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Building the Knowledge Culture

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Librarians? Or Knowledge Services Professionals? Changing Trends in the Profession

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Abstract

The role of libraries has notably shifted from what is generally thought of as “traditional library services” (that is, reactive service delivery) to the current proactive and – in many cases – interactive or integrated library service delivery status as in the popular “embedded” library and research services in many organizations with specialized libraries.

Likewise, the professional title has evolved along these shifts to new titles and job descriptions such as "documentalist," "information manager," "information professional," and now "knowledge manager" or "knowledge services professional." These changes have been required because library patrons (in every type of library) now require these new levels of attention, market demand which equally influences professional accrediting institutions as they establish educational policy for librarians moving toward more relevant innovative service delivery.

The changes have also led to a new way of thinking about knowledge management (KM) in service delivery functions and professions, especially in those service-delivery professionals such as librarianship. In many lines of work, the KM concept can be off-

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putting and sometimes perceived as irrelevant, so many of service-delivery functions and professions have turned to the concept of knowledge services, the management and service-delivery methodology that brings together information management, KM, and strategic learning (organizational learning), all enterprise-wide activities in which librarians have particularly well-developed and strongly supported expertise.

This paper presents and describes best practices and challenges shared by KM, knowledge services, and knowledge sharing participants in workshops conducted during 2014. Among the topics to be discussed are the library knowledge services audit, the library as a knowledge culture, library webpages mash ups, embedded librarianship, information literacy curriculum development and delivery, and the development of institutional repositories.

Introduction

Librarians work in a “knowledge domain”, working with strategic knowledge for companies or organizations. The focus is on how knowledge is used in the advancement of organizational goals, in order to ensure that the company or the organization succeeds in achieving its mission. The librarians’ role is to make an impact on the world of knowledge and how knowledge is used (and appreciated) in the workplace. This is achieved by directing knowledge development and knowledge sharing (often referred to as “KD/KS”) on career paths that impact on KM and knowledge services.

Knowledge Services

Knowledge services is defined as the converging of information management, knowledge management (KM), and strategic learning as a management and service delivery methodology. Knowledge services is linked to an enterprise-wide knowledge strategy, an organizational business strategy that “takes into account the company’s intellectual resources and capabilities, Zack (1999).

With knowledge services usually defined as this convergence, these component activities provide focus for the knowledge strategist for aligning the corporate knowledge strategy with the organization’s business strategy or mission. As employees, librarians performing as knowledge strategists are expected to design and plan knowledge-related activities and policy, and they are particularly expected to give attention to future knowledge-related roles and activities that will affect corporate or organizational success.

A summary description of knowledge services can describe the methodology as conversations and talking with people about how knowledge services are the convergence of information management, KM, and strategic learning, all pulled together for the benefit of an organization. And knowledge services, as we know, are both strategic and operational, and without attention to knowledge services organization/company can’t succeed.

Librarians? Or Knowledge Services Professionals?

In this environment, librarianship is changing and, indeed, must change; librarians in all sectors of the profession must review how they work and move forward in fundamentally similar ways (in many cases as they are already doing). Librarians must master new technologies for delivering knowledge and recognize the difference between information and knowledge. This is achievable by developing new organizational structures; new management techniques and establishing new relationships with information/knowledge users.

As librarians work in the knowledge domain, naturally Peter F. Drucker's famous term – the “knowledge worker” – comes into the picture. These are the employees, as Drucker described them in his 1973 *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* who undertake such activities as writing, analyzing, and advising. They are often not thought of as knowledge professionals, *per se*, and much of this work is performed by subject matter specialists in all areas of an organization. And it is this practice which leads, in some organizations, to the “promotion” (quote – unquote) of these individuals – people who act and communicate with knowledge within a specific subject area – to a larger or broader organizational role as “knowledge manager.” In this case, the connection with formal or academic KM learning, or even professional development or strategic learning, is often limited or self-driven.

A second role is that of the strategic knowledge professional, often thought of as “information professionals,” “content professionals,” records managers, archivists, specialist librarians, and working in other related roles supporting the management of the organization's knowledge domain. These employees can usually be counted on to contribute to an enterprise-wide understanding of a subject or group of subjects through focused analysis, design and/or development, and they use their research skills to define problems and to identify alternatives. They generally connect to professionals in other disciplines and work with captured knowledge – tangible information – in physical or electronic repositories, with the distinction being that the knowledge these professionals manage is strategic, directly connected to organizational or corporate effectiveness.

