KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALAYSIA

JAMA HMI BT. MOW) NAYAN

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the new economy that is based on knowledge in the present era has definitely affected everyone and every organization including libraries. Knowledge is seen by most organizations as an overriding and important commodity and if managed properly can assist the organizations to improve their services and remain sustainable and significant in the near future. This study is carried out to assess the organizational working culture of the National Library of Malaysia as to whether it would support the efforts of managing knowledge in the organization. The explorative study using triangulation method consisting of interviews, observations and questionnaire were conducted to investigate the situation. Two hundred questionnaires on knowledge management issues were distributed to the staff of the organization and a total of 72% of it was duly filled and returned. Analysis of the data revealed that most of the respondents that participated in the survey are familiar with the concept of knowledge management and that the National Library has all the required tools and systems to manage knowledge in the organization. However it was anticipated to come up with a Knowledge Management System whereby persons with specific knowledge and expertise can be located easily and the organization should document the best practices and expertise it requires to successfully conduct the services offered to the library users. Therefore a conceptual framework called the l’NM Knowledge Bank is proposed in the final chapter hopping that it could act as the medium for knowledge capturing and dissemination in the organization.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management in the National Library of Malaysia: An Explorative Study

1.1 Preamble

The emergence of a new economy that is based on knowledge in the present era has definitely affected everyone and every organization. Knowledge has suddenly become a key resource in every organization and seen as the thermonuclear competitive weapons (Steward, 1997). This significant transformation that occurred in the economy has urged both profit and non-profit organizations to make major structural adjustments in the organization for survival and to prosper in this new competitive millennium.

Knowledge as seen by most organizations is an overriding and important commodity in the competitive millennium, if managed properly can help the organizations improve their services and remain sustainable and significant. This can be achieved through creating an organizational culture of sharing knowledge and expertise within the organization. However, there are obstacles and innumerable challenges in nurturing and managing the knowledge. The challenge occurs because only a part of knowledge is internalized by the organization and the other part is internalized by individuals (Bhatt, 2002) and is floating around in the organization in the form of in-house 'expert', shared stories, working solution, web of relation, communities of practice and experiences. This is the real intellectual asset of the organization and
this asset needs an effective and efficient process of capturing, organizing and distributing it within the organization (Allee, 1997). This phenomenon not only occurs in the profit making organizations but also the non-profit organizations and service providers like the libraries.

Faced with the challenges mentioned above and to remain relevant to the changing environment, libraries should rethink and explore ways to capture and share the tacit and explicit knowledge within the library. Libraries with the conventional functions to collect, process, disseminate, store and utilize information to provide services to its users now need to improve the services provided to the clients or users by becoming a learning organization that enhance the process of managing knowledge and innovation. The roles of librarians should shift from information providers to knowledge managers and more emphasis should be placed on the need to constantly update or acquire new skills and knowledge.

Like any other organization in the world there is a need for libraries to realize that knowledge and experiences of the staffs are the assets of the organization and should be valued and shared (Lee, 2000). Libraries now have to depend on their ability to utilize information and knowledge of the staffs to better serve the needs of the organization and users in order to be successful in the near future. Knowledge management is therefore seen as the tool that can help the libraries to draw out the tacit knowledge that the staffs have, which they carry around with them, through their observation and what they learn from experience rather than what is usually explicitly stated. By managing knowledge the role of the librarians can therefore be extended and as such the libraries can then expand their role and responsibilities to
effectively contribute and meet the needs of a large and diverse of community and users.

1.1.1 Fundamentals of Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is an organization's capability to combine the culture, context and infrastructures of the organization to deliver high-value information ready to be applied to decision-making and service delivery with the aim to improve performance. "Concepts and practices evolved through the 1990s as management in the postindustrial era not only realized that knowledge was perhaps the critical resources, rather than land, machines, or capital (Drucker, 1993), but also their organizations generally poorly managed it. If more attention were paid to creating, providing, sharing, using and perhaps protecting knowledge, the promise was that the organizational performance would improve" (Earl, 2001).

