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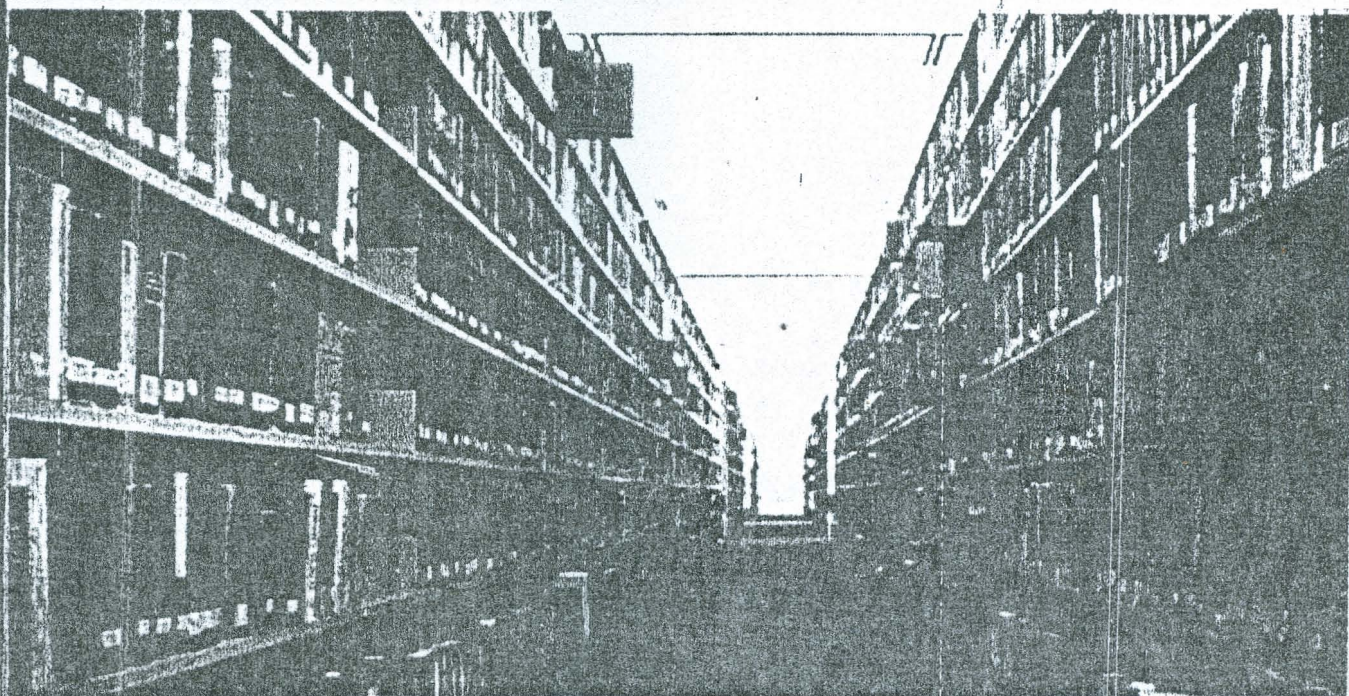
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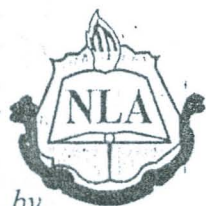
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Libraries Without Borders: Globalisation of Library and Information Services

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Librarians as Knowledge Managers in the Global Library and Information Services: Empirical Evidence from Libraries in South-Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper discusses Librarians as knowledge managers in the global library and information services, using empirical evidence from libraries in South-East Nigeria. The study was guided by four research questions and four hypotheses. It was a descriptive survey and the population comprised all professional librarians in libraries in South-East Nigeria. Eighty two professional Librarians were randomly selected and sampled from these libraries. Data for the study were generated using questionnaire, and analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages; means and the analysis of variance (ANOVA). It was found that the critical roles of librarians as knowledge managers include those of information providers, and custodians of information. The needed critical skills, include the ability to build schemes for the classification of information. Mentoring and exposing staff to the new emerging information technologies are some of the strategies that enhance their roles as knowledge managers.