Knowledge Services Audit

The knowledge services audit is one of the common knowledge management tools and techniques. It is a qualitative evaluation or assessment tool that seeks to study the effectiveness of information and knowledge flows within an organization as well as examine information needs throughout the organization – the “knowledge transfer networks”. It investigates an organization's knowledge “health”. As such, the knowledge services audit details not only knowledge-sharing gaps to which attention must be given, but – from a more positive perspective – identifies and examines those elements of the knowledge-sharing process that are being done well, frequently with attention to how that “good” service delivery can be enhanced or, in many cases, replicated in other knowledge exchange activities.

A knowledge services audit is vital as it gives an organization a comprehensive picture of its strengths and weakness by looking at problems and putting the information in the context of the problem for results based outputs. Like all management elements having to do with information and knowledge transfer, the successful knowledge services audit is (and must be if it is to be successful) people-centered and people-focused.

As a process, the knowledge services audit seeks to address questions such as:

- What are the organization's knowledge needs?
- What knowledge assets or resources does it have and where are they?
- What gaps exist in its knowledge?
- How does knowledge flow around the organization?
- What are the blockages that prevent or impede knowledge flow
- How does the traditional knowledge management construct (people + process + technology) function in a library, library-like, or other research-focused setting?

When answered, these questions provide a classic and clear picture of an organization's knowledge structure, with the results providing great value in establishing or strengthening processes and systems to tackle knowledge development and knowledge sharing shortcomings.

Some of the key benefits of a knowledge services audit according to St. Clair (2009) include:

- a clear identify of what knowledge is needed to support overall organizational goals and individual and team activities
- evidence of the extent to which knowledge is being effectively managed and indicates where improvements are required
- evidence-based account of the knowledge that exists in an organization, how that knowledge moves around in, and is used by, that organization
- a map of what knowledge exists in the organization and where it exists, as well as revealing gaps, reveals pockets of untapped knowledge
- a map of knowledge and communication flows and networks
- an inventory of knowledge assets, giving a clearer understanding of the contribution of knowledge to organizational performance
- vital information for the development of effective knowledge management programmes and initiatives that are directly relevant to the organization's specific knowledge needs and current situation.

The library as a knowledge culture

To successfully exploit and leverage knowledge resources, the creation of an organizational culture that enables, facilitates and encourages the creation and sharing of information and knowledge is a necessity. Knowledge culture is an accumulation of shared beliefs about what constitutes knowledge and the role of knowledge in society. The beliefs and values build on and connect with the understanding of the information, knowledge and strategic learning, and how they converge for the benefit of an organization, St. Clair (2009).

Knowledge culture derives on a willingness to collaborate and the value of collaboration, both of which must be understood and recognized by all library stakeholders as part of knowledge processes in an environment that incorporates morals and professional standards of service delivery. It is about valuing knowledge and putting that knowledge where needed. At the same time, and as part of its purpose, the knowledge culture democratizes knowledge and values diversity (with, incidentally, a subversive effect on traditional management hierarchies).

Knowledge culture in libraries refers to how to manage information, knowledge, and learning for intellectual and service-focused capabilities beyond the library contributes to the organizational enterprise. It rides on the organization's culture with a focus on the seeking, capture, and utilization of information, knowledge, and strategic learning, a focus characterized by integrity and work ergonomics that support transparency as well as honesty and trust among the stakeholders.

The librarians and knowledge professionals in the knowledge culture maintain beliefs and values about knowledge that build on and connect with an understanding of the organization of information, knowledge and strategic learning, and how those disciplines converge for the benefit of an organization, a group, a community, or a society, (St. Clair 2009). This is based on the fact that librarians and knowledge professionals possess personal and professional competencies, intellectual background, function

within an organizational framework, common strengths, and a service-delivery perspective to contribute to the enterprise success in achieving the organizational vision and mission. Some of the specific tools and techniques that lead to the “good place” of the organization or institution as a knowledge culture include with such useful products and services as library webpages mashups, embedded librarianship, library-related curriculum and delivery, and institutional repositories (not a complete list by any means).

Library webpages mash ups

Mashup is a web application that uses content from more than one source to create a single new service, displayed in a single graphical interface. Open access (to data resources) with minimal licensing negotiation by major internet companies such as Yahoo, Google, and Amazon coupled with the rapid growth in advent of new tools that make creating mashups easy for anyone (regardless of technical know-how) contributes to the increasing usage of mashup in libraries today.

Breviik (2009) emphasizes that the development of mashable bodies of knowledge creates a unique opportunity for libraries and library managers. This, he says, is an opportunity for librarians to embrace openness, set an example, and develop methods, standards and tools to enhance their professional role and contribute to a more open universe of knowledge and knowledge sharing. With new developments on open access, librarians also have the opportunity to use and promote open and useful tools and resources that show commitment to sharing knowledge and providing professional direction to other professional colleagues and patrons.