Knowledge and management of knowledge appear to be regarded as increasingly important features for organizational survival (Martenson, 2000). In addition, knowledge is fundamental factor, whose successful application helps organizations deliver creative products and services. Today organizations are fundamentally different as compared to organizations that existed in one or two decades ago in terms of their functions, structures and management styles. Yu (2002) pointed out that organizations put more emphasis on understanding, adapting and managing changes and competing on the basis of capturing and utilizing knowledge to better serve their markets. The central argument around which knowledge management
It is important for organizations to determine who knows what in the organization and that knowledge can be shared throughout the organization.

For the purpose of this research knowledge management is thus:

*The explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge and its association process of creating, gathering, organizing, diffusion, use and exploitation. It requires turning personal knowledge into corporate knowledge that can be widely shared through an organization and applied* (Skyrme, 1997).

There is obviously much more to knowledge management than sharing these basic definitions. It is important to begin to frame the detailed aspect of knowledge management. “Knowledge management has become a new way of capturing an institution’s MI expert addressing factors such as: databases; Web site interfaces and documents; knowledge infrastructure for just-in-time knowledge and global access; enhancing the visibility of knowledge in the institution; sharing knowledge not only within the institution but also with external clients; an institution’s knowledge capture; capturing tacit knowledge and experience of staff; and information collected in libraries, record centers, administrative units, operational units, and with individuals.
staff' (Srikantaiah et al, 2002). This definition speaks to the heart of knowledge management. It is a holistic approach for managing tacit and explicit knowledge in order to gain a competitive advantage (Drucker, 1993).

1.1.2 The Evolution of Knowledge Management in Malaysia

Since the announcement of vision 2020, the concept of the knowledge economy has been prominent across Malaysia. Knowledge management, however really only began to make an impact at the turn of the century. InfoSoc Malaysia 2000, a major conference held in Sarawak, and the Second Global Knowledge Conference, held in Kuala Lumpur from 7 — 10th March the same year was said to be the events that were largely responsible for this. At the opening of the Second Global Knowledge Conference, the Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad stated that, "...in the Information Age which we enter, our society must be information rich..., this country must most seriously enhance the production and supply of information, knowledge and wisdom and ensure their accessibility to all our people in every area of work." (Mahathir, 2000)

Recently, the number of firms experimenting with the disciplines that relate to knowledge management has grown, especially over the past two years. The big multinationals still lead the way, but a number of large corporations' utilities in the country are beginning to take their steps down the knowledge management road. Knowledge management is also creeping up the government agenda, affecting both the government's vision for the country as
a whole and the way ministerial departments operate on a day-to-day basis. The K-based Economy Master Plan (KEMP) introduced at the end of 2002, proved that the government is very serious in transforming Malaysia from P-based economy to a K-based economy (K-economy). The various cutting edge initiatives such as the Multimedia Super Corridor and the increasing emphasis on research and development (R&D) are other few examples that testify the Government's seriousness and efforts.

In an interview with the Knowledge Management journal, Ming Yu Cheng, Head of Economic Unit of Multimedia University Malaysia, noted that in Malaysia, government agencies represent one of the sectors in which knowledge management has thus far made the biggest impact. In the same article on "Country focus", he mentioned that knowledge management strategies in public—sector bodies are well defined and relatively far advanced. In the private sector, many large firms now have dedicated Knowledge Managers, although most of these still cut fairly lonely figures. Knowledge management has had an impact on the country's telecommunications industry, such as the Syarikat Telekom Malaysia and also the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC).

The lack of understanding of what knowledge management entails and its potential benefits was probably the limited application of knowledge management in other sector in the country. Another factor that contributes to it could no doubt be the cost consideration in implementing Knowledge
Management in the organization. Funding is always seen as a hindrance to implement programmes and nurture innovations.

As seen from social perspective, the knowledge management movement in Malaysia has a number of things in its favor. First, Malaysians are becoming far more comfortable with information technology. Partially as a consequence of this, e-commerce is also taking off, and people are beginning to feel at home with many of the ways of working associated with knowledge management. The government is also paying a crucial role in raising awareness about the importance of knowledge—based working in Malaysia. A Knowledge-base Economy Master Plan was then published as a guide to the public sector to develop a world-class knowledge-based public services.