Introduction

The concept of knowledge management is an essential element for knowledge managers of which librarians are a part, in the global library and information services. In the view of St. Clair (2003), knowledge management is a management practice that uses an organisation's

intellectual capital to enable the enterprise to achieve its organisational missions. Intellectual capital, according to him, is the knowledge that comes from the developed and accumulated experience, service and products of the organisations employees at all employment levels.

Knowledge managers according to Idiegbeyan Ose (2006) are librarians, archivists, statisticians, teachers and journalists who have a specific responsibility to serve the public interest in providing people with authentic, accurate and unbiased information. Knowledge managers are practitioners in specialist librarianship who see themselves as knowledge workers; whose role is to utilise these techniques and provide desired results. They are often known as knowledge professionals who provide focused information and service to clientele, thereby having an impact on the organisational success, mission and goals. (Special Library Association, 1997).

In the process of discharging their responsibilities, librarians are decisively contributing to people's educational, political and cultural development. In this sense, quality information should be considered as public goods, and therefore, made highly accessible and affordable for everybody. Librarians, as knowledge managers are the key actors in providing unhindered access to essential information resources for economic, political and cultural advancement.

Knowledge management (KM) has also been delineated by Townley (2001) as capturing the organisations goal-related knowledge as well as knowledge of its products, customers, competition and processes, and thereafter sharing that knowledge with the appropriate people throughout the organisation. Townley in addition identified two types of knowledge: tacit and explicit knowledge. The former is knowledge deeply embedded within individual experience, judgement and intuition whereas the latter is knowledge which is usually known by all. Shanhong (2000) advocated the building of a repository of both tacit and explicit knowledge as data warehouses or data mills which can be accessed by all professionals. This job is usually entrusted to the Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) who is the highest-ranking person in charge of KM. S/he collates all the documented vital information from own library and outside libraries, for future use. The whole essence is to increase operational efficiency, particularly in the global library and information services. For libraries to prove their relevance and add value they must aim at providing the right amount of information to the right clientele at the right time. Knowledge management will help to achieve this target.

However, it appears that librarians in libraries in South-Eastern Nigeria have not assumed their proper roles as knowledge managers. Perhaps, librarians in this part of the country are not yet equipped with the requisite skills needed for optimal performance of their tasks as knowledge managers. Such skills are very vital; more so, with the innovations in the information service in libraries brought about by information communication technologies.

It is in the light of the foregoing that this study set out to examine the place of librarians as knowledge managers in the global Library and Information Service, drawing an empirical evidence from librarians in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of knowledge that librarians in Nigerian Libraries have about their roles as knowledge managers?
2. What are the responsibilities of Librarians as knowledge managers in Nigerian libraries
3. What skills should Librarian possess to effectively play their roles as knowledge managers in Nigerian libraries?
4. What are the strategies for enhancing Librarians' roles as knowledge managers in Nigeria libraries?

Hypotheses

The following four (4) hypotheses guided the study.

1. There will be no significant difference in the mean ratings of librarians in Nigerian libraries on knowledge of their roles as knowledge managers based on library type.
2. The mean ratings of *highly* experienced librarians on knowledge of their roles as knowledge managers do not differ significantly from those of *not highly* experienced librarians.
3. There will be no significant difference in the mean ratings of librarians in Nigeria libraries on their responsibilities as knowledge managers based on library type.
4. The mean ratings of *highly* experienced librarians on their responsibilities as knowledge managers in Nigerian libraries do not differ significantly from those of *not highly* experienced librarians.

