

Perception of Knowledge Management Practices among Academic Librarians in Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The main focus of this study was to examine the role of academic libraries as regards to knowledge management practices and librarian's perception. The study was limited to two academic libraries in Edo State, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised of 127 academic librarians in the selected libraries. Total enumeration sampling technique was adopted for the study due to the small sample size of the population. Questionnaire was used for as instrument for data collection. Out of the one hundred and twenty-seven (127) questionnaires administered, eighty-five (85) were duly completed, returned and used for the study, representing 70% response rate. The findings revealed that the perception of librarians on knowledge management practices in Edo State was Knowledge values are explicitly stated and promulgated. This means that the librarians have good perception about knowledge management practices and also agreed that it is a key function of the library; inadequate information technology infrastructure, absence of facilities for knowledge management practices in the library are the major challenges faced by the academic librarian in Edo State in effective knowledge management. The study recommends that: Library managers (University Librarians) should seek for clear understanding of Knowledge Management Practices and creates Knowledge Management Department/Centre in the library through the Tertiary Institution Knowledge Centre provided by Nigerian Communication Commission through Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) in order to take full responsibility as knowledge management practices is found to be the function of academic libraries; University Librarians should persuade the university managements with the requisite framework on the needs for the establishment of Knowledge Management practices with the provision of adequate information technological infrastructure, and availability of the required facilities for effective KM practices.

Keywords: Knowledge Management Practices, Academic Libraries, Perception

Introduction

Knowledge they say creates wealth, in another sense, knowledge is seen as power when it is applied in the right way. In this era of technology, knowledge has been accepted as one of the factors of production. Knowledge Management (KM) therefore, is a process used to improve the performance of individuals and organizations by leveraging knowledge assets. KM involves the identification, creation, capture, representative distribution, use and re-use of knowledge. The provider of knowledge is an indispensable fuel for the engine of development. Knowledge management unites intellectual practices and activates channels of knowledge. KM plays important role in the production of the much needed skilled manpower found at universities. Knowledge management is a broad term that describes many components in the identification of information production and delivery system. These elements include (but are not limited to) the categories of knowledge needed to support overall business strategy; capturing the knowledge that employers and customers need in a central repository; and describing, collecting, classifying and disseminating information throughout the organization.

According to Adebayo, Helo, and Kekale(2013), knowledge management has become the most important phenomenon for most of the economies of the world in the recent decades. Knowledge has been recognized as the driver of productivity and economic growth in the knowledge-based economy. Countries around the globe are reviewing and restructuring regulations, financial operations and ownership in an attempt to take advantage of knowledge economy. In this economy, there is a gradual shift from material goods to intangible goods. Stewart (2011) highlighted the importance of knowledge when he stated “Knowledge has become the primary ingredient of what we make, do, buy and sell”. As a result, managing it, that is, finding and growing intellectual capital, storing it, selling it, sharing it has become the most important economic task of individuals, business and nations”. In July 1999, Tony Blair, the former British Prime Minister said “the knowledge economy is the economy of future”. The Government of Nigeria has also realized the importance of knowledge economy and established the National Knowledge Commission that has identified knowledge as new determinants to increase Nigeria’s competitive advantage in the field of knowledge through the establishment of knowledge centres in the education sector championed by Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC). It has also realized the importance of libraries and library professionals in facilitating inclusive society where Knowledge is power and accessible to all. Obviously, the application of knowledge management to libraries assumes greater significance and this is particularly true. Also, the knowledge and expertise of academic librarians needs to be seen as library’s greatest asset. Since librarians have been managing knowledge from time immemorial and academic librarians in particularly, University librarians should equip with rich research information and skills; hence they may stake their claim as their organization’s best-qualified knowledge managers (Mahmood, 2013).

The concept of Knowledge management in libraries as a completely new method of management demands change in its conventional management. The roles of librarians need to be shifted from information providers to knowledge managers and therefore they need to constantly update or acquire new skills and knowledge.

According to Taiwo (2012), academic librarian as knowledge seeker need to play active roles in searching for innovative solutions to the issues involved in adapting new environments. Knowledge management is a viable and effective management tool by which academic libraries can improve their operational efficiency and knowledge products and services. It is conscious strategy of providing right knowledge to the right users at the right time with a right expense of financial and human resources. Therefore, the main focus of this study is to examine the role of academic libraries with regard to knowledge management practices and the librarian's perception.

