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Fall 1-7-2019

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Enakrire, Rexwhite T. Dr; Chisita, Collence T. Dr; and Chigwada, Josiline Phiri, "Knowledge Sharing for Professional Growth: Views from Academic Librarians in Zimbabwe" (2019). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 2228.  
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# **Knowledge Sharing for Professional Growth: Views from Academic Librarians in Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

Knowledge sharing activities are indicators for professional growth. It consists of inconceivable diverse and complex patterns through which professionals gain more from each other. This type of knowledge sharing experience is essential for professional growth. Ordinarily, except engage in certain activities, professionals do not benefit much from each other. The process that unfold in what the professionals know best is through the process of sharing tacit knowledge. Librarianship as a profession is at its critical point where issues to contend with emerges, based on current trends in library and information sciences. The dynamics that surround users' diverse information needs and technological changes have become critical factors to consider. Librarians in the academic environment in Zimbabwe have no option than to tap into the newly launched Zimbabwe Transitional Stabilization Programme (TSP). This programme lay emphasis on quality service delivery and research collaboration. This article therefore investigates how knowledge sharing can strengthen librarians' resilience and innovative drive to adjust to constant change. The quantitative research approach was employed in this study. The quantitative (survey) collected data from respondents through the questionnaire instrument. The data collected were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. Findings from the data gathered revealed that, innovative strategies for current and future practices on knowledge sharing among librarians were infused. The knowledge sharing patterns among librarians in Zimbabwe has becomes more deepened. Proposed ways in rendering services in line with current trends in professional development have created more awareness among academic librarians such that, professional associations and their special interest groups (SIG) have place emphasis on the importance of knowledge sharing. Cooperation and collaboration becomes the cornerstone for the survival of professionals in a digital economy. Several factors such as lack of support from institutions, negative attitude among others has interfered with knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing has also brought unprecedented opportunities for professional growth. The study recommends praxis-oriented strategies through which capacity building in knowledge sharing be attained in the different university libraries in Zimbabwe.

**Key words:** *knowledge sharing; collaboration; professional development; communities of interest, academic librarians, Zimbabwe.*

## **1. Introduction and conceptual background**

Librarians in the twenty-first century are at a critical point, as they must grapple with rapid technological changes, growing dynamic of users need, underfunding and competition from other information providers. Igbino and Osuchukwu (2018,120) note that sustainable development goals (SDGs) agenda spurred a shift in discourse with regards to development in general, and this has in turn resulted upsurge of knowledge generated in various areas of sustainable development. The authors argue that the constant increase in knowledge necessitates the need for knowledge management (KM) within knowledge sharing (KS) interface, thus, leveraging knowledge for positive gain. Townsley (2001) states that knowledge management (KM) offers academic librarians the opportunity to improve themselves effectively within and outside the organisations. In the same vein, Islam, Agarwal, and Ikeda (2017) advocates for librarians to leverage employee through user knowledge togetherness with the rapidly evolving ICTs. Ryu, Ho and Han (2003) viewed KS as the behaviour of an individual towards dispersing their accumulated knowledge and information. The accumulated knowledge and information could have been obtained either from other colleagues, or possibly from experiences in the work place, training, conferencing and interactions within and outside the organization.

Hong, Suh and Yoo (2011, 14417-14427) describe KS as the process by which knowledge held by an individual are converted into forms. The conversion helps to understand, comprehend, absorb and later use such knowledge by other individuals. The knowledge converted into forms, can be understood, absorbed, accessed and used through either different channels or networks between known providers and seekers. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1994) introduced the SECI model, which is characterised by four steps for KS, namely: socialization-conversion of tacit to tacit; externalization- conversion of tacit to explicit; combination-conversion of explicit and internalization-conversion of explicit to tacit vice versa. Yu and Zhou (2015) highlighted four types of tacit knowledge sharing processes as the peer review, the learning community, the academic conferences and thumb -a lift whereby tacit knowledge is shared through online platforms.

Reflecting on Nonaka and Takeuchi (1994) SECI model in KS interface, the assumption is that, the four steps of KS process is about communication. Without communication, these four steps (socialization, externalization, combination and internalization) of KS process cannot take place within individual or communities of interest workspaces. The four steps of socialization, externalization, combination and internalization require a scenario where two or more parties

are involved in deep transfer of knowledge. This knowledge transfer require deepened understanding of the social environment before the support can take effect. The deepened understanding and buried knowledge (tacit) are transferred through the processes of socialization, externalization, combination and internalization. Therefore, the infusion of communications work better when several participants are involved through the provision and acquisition of knowledge within and outside the organisation (Uoro, Sharratt, Tsui and Shekhar, 2007). There are various factors that influences individual willingness to share knowledge, for example, ICTs, costs and benefits, incentive systems, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, social capital, social and personal cognition, organization climate, and management championship among many. These factors varies from one context and individual to another. The description of KS by Ikeknwe and Igbinovia, (2015, 18) shows that it is a key aspect of KM. KS often referred to as exchange of acquired information, knowledge, ideas, skills and experiences of people. The authors argue that KS occurs when people are interested in one another before deeper learning of new phenomenon can evolve. The sharing of such knowledge becomes feasible when value is placed on what it is meant for (its use), than when it is not used (Ikeknwe and Igbinovia 2015).

The purposes for which KS was established in organisation are diverse in nature. Firstly, it was to create new knowledge or exploit existing knowledge (Christensen, 2007). Secondly, the application of new knowledge was to re-invent new products and services for the organisation in order to strengthen its competitive edge (Christensen, 2007). Thirdly, the need for organisational growth and rival of other organisations is also envisaged (Christensen, 2007). The authors of this paper believed that, KS brings increase of deepened knowledge to members of the organisation. Matthews (2018) posits out that, academic libraries need to justify the value of their stakeholders, and therefore demonstrate that their existence is essential in order to deliver social consequences that support the goals of their parent institutions. Albert (2009, 69) argues that the fate of nations, communities and enterprises are intertwined in present day knowledge economy, hence the need for cooperation and collaboration among academic librarians. This would help build confidence and gain competitive advantage among other organisations.