Methodology

This study which was a descriptive survey was limited to libraries in South-Eastern Nigeria. These include academic, public and national libraries. The professional librarian in these libraries was used as study subjects. A total of eight-two (82) professional librarians were studied which gave a response rate of 82%. Questionnaire was used to elicit responses from the study subjects. It consisted of five (5) sections covering all aspects of the research questions. The analysis of data was done using descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean, as well as the analysis of variance (ANOVA). Hypotheses were tested on two variables, namely, library type and work experience. For ease of analysis, the years of work experience of professional librarians were grouped into two, namely *highly experienced* librarians (16-20 years; and 21-25 years) represented by "16 years and above" and those *not highly experienced* (6-10 years and 11-15 years) represented by "0-15 years".

To determine the knowledge level of the professional librarians, the response categories of strongly (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) were collapsed into Agree and Disagree. This enabled the raw scores to be converted to percentage scores. The median of the percentage scores was taken to represent the knowledge score of the librarian on their roles as knowledge managers.

Results

Table I: Mean Ratings of Librarians' Level of Knowledge on Roles as Knowledge Managers

| S/N | Librarians' roles | University | Polytechnic | Public | National | Overall mean |
|-----|---------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | Technology experts | 2.88 | 3.14 | 2.67 | 3.33 | 3.01 |
| 2 | Cataloguers /Archivists | 3.27 | 3.43 | 3.50 | 3.33 | 3.38 |
| 3 | Scout | 2.70 | 3.14 | 2.00 | 1.67 | 2.12 |
| 4 | Research librarians | 3.38 | 3.71 | 3.50 | 4.00 | 3.65 |
| 5 | Analysers, synthesizers and Interpreters of | 3.23 | 3.86 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 3.52 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6 | Facilitators, consultants, and trainers | 3.27 | 3.57 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 3.46 |
| 7 | Educators | 3.32 | 3.57 | 2.83 | 3.67 | 3.35 |
| 8 | Information managers | 3.43 | 3.57 | 2.83 | 4.00 | 3.46 |
| 9 | Information management consultants | 3.21 | 3.71 | 3.67 | 4.00 | 3.65 |
| 10 | Custodians of information | 3.42 | 3.86 | 3.50 | 4.00 | 3.70 |
| 11 | Information providers | 3.53 | 3.71 | 3.83 | 4.00 | 3.77 |
| 12 | Change agents | 2.62 | 2.85 | 2.17 | 3.33 | 2.74 |
| 13 | Custodian of public facilities | 2.28 | 2.85 | 1.50 | 3.33 | 2.49 |
| 14 | Knowledge engineers | 3.12 | 3.00 | 3.33 | 3.67 | 3.28 |
| 15 | Knowledge editors | 3.26 | 3.43 | 2.17 | 3.00 | 2.97 |
| 16 | Knowledge analysts | 3.35 | 3.29 | 2.83 | 2.33 | 2.95 |
| 17 | Knowledge navigations | 3.10 | 3.43 | 2.67 | 3.00 | 3.05 |
| 18 | Knowledge brokers | 3.20 | 3.43 | 2.33 | 2.67 | 2.91 |
| 19 | Knowledge gatekeepers | 3.36 | 3.71 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.27 |
| 20 | Web content managers | 2.98 | 3.43 | 2.17 | 2.67 | 2.81 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 21 | Web page designers | 2.88 | 2.71 | 1.83 | 3.33 | 2.69 |
| 22 | Information architects | 3.15 | 3.51 | 2.33 | 4.00 | 3.25 |
| | | n = 66 | n = 7 | n = 6 | n = 3 | n = 82 |

From Table I, the most critical roles of librarians as knowledge managers included those of information providers, custodians of information, research librarians and information management consultants. It is also evident in table I above that the roles of librarians as knowledge managers in the global information environment should not include those of scout and custodians of public facilities. The above findings imply that librarians in libraries in South-Eastern Nigeria have as high as 85% knowledge of their roles as knowledge managers in the emerging new information environment.

