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Librarians as Knowledge Mangers

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Abstract

An overall view of knowledge management, and the role of librarians in its implementation are being discussed. The shift from traditional work culture to a learning organization cannot be accomplished quickly. It requires high-level commitment to change, a rewards system that encourages teamwork, and the sharing of best practices. The main idea of knowledge management is establishing an environment where information is shared and openly accepted. To built an effective knowledge management system, the knowledge system needs to work according to the work flow of the respective organization, and should be able to produce the relevant information to the ongoing projects in the organization. At the completion of the project, the system is able to produce key documentation, lessons learned and other useful information to be stored and disseminated for future use. Corporations want knowledge management because they realize it has the potential to help them use what they already know, and what they don't know, to

work smarter and quicker and to make more money. Librarians have significant advantages as knowledge management players and they are both effective and customer oriented, secondly, they understand the ways in which people communicate information needs. Thus, librarians as knowledge managers can provide value-added information to their user community by using knowledge management tools in their system.

1 Introduction

Every organization consists of a large volume of data in circulation — tangible information, such as reports, financial facts, presentations, figures etc., and also intangible information such as who knows what in the organization. Information is systematized data, such as library catalogs. Databases and directories provide consistent and logical treatment of data so that people are able to find things, and these efforts can be described as Information Management, but most people confuse it as Knowledge Management.

2 What is Knowledge Management?

Knowledge Management is not easy to define. “Knowledge” is a word we all use and understand in everyday life without much trouble. According to Webster’s Dictionary, knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association. Knowledge may be recorded in an individual brain or stored in organizational processes, products, facilities, systems and documents. Knowledge Management is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets. Most often, generating value from such assets involves sharing them among employees, departments and even with other companies in an effort to devise best practices. It is important to note that knowledge encompasses

both tacit knowledge (in people's heads) and explicit knowledge (codified and expressed as information in databases, documents, etc.).

In reality, knowledge management is concerned with developing organizations in such a manner as to derive knowledge from information. Doing this requires people, processes, and technology. It is not just a better way to index, store, and retrieve information; it is a fundamental change in the nature of how people work with information to derive knowledge from information. This idea can be better explained by taking a practical example of a potter's wheel to make objects of clay. The first step in the process involves centering the clay on the wheel. People who have mastered this process describe it in terms of "feeling" when the clay is centered. Teaching this technique involves helping the students to discover a complex set of actions, rather than communicating the skill through a lecture or explanation. Information management also fails to reflect reality when intangible data and information outweigh the importance of tangible information.

3 Key elements of Knowledge Management implementation

It's very difficult to take an initiative to implement knowledge management in a traditional work culture environment. Implementing knowledge management requires:

1. High-level commitment to change;
2. People in the organization because, the knowledge lies in the people's head, and people are considered as most important part of knowledge management
3. Two-way communication in the hierarchical structure of management;
4. Understanding among the staff;
5. Keeping track of the process of workflow in the organization.

The knowledge management system should be able to provide information relevant to the ongoing projects at the right time and in the right context. As the project or task goes on, the knowledge system should capture versions of the intelligence produced by the individual or team. The bottom line is that the intranet provides an excellent and

relatively low-cost option for beginning the task of knowledge management in the organization.

4 True purpose of Knowledge Management

The entire purpose of Knowledge Management is to gain significant returns out of the data and information you produce and the way in which you produce it. Apart from the daily key tasks like collection of new materials, selection for inclusion in database, inputting data, indexing, searching and retrieval and delivering the output to the end-user, some additional tasks like data cleaning or deletion of redundant records from the database and check for the systems security, setting up links with other internal functions, creating relevant links with external sources, and updating any manual of procedures specific to the operations going on in the organization. From this knowledge, librarians can build a Web front end to allow users to access the information in a quick and easy way. In a practical condition, for example, universities which spend large amounts of money in conducting research and creating data, give away their work produce to publishers who sell it back to the universities in the form of very expensive journals. For universities or research laboratories, an application of Knowledge Management system could help them to capture the information they produce and market it to their customers in an effective manner. Knowledge Management principles are needed not only in libraries, but also in every department within the corporation or organization, whether it is a private or government sector.

5 How can a librarian best become a Knowledge manager?

Managing knowledge requires 70% of services and 30% of technologies as knowledge management tools in a knowledge management system. Librarians are best known as information service providers; here librarians can take lead over technologists to become a Knowledge Manager. Technologists are good in their subject, whereas, the librarians are handling all the subject disciplines, including technology. They also have knowledge of subject formation in the Universe of Knowledge.

6 Some of the qualities of a librarian to become a knowledge manager

- Providing services to the user community
- Sharing the information and understanding the user needs
- Theoretical and practical experience in designing and implementing information systems
- Analyzing the documents, classifying and storing them for easy retrieval
- Knowledge of current advances in information systems and technologies and their application in libraries.
- Building the index, using standard vocabulary
- Ability to effectively teach end-users, individually and in groups.

7 Where can a traditional librarian improve?

- Having knowledge of the digital library concepts, current and new advances in the scholarly communication systems, electronic publishing, and creating knowledge databases.
- Focussing on the quality of information provided, which tends to lead to continuous improvement in achieving the objectives.
- Being open and acting responsive to the changing environment.
- Analyzing whole library activities or systems thinking.
- Being a strong promoter of diversity in the workplace.
- Establishing trusting and respectful relationships with customers and staff.
- Developing the skills of continuous learning from the lessons learned or best practices.
- Effectively communicating with the colleagues and customers.
- Keeping track of all possible sources where one can have access to information.

- Experience in using, managing and troubleshooting computer systems and networks, MS Windows, the Unix operating system, TCP/IP protocol, other related protocols, the Internet, and World Wide Web.

8 Role of librarians as Knowledge managers

Librarians have major advantage as Knowledge Management players, by enhancing the efficiency in the quality of the services they provide. Training should be provided to the end-users and the library staff to use any sources available in the library, with the help of sound IT support. Equally valuable will be constant two-way communication with all levels of management and regular interaction across disciplines. This will lead to a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and allow maximum coordination of skills and knowledge. Staff involved in the operation and maintenance of the knowledge core will need to keep themselves up-to-date with what is going on both inside and outside the organization.

Questions to be asked include the following:

- What new projects are coming?
- Which additional areas of business might the organization be considering?
- In the wider marketplace, what are its competitors doing?

Answers to such questions will determine the content requirement of databases with in the knowledge management function. There will also be a need to keep up-to-date with new ways of organizing information in terms of creating records and making the most of indexing tools; learning about new software products and evaluating them for particular tasks. Wherever possible join the user groups, which relate to your organization's interest; this will provide you with a network of contacts with whom to raise questions, exchange experiences and discuss areas of common concern.

9 Conclusion

Librarian's advantages as knowledge management players are significant, unlike most people in organizations. Librarians are predisposed to sharing information, and consider sharing information as their mission; they are both effective and customer-oriented. Secondly, librarians understand the ways in which people communicate information needs and their patterns of information use. Librarians, in future, would move from the background to the center of the organization. They would shed their traditional role as part of a support group, uninvolved in any critical functions, to a prominent position to jointly hold the reins of knowledge management with users and technical experts.

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