Librarians of today have evolved into digital communities of digital space because of the proliferation of ICTs and ubiquitous computing. The networked community, also referred to as the wired community, is characterised by virtual and physical space. Therefore, since social and economic wellbeing of individual are tied to networks, collaboration become the key to

survival in virtual spaces. Keenan and Trotter (1999, 1000-1008) state that the concept of community informatics is associated with the ways ICTs are used to help communities achieve their social, political, economic and cultural goals. The key factors of community informatics include infrastructure, content and applications available on the networks. These give citizens ability to utilise ICTs intelligently. Malhotra, Gosain and Hars (1997) described the virtual community as one whereby internet users' complete their tasks in online environments, thus uniting people who are separated by time and space. Furthermore, the intelligent community is one that views communication bandwidth as the novel utility for critical economic growth and public welfare and data as the new oil. The concept of intelligent communities refers to the broadband facilities required to open up collaborative opportunities for redressing socio-economic and political problems in organisations (Albert, 2009, 9). The assumption of the two variables 'virtual and intelligent' communities as stipulated by the authors of this paper is that, they are associated with collaborative KS for professional growth in formal organisations. KS has accommodated various constructs of new knowledge, reinventing/innovation, new products, services and competition in organisation (Christensen, 2007). The achievement of these would not only make the organisation viable but increase professional growth of staff members. This paper therefore, unveil how KS would strengthen professional growth among academic librarians in Zimbabwe.

## **2. Research problem**

Ismail (2013) notes that, the understanding that affect KS in higher education is still very low, especially among librarians. Although many research on KS are found in corporate organisations (Ismail (2013). Several factors such as trust, values, attitude, behaviour, economic and social exchange are associated with why people do not want to share knowledge (Fullwood, Rowley and McLean, 2018; Bock and Kim, 2002). Lee, Shiue and Chen (2016) referred to organisational culture as barriers to KS. The organisational culture and individual are part of the factors that militate against KS (Hislop 2013; Wang and Noe, 2010). The organisational culture consists of issues of values, corporation goals, communication, procedures, strife, disputes and policy. While in the case of individual, trust, values, attitude, behaviour and many more (Fullwood, Rowley and McLean, 2018). Therefore, the need to fill the knowledge gaps that surrounds KS among academic institutions becomes necessary. Organisational culture and individual factors has proven to be resultant from people not willing to share knowledge and these needs to be addressed properly (Chugh, 2018, 1-7). The achievement of this is when constant and extensive deepening of research investigations among academics is carried out. The author notes that despite progress made on the sharing of explicit

knowledge, much effort is still required on tacit knowledge transfer in academic institutions. The essence is due to evolving phenomenon of librarianship as a profession. The dynamic response to the changing needs of citizens with their socio-economic, political, religion, educational and environmental background justifies the need to share knowledge. The shared knowledge would help address diverse information needs increasingly on daily basis. This changing need comes in the form of transformational experiences, which librarians have seen among users, that requires adequate attention.

Information needs of users differs from one context to another. It has equally become more diverse and increasingly on daily basis. Present day library operations now require extra effort by librarians and the application of newer technological tools, in order to meet this multifarious need. The newer technological tools also require adequate knowledge and skills of librarians for their use, considering the user-friendly nature of some of the tools. The assumption is that, when knowledge is shared, it would help addressed this knowledge gap between users and librarians especially in rendering quality services. Policies are vital in organisational growth and staff adherence to rules, but unfortunately, many policies, which ought to guide librarians in the use of some technological tools, are inappropriate. Therefore, the need for the review of such policies becomes necessary. Some of the policies that guides librarians operations has not been reviewed over the past ten (10) years, thus posing challenges to librarians to apply. This was practical experience of the authors of this paper regarding the study environment. The essence of the review was that, as the trends of library practices changes, reviewing of policies into new phenomenon becomes necessary.

For KS to flourish among academic librarians, thus resulting in intrinsic and extrinsic professional growth, the experiences and knowledge of librarians needs to awaken. The awakening is continuous sustainability of work performance and regularly KS activities. The regular KS platform involves engagement in several activities that would make people to interact and discuss issues that bothers on the organisation and their professional growth. In Zimbabwe, there are two groups of academic librarians. These consists of those in Polytechnic and Teachers Colleges and Universities. The latter have organised themselves into a consortium which not only serves as platform for resource sharing but KS. The librarians from the polytechnics and teachers' Colleges have their own affiliation known as College and Research Libraries Consortium (CARLC), even though it is still at infant stage of development. The gap between the two groups reflects differences in terms of professional growth and development. This gap sometimes does not allow professional growth to take place. The reason

behind this is that, both groups are under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and Science and Technology. The scenario is exacerbated by the fact that librarians from Polytechnics not given much recognition and opportunities compared to those in the universities. Besides, some librarians have not had much exposure to regional and international conferences, which serve as basis for professional growth. While those in the universities have, more experiences and exposure considering the nature of academic activities that take place. Cooperation and collaboration among academic librarians irrespective of institution, geographic location yields dividend in the form of professional growth. Librarians by their nature are predisposed to share knowledge since it is the core of their professional ethics. The professional growth of academic librarians is dependent upon variety of factors, which includes intrinsic motivation, status, cooperation and collaboration among many. Professional growth among academic librarians takes many forms, for example, there is desire to fulfil a need for continuing acquisition of knowledge and competencies. This can only been met by either formal education and/or on-the-job-training by so many librarians (Pan, and Hovde, 2010, 1-9). The assumption that arose from the emphasis above is that, the need for self-actualisation comes from self-realisation, and without that realisation, it becomes difficult. Therefore, for professional development to take place, librarians have to be involved KS activities.

### **3. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate knowledge sharing for professional Growth, with views from academic librarians in Zimbabwe. In accomplishing this, several research questions were raised to guide the study.

### **4. Research questions**

- What are the knowledge sharing patterns among academic librarians in Zimbabwe?
- What professional association are you engaged in, as academic librarians?
- What factors interfere with knowledge sharing for professional growth among academic librarians?
- How can academic librarians utilise opportunities of knowledge sharing for professional growth?
- What strategies can enhance knowledge sharing for professional growth among academic librarians?