Problem Statement

The need for KM in libraries in enhancing service delivery has been recognized both locally and globally. Roknuzzaman and Katsuhiro (2012) hold the view that KM should be a very common practice in day- to- day library work because of the libraries long tradition with the dissemination of information and knowledge. However, the common problem found in most studies revealed that Knowledge Management have not addressed the level and strategies needed for Knowledge Management application in academic libraries even though when some donors have made available knowledge centres which are attached to University libraries. There is also need to put measures in place to enhance Knowledge Management acceptability, and improve the accessibility and utilization of knowledge assets in academic libraries. Although studies have been carried out on Knowledge Management in libraries much have not been done as to the level of KM application in academic libraries. This is one of the gaps that this study sought to fill. Hence this study was conceived with a view to examining the perception of knowledge management practices among academic librarians in Edo State, Nigeria. This study is primarily limited to the perception of Knowledge Management practices amongst librarians in Ambrose Alli University Library and John Harris Library university of Benin Edo State Nigeria.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine the perception of Academic Librarians on knowledge management practices as a function of academic libraries;
2. Ascertain the effectiveness of the libraries' culture and environment in enhancing knowledge sharing among library stakeholders in Edo State;
3. Find out the challenges faced by Academic librarians in effective knowledge management.

Literature Review

Alavi and Leidner (2011), proposed a four Knowledge Management (KM) process consisting of creation, storage, retrieval, transfer and application. Yahya and Goh (2012), on their part postulated a five KM process consisting of knowledge acquisition, knowledge documentation, knowledge transfer, knowledge creation and knowledge application. Maponya (2004), argued that the main focus of KM is the people, he is of the view that “organizations often suffer permanent loss of valuable experts through dismissals, redundancies, retirement and death” if attempts had not been taken to manage the individuals who have knowledge. This is because a lot of “knowledge is stored in the heads of the people and it is often lost if not captured elsewhere”. Maponya (2004), went further to assert that this is a very crucial stage to the success of KM in organization as it enables organizations to identify knowledge held within the organization but scattered in bits and pieces throughout an organization. In this regard, libraries are urged to identify the expertise and the skills of staff and capture it to avoid collective loss of organizational memory, and also advice the University libraries of the need to “devise systems to identify people’s expertise and develop ways of sharing it (Maponya, 2004).

Aswath and Gupta (2013), are of the view that the success of university libraries and information centers in support of the mission of their parent institutions which is to generate knowledge and to equip people with knowledge in order to serve the society and advance the wellbeing of mankind will depend upon their ability to utilize knowledge of its staff to serve the user community. They continue to argue that libraries can only realize such a goal by planning to apply KM. Shanhong (2012), put it very clearly that the role of the library, in the knowledge economy era, is to become a treasure house of human knowledge, participate in knowledge innovation and become an important link in the knowledge innovation chain.

Lee (2013), was also very categorical on the new role of libraries in the 21st century. To him the, “new role of libraries in the 21st century needs to be as a learning and knowledge centre for their users as well as the intellectual commons for their respective communities”. A study by Mosoti and Masheka (2013) carried out in 69 profit and non-profit organizations in Nairobi revealed that those organizations that had adopted knowledge management posited positive results. Townley (2011), observed that in spite of the huge amounts of information about their operations, libraries rarely use their operational information to create or apply organizational knowledge. He is also of the view that the emerging field of knowledge management offers academic libraries the opportunity to improve effectiveness both for themselves and their parent institutions. Lin (2015), identified perception aspect as one of the four knowledge management gaps that must be addressed before implementing KM. Perception is to help establish how librarians at various levels of library hierarchy perceived KM. Where perception of an idea or practice is positive application becomes easy and the reverse is the case. Perception was then investigated as a factor influencing KM application in university libraries. Choy (2005), noted that, many researchers have insisted that knowledge –friendly culture must be present or nurtured in order to achieve KM

implementation success. An organizational culture reflects the spoken and unspoken values which are adopted by staff in their daily activities. Figallo& Rhine (2012), advice that to get that mind flow going, there is need to develop practices and develop compatible technical systems that attract and support participation. They also hold that, “knowledge does not always come neatly packaged and in an active and open knowledge network, it may sometimes be presented in unsettling forms.