Table 2: Mean Ratings of the Responsibilities of Librarians as Knowledge Managers

| S/N | Responsibilities | University | Polytechnic | Public | National | Overall mean |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | Involvement in the design and development of Intranet and portals | 2.18 | 1.71 | 1.83 | 2.00 | 1.93 |
| 2 | Interaction with library users to meet information needs | 3.44 | 3.43 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 3.72 |
| 3 | Combination of technologies for information access and dissemination | 3.11 | 3.43 | 2.83 | 3.33 | 3.18 |
| 4 | Providing assistance to users | 3.38 | 3.71 | 3.17 | 4.00 | 3.57 |
| 5 | Helping users to use technology facilities in the | 3.23 | 3.71 | 3.17 | 3.33 | 3.36 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | library | | | | | |
| 6 | Helping users to use networked information resources | 3.12 | 3.86 | 3.00 | 3.33 | 3.33 |
| 7 | Providing information literacy training to users | 2.89 | 2.85 | 2.50 | 2.00 | 2.56 |
| 8 | Involvement in selecting and packaging information | 3.35 | 3.86 | 3.50 | 3.00 | 3.43 |
| 9 | Informing users about free online journals | 3.39 | 3.57 | 1.67 | 2.00 | 2.66 |
| 10 | Training in online searching | 3.59 | 3.57 | 1.50 | 2.00 | 2.67 |
| 11 | Constructing thesauri for classification of information | 1.88 | 1.86 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 1.94 |
| 12 | Involvement in database design and content management | 1.86 | 1.71 | 1.00 | 1.67 | 1.56 |
| 13 | Involvement in the design of information infrastructure | 1.85 | 1.57 | 2.67 | 1.67 | 1.94 |
| 14 | Providing information from internet and online database | 2.98 | 2.86 | 1.33 | 1.67 | 2.21 |

From Table 2, the knowledge management functions of the librarians studied more of interaction with users to meet their information needs; providing assistance to users in evaluating, selecting and using information resources; and involvement in selecting and packaging

information for its maximum use. Table 2 also reveals that librarians are not involved in the design of databases, web design and content management. It is surprising to observe from the findings that librarians do not provide information to users from the Internet and online databases. These findings show that, librarians studied are yet to interact with the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in the most efficient manner to achieve results.

Table 3: Mean Ratings on the Skills needed by Librarians to Function as Knowledge Managers

| S/N | Skill-Set | University | Polytechnic | Public | National | Overall mean |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | Ability to build classification schemes | 3.23 | 3.57 | 3.83 | 4.00 | 3.66 |
| 2 | Ability to map knowledge | 3.12 | 3.29 | 3.17 | 4.00 | 3.40 |
| 3 | Understanding flow of information and knowledge in the library | 3.18 | 3.71 | 3.17 | 4.00 | 3.52 |
| 4 | Ability to use information technologies | 3.32 | 3.57 | 3.33 | 3.33 | 3.39 |
| 5 | Ability to collaborate and communicate | 3.32 | 3.57 | 3.17 | 3.33 | 3.35 |
| 6 | Ability to participate in sharing and transfer of knowledge | 3.53 | 3.71 | 2.50 | 3.33 | 3.27 |
| 7 | Ability to manage document and information | 3.67 | 3.57 | 2.33 | 3.00 | 3.14 |
| 8 | Understanding of information and knowledge needs of users | 3.40 | 3.71 | 3.17 | 3.67 | 3.49 |

From Table 3, the librarians were of the view that they needed to possess certain critical skills so as to play their roles as knowledge managers. They were of the opinion that the highest critical skill to possess is the ability to build schemes for the classification of information. Other critical skills needed include ability to understand the flow of information and knowledge in the library; ability to understand the information and knowledge needs of users as well as the ability to map both internal and external knowledge. These findings reveal that the librarians studied are deficient in the critical skills-set needed to enable them to become relevant in the knowledge economy.