## **5. Theoretical framework**

The researcher adopted social exchange and capital theories as the theoretical framework for this study. The social exchange and capital theories implies networking that brings people together in achievement of set goals. The essence of such networking is to share knowledge with people of the same commonalities. Homans (1961, 13) defined social exchange as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two parties. The social exchange theory explains fundamental processes of social behaviour (influence, conformity, status, leadership, and justice) from the ground upward. According to the theory, human beings consider the cost against the benefits when forming relationships. Stafford (2008) states that social behaviour is a series of exchanges between two or more people. The author states that in social exchange, individuals attempt to maximise their rewards and minimise costs. Liang, Liu, and Wu (2008, 171) viewed the social exchange theory as commonly used theoretical base on investigating individual's knowledge-sharing behaviour. Molm (2001, 171) states that individuals regulate their interactions with other individuals based on a self-interest analysis of the costs and benefits of such an interaction.

Cook, Cheshire, Rice and Nakagawa (2013, 61-68) criticised Homans' work because it considered the principles of psychology as the basis for sociological phenomena. This was used to analyse the sub-institutional level of social behaviour, as it underestimated the significance of the institutional forces as well as the social processes and structures that emerge out of social interaction. Chang and Chuang (2011, 9-18) view social capital as the sum of assets or resources embedded in the networks of relationships between individuals, communities, networks and societies. The theory is on the premise that, the notion for which social capital exists is through interpersonal relationships among individuals. Social capital theory is characterised by three dimensions namely; the social, structural and the relational dimension (Chang and Chuang, 2011, 9-18). There are many factors that affect interpersonal relationships, for example, relationships, language and social structure (Chang and Chuang, 2011, 9-18). The assumption of the authors in this study is that, certain indices reflect the understanding of people in association with benefits. This brings about KS for professional growth among people (librarians). The associated was based on interpersonal relationships, language and social structure rooted on community networks. These were the rationale towards choosing the theory of social exchange and capital for this study.



## **6. Literature review**

Islam, Agarwal and Ikeda (2017, 266-281) argue that the changes stemming from technological developments, increased user expectations, and dwindling budgets has resulted in innovation being the lifeblood of many organisations. The authors further argue that innovation allows organisations to come up with novel services for the benefit of their users. However, innovation can only be realised through knowledge sharing for professional growth because Library and Information Science (LIS) landscape in academic libraries is experiencing rapid changes which requires effective strategies through team work. Gelfand (1985, 402-403) identified a number of activities that fall under the umbrella of professional development in LIS, namely: availing oneself of professional literature, attending professional seminars, workshops, symposia, participating in continuous professional development and enrolling for academic courses. Historically, the library profession has always supported the idea of continuous professional development as evidenced by the goals of local, regional and international professional organisations (Havener, and Stolt, 1994, 25-36).

The 1994 IFLA/UNESCO Public library manifesto emphasises the importance of continuous professional education. The essence of the continuous professional education is to have smooth workplace learning that serves as the basis for delivering quality library services. The responsibility of continuous learning rests on the individual, organisation and professional associations. IFLA Guidelines for Continuing Best Professional Development Principles and Best Practices (2016, 7) place responsibility for ongoing learning, based on regular assessment, on the individual practitioner. Employability now implies being aware of the dynamic world of work and taking responsibility for one's own career and personal development as well as lifelong learning needs (Blair, 2000). The author defines career planning as the ability for clarity concerning one's continuous professional development. It demands actions to correct current performance gaps and to prepare for future responsibilities. There are several imperatives to the future responsibilities. One is to support the employing organization's goals for excellent service. Another to further one's own career development, and ultimately to contribute to profession-wide growth and improvement (IFLA Guidelines for Continuing Best Professional Development Principles and Best Practices, 2016, 7).

To examine the role of academic library within the university environment, it is important to bear in mind, the position of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Professional development (PD). These play key roles towards deepening KS among librarians. Huotari and Livonen (2005, 324) view the academic library as an internal strategic partner of the university.

Appleton, Stevenson, and Boden (2011, 357) state that through strategic partnership with internal and external units, academic libraries can influence changes rather than just respond to it. The adequacy of the services offered depends on personnel who are well prepared and continuously learning at different intervals. Therefore, the quality of educational opportunities acquired and ability of staff to use those opportunities were of much concern. The IFLA code of ethics included the statement: “Librarians and other information workers strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing their knowledge and skills” (IFLA, 2012a). The main aim of Zimbabwe Library Association (ZIMLA) was to foster cooperation and enhance PD. The training also incorporated modern technologies and good practices in LIS (ZIMLA Constitution, 2018). The CPD as further emphasised in article 3 and 4 of the same constitution, several definitions of the CPD refers to Huckle (2001) work, that, CPD is characterised by myriad of motifs. This refers to common themes with reference to the systematic ongoing process by which professionals can broaden and deepen their skills, as well as updating themselves. CPD reflects on the maintenance and enhancement of knowledge, expertise and competence of professionals throughout their careers. The plan formulation embraces the needs of the professional, employer; professions and society in order to integrate certain principles and practice of the profession (Jones and Robinson, 1997).

Robinson and Glosiene (2007) emphasised that CPD and PD are synonymous. The terms imply a process through which those involved in LIS maintain competencies throughout their career irrespective of the dynamics of the profession. Chisita (2012, 331-343) argues that the responsibility for professional growth is resident on individual, the organisation, professional associations, and commissions among many other stakeholders. The author further states that the professional as an individual, is the architect of his or her own success or failure. However, the individual is the key driver of the professional growth as articulated by the IFLA Principle number one (1), stated as “The individual library and information professional is primarily responsible for pursuing ongoing learning that constantly improves knowledge and skills” (Koontz & Gubbin, 2010). Townley (2001, 44-55) argue that KM practices are incorporated into many library operations, to improve effectiveness and efficiency of performance. Using an ecosystem approach, the author argue that KM offers the opportunity to expand the role of libraries in the academic community and the results strengthen relationships with related units, within and outside the university.