Flynn (2014), argues that one of the key elements that support KM process is organizational culture. To Flynn, the creation of a knowledge sharing culture in which employees believe that knowledge sharing is a critical success factor at the individual and group level was the first step in the implementation of a KM process. Debowski (2016), holds that knowledge communities are characterized as open communicative culture which encourages sharing, tolerance, collaboration and trust. Sharing knowledge freely is almost always a difficult assignment. Staff fails to share knowledge within the organization due to reasons such as lack of trust, feelings that it is not valued, feelings of loss of power, status and prestige, loss of job opportunity among others. Wong (2015), points out that giving incentive to employees helps to stimulate and reinforce the positive behaviors and culture needed for effective KM.

Methodology

Survey research design was used. The population of the study comprised of all the 127 librarians in Ambrose Alli University Library and John Harris University of Benin. Total enumeration sampling technique was adopted for the study due to the small size of the population. The questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The technique used in data analysis was descriptive statistics (simple percentage (%), tables and frequency count, mean and standard deviation) with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Out of one hundred and twenty-seven (127) copies of the questionnaires administered to librarians in the academic libraries studied, eighty-five (85) were duly filled and returned successfully, representing 70% of the total administered questionnaire used for the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Perception of Librarians on Knowledge Management Practices as a Function of Academic Libraries.

Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD
There is a climate of openness, trust and tolerance in Knowledge mgt Practice.	24(28.2%)	32(37.6%)	15(17.7%)	14(16.5%)	2.8	0.56
University libraries need to devise System to identify expertise and capture their Knowledge.	31(36.5%)	19(22.4%)	13(15.3%)	22(25.9%)	2.7	0.54
Knowledge policies are formulated and accessible to librarians.	31(36.5%)	28(32.9%)	13(15.3%)	13(15.3%)	2.7	0.58
Knowledge values are explicitly stated and promulgated.	39(45.9%)	21(24.7%)	11(12.9%)	14(16.5%)	3.0	0.6
Knowledge have been managed and Promoted in the library.	18(21.2%)	29(34.1%)	22(25.9%)	16(18.8%)	2.6	0.52

KEY: SA = Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, D = Disagreed, SD = Strongly Disagreed

Table 1 revealed that 39(45.9%) of the respondent agreed to a very high extent that Knowledge values are explicitly stated and promulgated. It was strongly agreed that University libraries need to devise systems to identify expertise and capture their knowledge with 31(36.5%). The respondent agreed that Knowledge have been managed and promoted in the library with 29(34.1%) respectively.

The findings as shown in table 1 is in line with Rogers (2012)who posits that if an innovation is perceived to be a better substitute to what people are used to, is compatible with existing systems or practices.

Table 2: The Effectiveness of Libraries' Culture and Environment in Enhancing Knowledge Sharing Among Library Stakeholders

Items	Strongly AgreedAgreed	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	—	SD
The library has an incentive package for sharing of new ideas or innovations for staff.	20 (23.5%)	31 (36.5%)	11 (12.9%)	2.61	0.52
Knowledge –friendly culture must be present or nurtured in order to achieve KM implementation success.	35(41.2%)	12(14.1%)	8(9.4%)	3.1	0.62
The library management provides Monetary incentives for sharing knowledge.	18(21.2%)	22(25.9%)	16(18.8%)	2.6	0.52
Library structure is open to facilitate Knowledge sharing.	30(35.3%)	11(12.9%)	14(16.5%)	2.9	0.58
Library structure has provision for meeting rooms for knowledge sharing and discussions.	35(41.2%)	20(23.5%)	12(14.1%)	2.91	0.58

Table 2 reveals that for effectiveness of the libraries in maintaining culture and environment in enhancing knowledge sharing among library stakeholders in Edo State. Knowledge – friendly culture must be present or nurtured in order to achieve Knowledge Management implementation success, (x =3.1) ranked the highest followed by library structure has provision for meeting rooms for knowledge sharing and discussions (x =2.91), library structure is open to facilitate Knowledge sharing (x =2.9), library has an incentive package for sharing of new ideas or innovations for staff (x =2.61) the library management provide Monetary incentives for sharing knowledge (x =2.6) while the esharing among academic libraries stakeholders in Edo State. This implies that the libraries studied have put in place several measures in encouraging knowledge sharing culture. The finding corroborates the study of Choy (2005) who noted that, many researchers have insisted that knowledge – friendly culture must be present or nurtured in order to achieve KM implementation success that will make the organizational culture reflects the spoken and unspoken values which are adopted by librarians in their daily activities. But the respondents disagreed on the incentive for new innovations. Giving incentives or package for sharing of new ideas or innovations by library patrons and librarians for sourcing for the right experts to give the valid and required information was also found to ineffective. This affirm the study of Wong (2015) that “giving incentives to employees helps to stimulate and reinforce the positive behaviours and culture needed for effective KM