Media coverage is also very active and considerable. *The New Straits Times*, *Computimes*, *Malaysian Business* and *Bernama* are among the publications that regularly devote column inches to the subject of knowledge management, and the English press has occasional articles on the topic. There is, though, a tendency to treat knowledge management as primarily an IT-based discipline, an approach that does not help in spelling the confusion that still surround knowledge management in Malaysia. Prominent advertisements for out-of-the-box knowledge management solutions no doubt carry some of the blame for the perpetuation of this myth.

Companies in Malaysia have been aware of the principle of knowledge management for many years, although the majority either do not consciously
recognize them or call them by another name. If the country is to achieve its goal of becoming a truly knowledge-based economy as part of its journey towards fulfilling Vision 2020, or deliberate and defined approach towards knowledge management is perhaps in order. The country as a whole may have a relatively late start in knowledge management terms, but it now faces an excellent opportunity to secure its future and its place on the world's economic stage.

1.1.3 Knowledge Management and Libraries

Though not many libraries have been known to undertake knowledge management initiatives, the keen interest of the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) community in knowledge management (KM) over the past few years has led to the transformation of the knowledge management Discussion Group into a full-fledged IFLA Section. Established in December 2003, the new KM section is situated within Division IV (Bibliographic Control). Since its inception in 2001, the activities of the Knowledge Management Discussion Group received considerable attention among conference delegates. Information professionals from all parts of the world participated in the KM meetings, expressing their interest in learning more about this important development in organizational management.

Library and Information (LIS) professionals have shown great interest in the implementation of knowledge management in the libraries and information environment and expressed a need for a deeper understanding of its many dimensions and relevance to their work.
The aim of the IFLA KM Section was to support the development and implementation of knowledge management culture in libraries and information centers. The Section had provided an international platform for professional communication - a mechanism to increase the awareness of KM, understanding and appreciating its significance for librarians and the institutions that employ them. The Section had track developments in knowledge management and promoted its practical implementation within the IFLA community.

Since KM encompasses many dimensions of organizational management, the activities of the Section were intended to be integrated and linked to other relevant sections of IFLA and other professional organizations. The KM Section can be seen as a wide platform with integrated activities, working in a co-operative mode with other sections and divisions (Wormell, 2000).

*Knowledge management in Libraries in the 21st Century* is one of the conference paper presented at IFLANET that is much cited by libraries undertaking the knowledge management process. The presenter, Shanghoni (2002) noted that the role of knowledge management in libraries would become more and more important along with the development of knowledge economy. It is a new management mode, boasts the following superiority and characteristics incomparable with conventional management.

Human resource management she cited is the core of knowledge management in libraries because in the knowledge economy era, the libraries will attach
importance to vocational training and lifelong education of library staffs to raise their scientific knowledge level and ability of acquiring and innovating knowledge. They also will and fully respect the human value, guide and bring into play wisdom potentialities of library staffs, take developing knowledge resources in the brains of library staffs as an important way for increasing work efficiency. An all-round improvement of library stalls quality and positioning of the human value will become important objectives of knowledge management in libraries (Shanghong, 2002).

The objective of implementing knowledge management in libraries is to promote knowledge innovation (Cao, 1999). As bases for collection, processing, storage and distribution of knowledge and information, libraries represent an indispensable link in the scientific system chain, an important link in the knowledge innovation. Most libraries take part in scientific research process directly and therefore the library work is a component of knowledge innovation.

Libraries must pay attention to diffusion and conversion of knowledge. They should act as bridges for turning the results of knowledge innovation into realistic productive forces. Knowledge management in libraries should promote relationship in and between libraries, between library and user, to strengthen knowledge internetworking and to quicken knowledge flow. In the knowledge economy era, libraries will carry out researches on development
and application of information resources, construction of virtual libraries, protection of intellectual property rights in the electronic era etc., thus founding the base for knowledge innovation (Cao, 1999).