Foss and Pederson (2002), Davenport and Prusak (1998) posit that, knowledge is a critical organizational resources provides sustainable and competitive advantage in a dynamic

knowledge economy. To this end, Wang, and Noe (2010, 115-131) and Brown and Duguid (1991) emphasised the importance of staff development as strategy to gain competitive advantage. KS for professional growth is more effective when organisations exploit knowledge-based resources that exists within the organisations. KS helps in a fundamental ways. It builds employees continuity in knowledge application, innovation, and ultimately the competitive advantage of the organization (Jackson, Chuang, Harden, Jiang, & Joseph, 2006).

Chugh (2018, 1-7) states that, there are myriad factors that interfere with knowledge transfer. The tacit knowledge, for example, serves as fluid for hierarchical barriers. Therefore, the lack of a knowledge sharing culture, coupled with interest and peer trust, job insecurity, incentives and resources, institutional politics and technological tools are myriad factors to KS. On the same note, the author highlighted other enablers that can counteract the barriers to KS, for example, encouraging open discussions, provision of sufficient resources, cultivating KS culture, promoting openness and trust, incentivisation, eliminating institutional politics and enhanced job security among others.

Pan and Hovde (2010, 1-9) states that, professional growth is driven by technological imperative and by the element that librarians share with other professionals. The librarians are compensated for what they know, and do best. Pan and Havde (2019, 1-9) argues that the perceived needs for PD may also arise in a wide range of situations. For example, in the case of a new librarian, the occupational training begins from the moment one enters the profession. On the other end, individual libraries, however, have their own unique identity composed of organizational structure, types and arrangement of information resources. The clientele characteristics and needs as well as international relations forms the work place culture and this implies that newly hired staff face the urgent need to familiarise with the new institutional identity. It is through PD opportunities that newly employed staff trained can put theoretical knowledge into practice, apply generalized concepts to specific responsibilities, and become familiar with given job situations. Performance evaluation can also be the basis for PD because it identifies training needs, which can remedy deficiency that affect performance. The great flexibility of PD initiatives --formal and informal, large or small, virtual or real ensures that library professionals are well versed in the skills essential to promote the advancement of both their patrons and themselves. What is most important in this scenario is that, PD opportunities should be provided at all times (Pan and Havde, 2019, 1-9).

## **7. Research Methodology**

Taylor, Kermode, and Roberts (2007) emphasised that quantitative research approach gives a direction of proper gathering of data, which has valuable understanding of the research investigated. Quantitative research is known for its systematic process that values fairness, with standardisation of measurement. The quantitative approach adopted in this study was on survey, where questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents. The population for this study comprises of forty librarians across the sixteen university libraries in Zimbabwe. The survey sampled sixteen university libraries in Zimbabwe. The sampled sixteen university libraries in Zimbabwe consists of the following, namely: the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Midlands State University (MSU), Harare Institute of Technology (HIT), Lupane State University (LSU), National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT), Reformed Church University (RCU), Catholic University of Zimbabwe (CUZ), Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), Women's University of Africa (WUA), African University (AU), Solusisi University (SU), Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU), Manicaland University of Technology (MUT). These universities were purposively and accidentally chosen for this study. The essence of why these universities were chosen was because they are situated in the different provinces in the country. The librarians in these universities were targeted based on the nature of their work that involves knowledge sharing within, among and beyond the interface of library operations. In order to collect data from respondents, the researchers developed the research instruments and circulated them through the monkey survey platform. The monkey survey questionnaire was distributed among the forty librarians in the sampled sixteen libraries in Zimbabwe. The collection of data from respondents through monkey survey took four weeks. The data collected were collated and analysed using the descriptive statistical tools. The results obtained in the analysis were presented in tables and figures below.

## **8. Results and discussions**

This segment dwells on the research questions raised at the beginning of this paper. The various questions cover the following areas: knowledge-sharing patterns among academic librarians, professional association academic librarians are engaged in, factors that interfere with knowledge sharing, opportunities which knowledge sharing for professional growth offers to academic librarians and strategies that enhances knowledge sharing for professional growth among academic librarians.

**Table 1: Cross tabulation of librarians variables in ZIM (N= 40)**

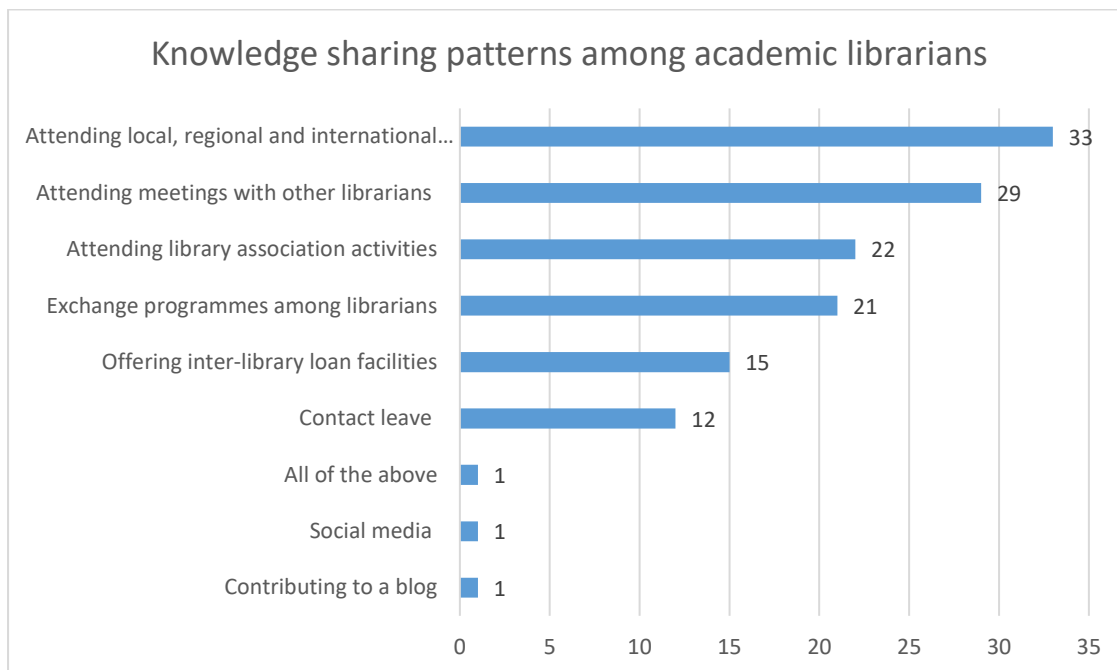
| <b>Demographic data across University libraries in Zimbabwe</b> |           |            |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Variables   | F         | %          |
| Male  | 10        | 25         |
| Female  | 30        | 75         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>40</b> | <b>100</b> |
| <b>Age</b>  |           |            |
| 20-29yrs  | 2         | 5          |
| 30-39yrs  | 10        | 25         |
| 40-49yrs  | 20        | 50         |
| 50-59yrs  | 8         | 20         |
| 60yrs & above   | 0         | 0.0        |
| Total   | 40        | 100        |
| <b>Qualifications</b>   |           |            |
| Bachelor's degree   | 9         | 22.5       |
| Master's degree   | 30        | 75         |
| PhD degree  | 1         | 2.5        |
| Total   | 40        | 100        |
| <b>Work experience</b>  |           |            |
| 1-5yrs  | 4         | 10         |
| 6-10yrs   | 15        | 37.5       |
| 11-15yrs  | 11        | 27.5       |
| 16-20yrs  | 10        | 25         |
| 21-25yrs  | 1         | 2.5        |
| 26yrs and above   | 0         | 0.0        |
| Total   | 40        | 100        |

