge sharing in libraries and information centres.
2. There should be adequate funding for libraries and information centres to meet the universal standard of adopting knowledge management strategies.
3. There should be modern ICT infrastructure to enable librarians and information workers to share knowledge electronically.
4. There should be a standard power supply in libraries and information centres to enable them to function effectively and deliver services of high quality.
5. There should be regular training and retraining of librarians and information workers on the importance and benefits of adopting knowledge management strategies to reshape their mindsets and, in turn slice away so many inhibitors to adopting knowledge management.

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