Table 3: Challenges faced by Librarians in Effective Knowledge Management

Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	—
Inadequate Information Infrastructure In the Library	40(47.1%)	24(28.2%)	19(22.4%)		3(3.5%)		3.2 0.64
Poor Leadership Support of Academic libraries In Edo State	12(14.1%)	14(16.5%)	28(32.9%)		31(36.5%)		2.1 0.42
Knowledge management practices are too Expensive and time consuming to implement	35(41.2%)	16(18.8%)	23(27.1%)		11(12.9%)		2.9 0.58
Lack of training and re-training programming Knowledge Management practice for libraries	25(29.4%)	15(17.7%)	21(24.7%)		24(28.2%)		2.5 0.5

KEY: SA= Strongly Agreed, A=Agreed, D=Disagreed, SD=Strongly Disagreed

Table 3, reveals the challenges faced by librarians in effective Knowledge Management practices. as shown in this table the greatest challenges faced by librarians is inadequate information technology infrastructure in the library (x =3.2), followed by absence of facilities set aside where knowledge management practices can be done formally or informally (x =3.0), it was also revealed that Knowledge management practices are too expensive and time consuming to implement (x =2.9), Lack of training and re-training programme in Knowledge Management practice for librarians was another challenge with(x =2.5) Based on the findings, it was revealed that the greatest challenges faced by librarians is inadequate information technology infrastructure and facilities for knowledge management practices in the library. The findings in table 3 corroborated the study of Maingi (2007), that tried to assess how ready universities in were for KM revealed that most universities were not prepared for KM and a lot more needed to be proactively and purposively done.

Summary of Findings

The findings were discussed based on the research questions formulated from the objectives of the study on the perception of librarians on Knowledge Management as a function of academic libraries.

1. The study revealed that the perception of librarians on knowledge management practices in Edo State was Knowledge values are explicitly stated and promulgated. It was discovered that Knowledge –friendly culture must be present or nurtured in order to achieve Knowledge Management implementation success among academic librarians in Edo State.
2. Inadequate information technology infrastructure in the library and absence of facilities set aside where knowledge management practices can be done formally or informally were the challenges faced by the librarians in effective Knowledge Management practices in Edo State.

Conclusion

This study sought to identify the perception of knowledge management practices among librarians in Ambrose Alli University and University of Benin, Edo State. Findings from this study have clearly showed that KM in Edo State university libraries is weak. Factors militating against effective KM practices in university libraries were enormous. The study established that there was lack of clear understanding of knowledge management process and its associated practices leading to failure to have KM incorporated as a library function or formally endorsed. University libraries lacked KM strategies and policies to guide the process and hence left KM function without an official back up. Findings also revealed that funds are not allocated for KM practices. Lack of leadership involvement in driving KM initiatives was identified as the most critical factor that had affected KM application negatively.

Lack of an incentive package and appropriate KM competences also negate KM application and practices.

On a more positive note, all the librarians were passionate about KM and concurred that they had intentions of incorporating it in to library operations. Hence, the practice of KM should be revived in academic libraries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

1. Library managers (University Librarians) should seek for clear understanding of Knowledge Management Practices and create Knowledge Management Department/Centre in the libraries in order to take full responsibility of knowledge management practices as academic libraries.
2. In order to ensure effectiveness of the libraries' culture and environment in enhancing knowledge sharing among library stakeholders, policies and guidelines should be formulated by academic libraries on knowledge management practices to include incentives or package for sharing of new ideas or innovations by library patrons and librarians for sourcing for the right experts.
3. University Librarians should persuade the university managements with the requisite framework on the needs for the establishment of Knowledge Management practices with the provision of adequate information technological infrastructure, and availability of the required facilities for effective KM practices

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