**Data from field work: 2018**

The results in Table 1 indicate that there were more female (30, 75%) librarians as compared to male (10, 25%) in the sixteen university libraries sampled. Most of the respondents were between the age's ranges from 30-39yrs (10, 25%) and 40-49yrs (20, 50%). Majority of respondents have master's degree (30, 75%) to their credit. The top rated work experience acquired is between 6-10yrs (15, 37.5%), 11-15yrs (11, 27.5%) and 16-20yrs (10, 25%). While the least is between 1-5yrs (4, 10%) and 21-25yrs (1%). It can be deduced that the sixteen university libraries needs higher calibre of staff/professional especially calibre with PhD holders, that would help to support services rendered to users, as there are more increase of users' on yearly basis of admission.

**8.1 Knowledge sharing patterns among academic librarians in Zimbabwe**

In this segment, respondents were asked to indicate the different patterns through which knowledge was shared among academic librarians in Zimbabwe. The result obtained are presented in the figure below.



**Figure 1: Knowledge sharing patterns among academic librarians**

The result in figure 1 indicate that, there are disparities as to how academic librarians practise KS exercise at the various university libraries in Zimbabwe. The envisaged patterns vary from one institution to another. Attending meetings with other librarians, in local, regional and international conferences, library association activities, offering inter-library loan facilities to support users' information needs, exchange programmes among librarians, contact leave, contributing to a blog, and the use of social media were shown to be the various patterns through which knowledge is shared. The most outstanding activity involves attending local, regional and international conferences. The least of such KS pattern is social media and contributing to blogs and other social media platforms. The findings suggest that, at these various forum, academic librarians engaged with scholars from different context. What they do most is interact with broader views on emerging issues in different expertise, thus sharing new insightful knowledge and experiences of best practices. Previous studies by Crane (1972) and Stoan (1991, 238-257) confirms that KS occurs through formal and informal networks. Crane (1972) developed the concept of invisible colleges, which highlights the importance of the social capital of members of networks and how they influences each other.

Information sharing takes the form of consulting and informal communication. These are widely recognized phenomenon in information science literature. Allen (1977) points out the significance of scholars communication networks, especially in information and knowledge sharing interfaces and how this correlate to intellectual and professional growth. Stoan (1991, 238-257) opines that the amount of scholars' contacts with other researchers is the strongest

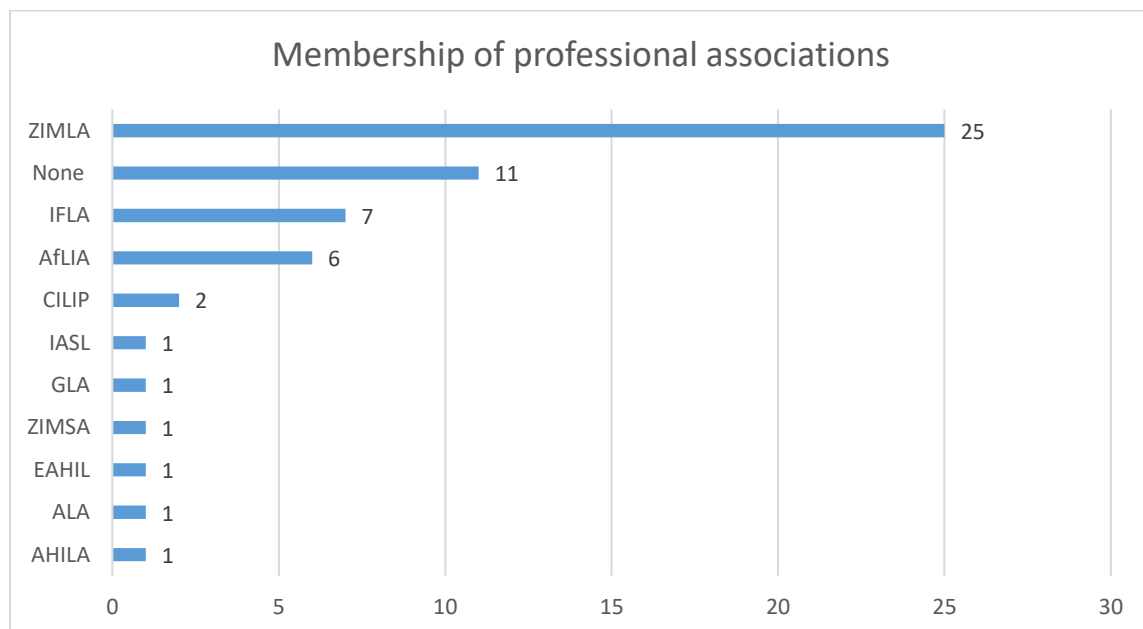
predictor of their publication efficiency. These conceptualizations suggest a one-way process in which an individual consults another individual. The authors of this paper emphasised that, usually, this kind of forum does not come by easily, as such, academic librarians should take advantage of it. They should engage with much experienced colleagues to gain insights on different thoughts and issues of top debate in their field of study. Most of the scholars/researchers invited to these different forums of workshops, seminars and especially international conferences are top researchers. They are experts in their different areas of fields. KS in the field of KM is widely recognised as a scientific way of influencing people. It helps to bring people together through communication networks (Talja, 2002). What is most important during the communication processes. It helps in the creation of social ties, thus influencing the productivity of researchers during the cause of shared discussion (Crane 1972). The efficacy behind researchers' patterns of contacts is how best they were able to utilise it (Talja, 2002). These contacts continue to grow and become strengthened relationship that would enable collaborations. Collaborations cannot live in isolation, as such, individuals continue to consult with one another and this reflects ways through which academic librarians share their knowledge/experiences.