Library websites just like the “new books” displays of book covers and book lists create these opportunities. This in addition to creating and remixing publicly available data resources ensures that libraries offer richer and more dynamic services to its patrons. Mashing up enhances accurate position of the library to the patrons with the goals of accurately representing the library as an active and vital place, exposing the library’s resources and making their access easier, providing opportunity for interactivity (if the patrons want it) and, allowing the integration of library-generated content in to the lives of patrons (Rancourt 2009).

Libraries may utilize some of the popular types of mashups that include Google Maps (maps.google.com) by combining the addresses and photographs of libraries and branches with a Google map to create a map mashup as well as Flickr (www.flickr.com) to built-in option for displaying library photos on the library website. By using these tools libraries are able to create entirely new technics for their patron thus improving patrons’ online experiences and providing superior services.

Additional mashup ideas for making a library’s online presence much more valuable to patrons- adding value to services are adding data from LibraryThing (www.librarything.com) to library site and sharing local repository with other campus resources . LibrayThing was developed to help people catalogue their personal libraries and make them available to share and discuss with other allowing conversation about books within the libraries.

Generally, mashups can be one tool to better meet information needs of patron and better still create new value in library services by exposing library collections to creative and unintended patrons using open standards.

Embedded librarianship

Embedded librarianship is a distinctive innovation that moves librarians out of libraries and creates a new model for library and information work. It emphasizes the importance of forming a strong working relationship between the librarian and a group or team of people who need the librarian's information expertise on an immediate or on-site basis, Shumaker (2014).

Embedded librarianship is driven by push and pull factors. Push- widely recognized need for innovation due to inadequacies of traditional form of librarianship and, the pull- fundamental changes in work and society a result of major trends that emphasize the importance of the knowledge worker; the challenges of the knowledge worker and the enterprise to be creative and to innovate as well as to be logical and exact towards a global economy.

An embedded librarian works within a set of factors that includes ongoing working relationship, knowledge of the commitment to information user group goals and objectives, and highly customized and value-added contributions to a team (Shumaker, 2014).

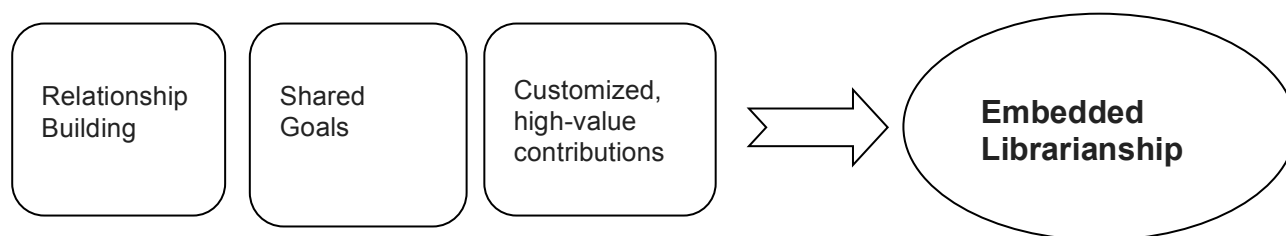


Figure 1: Factors that define embedded librarianship

An embedded librarian works in a team, forms a strong working relationship that leads to a strong working relationship as well as awareness of the information and knowledge needs of a team. As team projects grow, the embedded librarian develops highly customized, sophisticated, and value-added information and knowledge contributions to the team.

Embedded librarians move from responsive to anticipative service provision, they suggest ways of accomplishing tasks there for saving on time and efforts. This is a more effective way of working based on relationships formed through participation in a team to understand the teams information/knowledge needs therefore addressing them in a customized way. Embedded librarians according to Schuman (1990) provide “well-focused services that require contact between a librarian and a client group within the context of a problem environment... beyond answering the isolated reference question and into the role of professional visibility helping the client solve problems.”

How to embed

Librarians are central to an organizational enterprise, they need to embed themselves in all phases of organizational activities that include strategic planning, research, teaching and learning and service by volunteering for leadership roles. Heider (2010) recommended the following ways on how librarians can embed themselves: stakeholders buy-in; maintain physical presence with information user groups; attend user group meetings, develop collaborative programmes that use library resources. In addition, Cooper (2010) added: using existing events to promote library, going to where the action is as well as responding to the need for current information. Dene (2011) on

the other hand suggested; studying the information user community, outlining assessment strategies, collaborating with other departments as well as starting small and working up from small successes.