Table 4: Mean Ratings on Strategies for Enhancing the Roles of Librarians as Knowledge Managers

| S/N | Skill-Set | University | Polytechnic | Public | National | Overall mean |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | Mentoring staff | 3.59 | 3.43 | 3.33 | 3.67 | 3.50 |
| 2 | Having a Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) in the library | 3.21 | 3.00 | 3.17 | 1.67 | 2.76 |
| 3 | Introducing a reward system for knowledge sharing | 3.24 | 3.43 | 1.67 | 3.00 | 2.84 |
| 4 | Integrating them into job description | 3.32 | 3.43 | 3.50 | 3.00 | 3.31 |
| 5 | Staff exposure to technologies | 3.61 | 3.86 | 2.83 | 3.67 | 3.49 |

From Table 4, the librarians studied were of the opinion that mentoring can enhance their roles as knowledge managers. Other proactive approaches as shown in table 4 include exposing staff to the new, emerging information technologies and interpreting knowledge management in the staff job descriptions. These findings reveal that there is need for established organisational cultures as enablers for knowledge management functions in libraries.

Table 5: Summary Table Showing the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

| Hypothesis | Sources of variance | Sum of square | DF | Variance estimate | F | P | F-crit |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|----|-------------------|------|-------|--------|
| HO ₁ | Between-group | 161.7 | 3 | 53.72 | 6.78 | <0.05 | 2.68 |
| | Within-group | 617.56 | 78 | 7.92 | | | |
| | Total | 778.73 | 82 | | | | |
| HO ₂ | Between-group | 156.3 | 3 | 52.1 | 5.81 | <0.05 | 2.68 |
| | Within-group | 698.5 | 78 | 8.96 | | | |
| | Total | 854.8 | 82 | | | | |
| HO ₃ | Between-group | 155.4 | 3 | 51.8 | 6.17 | <0.05 | 2.68 |
| | Within-group | 654.7 | 78 | 8.39 | | | |
| | Total | 810.1 | 82 | | | | |
| HO ₄ | Between-group | 159.6 | 3 | 53.2 | 6.21 | <0.05 | 2.68 |
| | Within-group | 667.5 | 78 | 8.56 | | | |
| | Total | 827.1 | 82 | | | | |

Table 5 shows that the F-tests are all significant. This means that all the hypotheses are rejected implying that what librarians know about their roles as knowledge managers differ by library type and also by professional experience. On the other hand, the significance of the F-test also reveals that the knowledge management functions performance by librarians differ from one library type to another and they are also related to librarians' work or professional experience. In other words, the knowledge management functions performed by highly experienced librarians differ significantly from those of less experienced librarians.

Discussion

This study reveals that even though librarians in libraries in South-Eastern Nigeria have a high knowledge, or are fully aware of their roles as knowledge managers, they are yet to assume these roles properly in their respective libraries. The reasons for this situation, based on the findings of this study, are largely due to lack of requisite knowledge management skills and absence of defined organisational cultures for

knowledge integration and development. The lack of skills has affected the involvement of these librarians in content management and also in the development or design of websites or web portals, online databases and Internets. In addition, the lack of defined organisational culture is responsible for the non integration of knowledge management activities into the job description of librarians. However, it must be stated, based on the findings, that librarians in libraries in South-Eastern Nigeria have begun in their respective libraries to perform knowledge management functions that will strategically place them as leaders in the global information services.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It must be stressed here, that knowledge management is concerned with knowledge integration and development. It is also about proactively performing library-related tasks to achieve goals through such approaches like teamwork, centralised decision-making, motivation, innovativeness, and change management. These are internal factors that can help librarians to work effectively as knowledge managers in their respective libraries. Most importantly, librarians must be trained to interact with the new emerging technologies so as to make positive contributions to the global library and information services. From the foregoing the following recommendations have emerged:

Knowledge as a matter of necessity must be shared within the library. Knowledge must be generated and applied to organisational problems. This must be encouraged by library management.

Individuals with desired expertise should be organised into a knowledge group/network to share experiences such as we have in *NLAIT* and *Cat* and class sections.

Mentoring has become very critical in this era of globalisation. With librarians' easy mobility from one library to another and attrition caused by retirement, the need for mentorship and impacting on a younger librarian critical tacit knowledge about ones job has become crucial to further the goals of the library profession.

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