Erdelez (1997) asserts that certain factors influences information seeking and collaboration among academics. This could be the approach adopted in sharing knowledge. The characteristics that surround KS commitment differs from one person to another. Academics, either lecturers or librarians as Communities of Practice (COP) or Communities of Interest (COI) fit into different kinds of networks with different levels of KS interface. They concurrently work with different research motives, which allow diverse configurations stages of networking in KS. The typology of KS could take the form of super sharing and non-sharing interface. The classification of super sharing and non-sharing interface are both a social and cultural phenomena. The reasons behind non-activation of KS, apart from individual behaviour, qualities, and styles through which information is sought is deeply rooted between the goals or purposes it serves to accomplish and context from which it was made manifest (Talja, 2002). Information or KS has different typology (Talja, 2002) and this comprises of strategic, paradigmatic, directive and social sharing (Talja, 2002). The strategic sharing embraces cognizant approach that exploit proficiency across definite group of people into research investigation. The paradigmatic sharing is associated with the establishment of innovative and discrete phenomenon of research investigation within and across areas of expertise. The directive sharing takes the form of intellectual reciprocity, where the teachers and students learn from each other through sharing of experience, while social sharing is

likened to the relationship that exist between a husband and wife. Such relationship is cordial, mutual and everlasting. The community-building movement of social sharing surrounds trust, respect and mutual understanding (Talja, 2002). KS for professional growth attainment by librarians is not feasible if the mind to intertwine is not available. The authors of this paper believed that, librarians could do this through in-depth empathetic mutuality and the environment where they are made to serve. They do not only see themselves as focus of debate but also the organisation, which they represent.

### 8.2 Professional associations’ academic librarians are engaged in.

In this segment, respondents were asked to indicate the professional association they are engaged in. The result obtained is presented in figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: Membership of professional associations**

Results in figure 2 indicate that respondents attest to different membership of professional association. Result revealed that 11 (eleven) academic librarians do not belong to any library association, 25 (twenty-five) are members of the local Zimbabwe Library Association, while the rest belong to sector specific associations. Interestingly, some of the academic librarians in Zimbabwe are members of both local, regional and international library associations. These also form part of the umbrella of the professional associations. Professional association varies in different fields of study, thus with several educational background which the professionals have acquired. The essence of the professional association is to display the bodies of professional associations. It helps to give academic librarians a sense of belonging of what beliefs and practices the body of knowledge they carries. Professional association of different

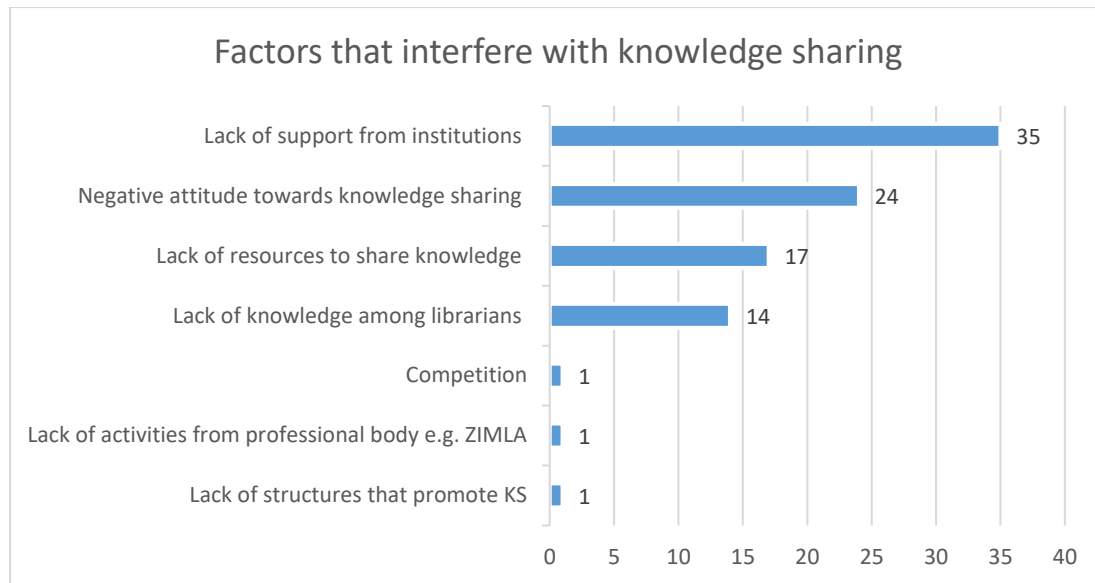


field of study helps to regulate and strengthen policies, ethical and professional practice challenges in the organisation arose. The professional association ensures that members adhere to activities that surrounds sharing of knowledge. The activities could be on regular basis, especially when they have their associational meetings. This would help younger members to grow and adopt to ethical value of the professional association. Membership of professional organisations is necessary because it helps to connect with other professionals in different environment. This could lead to infusing of recent occurrence within and outside the professional training and discourse (Gelfand, 1985, 402-403). The assumption which the authors has in this paper is that, during professional membership programme, well top/vast, and high rated members with experiences and dedicated in their areas of niches are recognised and given recognitions and awards. This sign gear/stimulates other younger members to be more dedicated and committed to their works and services. The activities that surrounds professional growth among LIS practitioners and educators are sometime intricate, for you to grow and be rewarded (Gelfand, 1985, 402-403).