Literacy curriculum development and delivery

The Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education defines information literacy as “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.” Thus, information literacy provides a foundation for life-long learning, the ultimate goal of education, and is common to all disciplines, learning environments, and levels of education.

Organizations need training and support to make use of new technologies for effective research, teaching, and learning. This, according to Williams (1997) provides an opportunity for librarians to play a key role in the evolution of an integrated information literacy curriculum, in contrast to past efforts which were sporadic and rarely programmatically based. In agreement, Fowell and Levy (1995) assert that Information professionals have the opportunity to take a leading role in developing and delivering the learning support strategies which will be appropriate to this new environment, acting as significant culture change agents in their organizations. This leads to increased communication, improved services and the cooperative leveraging of knowledge/information resources in an organization.

In the information and knowledge age, specialists in information management are essential – they provide the competitive edge for the knowledge-based organization by responding with a sense of urgency to critical information needs. Information, both internally and externally produced, is the lifeblood of the knowledge-based organization and essential for innovation and continuing learning. Information professionals/librarians are uniquely positioned to guide the process of integrating information literacy curriculum as they prepare patrons to address local and global issues and to make a difference in the cultural and economic dimensions in the world. The outcomes of information literacy include ensuring that the library patrons: know when they need information; identify what information will address a particular problem; find the needed information; evaluate the information; organize the information; use the information effectively in addressing the problem (Williams, 1997).

The information literacy programme can be developed and implemented through the integration of the curriculum into courses that are a part of standard learning activities, in the case of academic institutions, or the integration into courses with a research component in an organization. These are some of the opportunities that librarians can lead as research consultants and as pedagogical guides to facilitate the successful delivery of information literacy content in organizations.

The development of institutional repositories

The Institutional Repository (IR) is an information system whose initiatives capture, preserve, and make digitally accessible the intellectual, scientific, and academic output of the university community. IRs are becoming increasingly important as a service offered by University libraries, playing a major role in making access easier for students, lecturers, and researchers, enabling the university stakeholders to access institutional knowledge. Sustainability of an IR requires embedment of IR in the institutional knowledge management culture.

At the development phase, the quality of the contents of the repository must be guaranteed by ensuring that the documents are submitted formally and content analyzed for their relevance in the repository using internal feedback system. The aspects that should be considered at the development stage include guidelines on the types of documents to be included, as well as the development of a framework for ensuring legal rights of the document, for authorized persons to make the contents public as well as policies to guide the access and use of the information.

In developing IR, organizational routines that were originally embedded in the standard operating procedures and policies, practices, rules, and norms become embedded in the shared knowledge databases in the form of best practices. IR can further be developed in organizations by accumulating employees' knowledge in electronic databases. This knowledge can then be used as repositories of the shared, organization wide "structural intellectual capital" (Stewart, 1997).

Conclusion

Recognizing that librarians and information professionals in the 21st century are engaged in a workplace environment that is vastly different from that of previous generations is a critical "call" today. Practitioners in librarianship – whether educated with a graduate degree from an accredited university or undertaking "library-type" activities without such training – are positioned to be the new leaders in moving the profession of librarianship forward. Citizens and library users of any kind and in all types of libraries (regardless of the environment in which the library functions – as a public library, a specialized library, an academic, or a school library) now have vastly different expectations than those of their predecessors, and we librarians are blessed to have the opportunity to lead them to the information, knowledge, and strategic learning they require, regardless of where they require it or the purposes for which it is needed.

This study focuses of necessity on the operations – and the functional framework – of the specialized library or institutional research center or the academic library connected to the many educational entities that now provide a type of "specialized" library services for their users. Knowledge services and the role of librarians as knowledge services professionals is the employment framework that meets the needs of companies, organizations, and institutions wherein information, knowledge, and strategic learning align with the success of the parent employing organization (for the librarians) and librarians who choose to think of themselves and function as knowledge services professionals will provide leadership for organizational success.

Taking their cue from the now established knowledge services audit (referred to – for obvious reasons – as the "knowledge assessment" or "knowledge evaluation" in financial services organizations), today's librarians can go directly to their identified users and establish clearly and effectively what their users' needs are – and not to put too fine a point on it – their expectations with respect to information, knowledge, and strategic learning required for their success. Using the knowledge services audit technique to move the parent organization or community into an environment in which functions as a knowledge culture, and with such clearly useful products and services as library webpages mash ups, embedded librarianship, library-related curriculum and delivery, and institutional repositories, librarianship – as the "deliverer" of knowledge services – can indeed provide (and *should* provide) research leadership and management services appropriate to the needs of the user community. The profession is positioned to do so.

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