Ma and Wong (2018) asserts that during the professional membership meetings individual members can build relationship that will lead to future benefits. The benefits could be in the form of KS through research collaborations or projects. There are cases where smoothed academic librarians relationship could lead to the appointment to serve in any senior cadre position based on the reputation the professional has built over time (Ma and Wong, 2018). Ma and Wong (2018, 170) further note that, the connection or contacts made during the professional membership associations, experiences and other practices within the profession can be shared through social media platform with one another. This KS interface increases personal knowledge of professional especially in this era of multifarious growth in disciplines. Importantly, studies by Ma and Wong (2018, 171); Okuhara (2012); Gissing and Hallam (2003); Ritchie et al (1999) reflected on certain programmes which could help professional members grow rapidly in their areas of expertise. The authors emphasised that, one thing they can benefit in a gathering like this is sharing of new knowledge through support system. The authors reiterated that, such programme should be in relation to the mentoring programmes offered by libraries to their staff. The mentoring programmes does not necessarily mean the context from which it was develop, but importantly, provided it affirms with Association of College and Research Libraries, as it will help professionals grow more in their career (Ma and Wong 2018, 171; Okuhara 2012; Gissing and Hallam 2003; Ritchie et al 1999).

### 8.3 Factors that interfere with knowledge sharing for professional growth

In responding to the portion, respondents were asked to indicate factors that interfere with knowledge sharing for professional growth. The result obtained is presented in figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Factors that interfere with knowledge sharing**

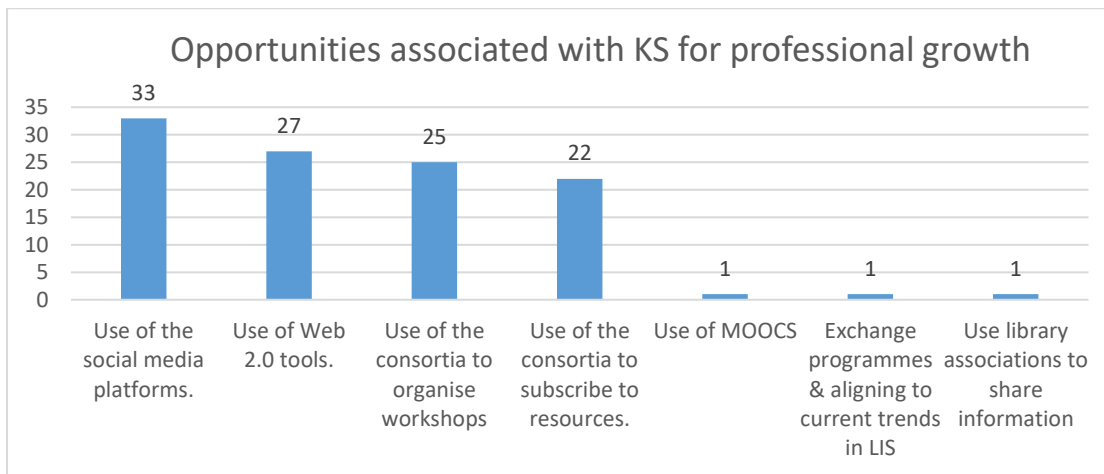
Result in figure 3 indicate that lack of support from institutions, negative attitude towards knowledge sharing were top among the list of responses. Competition, lack of activities from professional bodies such as ZIMLA and lack of structures that promote knowledge sharing were the least. The respondents' points out that certain factor influences KS. KS cannot function in a vacuum; rather it requires human interference, organisational culture and possibly application of technological tools. Chowdhury (2005, 310-326) highlight trust as an important factor in the process of complex KS because it promotes shared experiences. The author further cites social collaboration and affective collaboration as the underlying factors that influence complex KS. The former is the collaboration characterised by close and frequent social interactions in order to improve openness with shared values, mental models and perceptions. While the latter focusses on shared experiences. Affection based trust enables individuals to develop strong links on personal values and emotional ties towards each other, while, with cognition- based trust individuals are able to develop strong professional ties and build capacity for professional collaboration (Chowdhury, 2005, 310-326).

Blankenship and Ruona (2009, 209-305) also views social structure as a critical factor that affects KS in formal organisations. Scott (2003, 18) views social structure as the patterned or regularised aspects of relationships existing among participants in an organisation. The common social structures in formal organisations include, work groups, communities of Practice (Cops), learning communities, strategic communities, project teams and networks

(Blankenship and Ruona, 2009). Christensen (2007, 36-47) identified various types of knowledge shared within social structures. This comprises of professional knowledge, technical expertise, coordinating knowledge and object based knowledge. According to the author, professional knowledge is a combination of one’s education and experiences that enables an individual to complete job related task, for example, cataloguing and classification. While coordinating knowledge is grounded on rules, processes, procedures, and standards of how jobs should be done. Furthermore, object based knowledge was viewed as knowledge of a product or service, while expertise/knowledge referred to knowledge of where knowledge exists within the social structure. Knowledge can exist in a database or among COPs or COI.

#### 8.4 Opportunities associated with knowledge sharing for professional growth

In this section, respondents were asked to indicate the opportunities associated with knowledge sharing for professional growth. The result obtained is presented in figure 4 below.



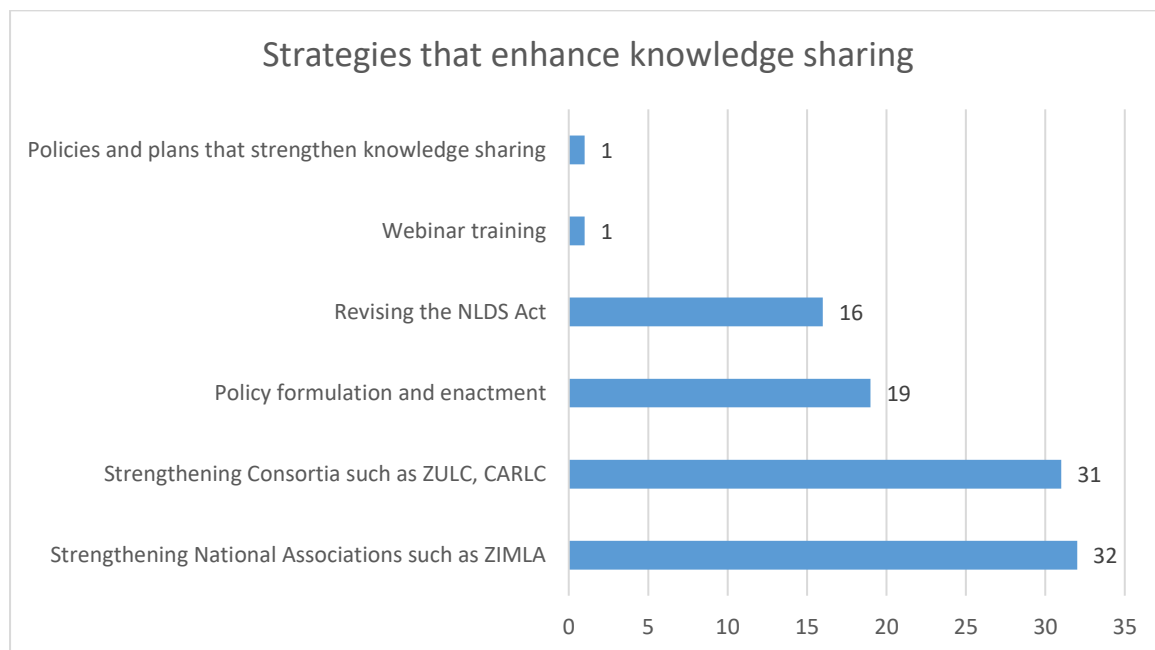
**Figure 4: Opportunities associated with knowledge sharing for professional growth**

Result in figure 4 indicate that the opportunities associated with knowledge sharing for professional growth are multifarious. The most rated as evident in table 4 is the use of social media platform. While the least are the use of MOOCS, exchange programmes and alignment to current trends in LIS and library association to share information. Importantly, it was noticed that, academic librarians in Zimbabwe took advantage of digital tools to strengthen their KS for professional growth. Cabrera and Cabrera (2002, 687-710) argue that information and technology experts have developed sophisticated KM tools to support KS. Such tools include groupware, databases, shareware, knowledge management systems, intranets and workflow technologies among others. Figure 4 shows that academic librarians use social media platforms, Web 2.0 tools, consortia to subscribe to e-resources, organise workshops, and massive open online courses (MOOCS), for exchange programmes and aligning to current trends in library

and information science, and library associations to share information. This confirms with what Yu and Zhou (2015) suggest that, conference attendance serves as insights for foundation in KS processes. Cheng, Ho and Lau, (2009) views the ultimate goal of KS as an equally opportunity for knowledge-based institution. It is a universal environment where knowledge production, distribution and application are ingrained in the institution.

### 8.5 Strategies that could enhance knowledge sharing for professional growth

In this section, respondents were asked to indicate the strategies that could enhance knowledge sharing for professional growth. The result obtained is presented in figure 5 below.



**Figure 5: Strategies that enhances knowledge sharing**

Result in Table 5 indicate that several strategies is believed to have enhanced KS for professional growth. The top in the list is National Association of ZIMLA (32%), followed by Consortia like ZULC, CARLC (31%) and policy formulation and enactment (19%); while the least is Webinar training and policies and plans that strengthen KS (1%). The strategies mentioned above has distinction in their appropriation, considering the position they occupy. It is noticed that policy and planning is fundamental in the application of strategies. Therefore, without basic planning for KS in organisations, strategies on how to accomplish such task cannot be feasible. Bollinger and Smith (2001) emphasised that, application of strategies for KS leads to operational management of explicit knowledge. Managing explicit knowledge creates a scenario for the reflection on what, why and how knowledge is shared. The what, why and how becomes easier through assistances of accessible databanks and systems within the framework of KM. Another point to ponder on is an enabling culture for such practices to take

place, which goes back to the how and the how involves tacit knowledge (Bollinger and Smith, 2001). Bollinger and Smith (2001) further notes that, knowledge creation (KC) is one major aspect that enhances KS. Without KC, nothing to share. KC surrounds motivation within the organizational scholarship of the employee and ability to learn and unlearn. Therefore, to have a smooth interface (strategies) of KS for professional growth, academic librarians should continue to acquire, organise, restructure, repackage, distribute and use tacit knowledge within their internal body and those on procedures/processes and routines (explicit) to improve the organisation.

Knowledge is continually shifting at the individual and organizational heights. The breach concerning peoples' intellect, their performance and unplanned activities taken is difficult to determine most times (Brown and Duguid, 2000). Therefore, regulating these activities through continuous sharing interface of what is known to unknown would help guide unpredicted problems for both the individual and the organisations. Wiig (1997) reflected on several strategies, which could enhance KS within any knowledge management system. One among the strategies correlates with Bollinger and Smith (2001) findings that centres on creation, capture, association, regeneration, sharing and use when decisions are taken. Another key area is the intelligent asset management that consists of patents, technologies, organizational knowledge, customer relations, operations and management practices. The use of individual knowledge (tacit) resulted in the responsibility approach of KS for professional growth (Wiig, 1997). Quantifying communal and increasingly professional understanding yields better results to KS within and outside the organisation. The insight of individuals when accumulated, are better strategies for professional growth and instant ability. The interaction that takes place among professional colleagues is smoothed when the integration of newer knowledge is sustained (Bollinger and Smith, 2001). Therefore, the authors of this paper envisaged that, continual strategies in KS for professional growth could be upheld through the capturing, codification of tacit knowledge and use of technological tools on regular basis. The authors thought that, personal development is very crucial in professional growth. Without self-motivation, there is no way professional growth can be attained. Experience have shown how individual have attained great heights irrespective against all odds. They persevered to the latter, thus wearing the crown of excellence in their professional growth.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

KS is crucial, not only for professional growth but for organisational productivity. It is a vitality for the deepening in KM processes. Technological transformation and evolving nature of

library and information science profession has made KS becomes significant, in order to unravel the mystery of unending viewpoint of scholars. This study facilitated the realisation of the distinction among academic librarians on the patterns through which KS for professional growth is practiced. It is envisaged that, the distinction encompasses different context, activities, associations, expertise and new insights of knowledge and experiences of best practices. Through strategic KS practices, academic libraries and librarians will not only achieve professional growth but also contribute towards the actualisation of institutional growth.

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