Information technology is a tool for knowledge management in libraries because knowledge acquisition is the starting point of knowledge management in libraries. The application of information technologies enlarges the scope of knowledge acquisition, raises knowledge acquisition speed and reduces knowledge acquisition cost. It is impossible to accomplish such important tasks by using man's brains only in the modern society in which the knowledge changes with each passing day. It will be possible to link closely knowledge sources and knowledge workers by computer networks, thus constructing knowledge networks in libraries based on the realization of a single-point informatization (Wang, 1999).

In order to endeavor in the 21st century, libraries should combine the best of the past with new thinking. This can be done by engaging or converting into a learning organization. As a learning organization Choo (2000) noted that libraries should then provide a strong leadership in knowledge management and expand the access of knowledge for their diversified users.
1.1.4 The National Library of Malaysia

The history of The National Library of Malaysia goes back as far as 1966 when it was first established as a unit within the National Archives with the modest primary functions of implementing the Preservation of Books Act 1966 and the publication of the Malaysian National Bibliography.

It then functions as a department after the establishment of the National Library Act 1972. A series of catalytic events in the following years accelerated the growth of the National Library. The Preservation Books Act 1966 was repealed and replaced by a much more effective Deposit of Library Material Act 1986. This act requires all publishers in Malaysia to deposit 5 copies of printed material with the National Library. This ensures published materials to be recorded and to be available for references now and the future.

Today the National Library of Malaysia is a Department under the Ministry of Education. It is responsible for the building and maintenance of the national collection from various library resources, providing facilities for their use as well as providing leadership in library matters. The National library also plays an important role in planning and development of the library infrastructure throughout the country. This role is in line with the aspirations of the government to inculcate a culture of knowledge in the development of the country and to foster a reading culture among Malaysians.
Objectives:

The purpose and objectives of the National Library of Malaysia as stipulated in Part II Section 3 of the National Library Act (Amended) 1987 is as follows:

1. To make available for use of present and future generations a national collection of library resources;
2. To facilitate nationwide access to library resources available within the country and abroad; and
3. To provide leadership on matters pertaining to libraries.

Philosophy:

To develop culturally advanced individuals with a love for knowledge acquired through lifetime reading in order to nurture the minds of Malaysians towards excellence; thereby bringing about innovations that can enhance the tradition of knowledge in the country.

Vision:

The National library of Malaysia aspires to be a world-class library in the provision of excellent information services towards the realization of Malaysia’s vision of becoming an industrialized and developed nation by the year 2020.

Mission:

To ensure that all Malaysians have equal access to library services and facilities as \veil as the ability to utilize Malaysian and universal intellectual
heritage knowledge through a national infrastructure of integrated electronic libraries.

A proposal to restructure the National Library's organization was forwarded to the Public Service Department (PSD) on 28 September 2000 and was approved to further strengthen the National Library's services and to provide opportunity for promotion to its staff. Under this new restructuring (Appendix IA — Organization Chart) the increase in the number of staff, the need for office space also increased. Therefore, the National Library has rented an office space at TH Selborn Building, Jalan Tun Razak to accommodate several Divisions besides the existing building in Jalan Tun Razak.

As at January 2005 the National Library of Malaysia has a total workforce of 466, holding different position and posts. The distribution of posts is listed below:

- Top management 2 posts
- Managerial and professional 124 posts
- Support staff 340 posts

The main services of the National Library are the Common User Library Service Scheme headed by the Director General of the National Library. The Department is supported by staffs from the Common User Services of the Public Service Department, Common User Services of Accountant-General's Department and the Common User Service of the Ministry of Information.
Under the National library Common User Services Scheme, there are four (4) schemes of services as follows:

- Librarians
- Library Offices (Personal to holder)
- Assistant Library Officers
- Library Assistant

Regarded as the main organization that is responsible for the development of the librarianship (library) services the National Library continuously strives to upgrade the level of knowledge and understanding of its officers in the field of librarianship, especially on current issues such as the development of the local digital content, the National Library's strategic plan, public sectors evaluation programmes and others. In this regard, embarking the process of knowledge management seems vital to leverage the organizational knowledge, where experiences and expertise can be shared and learned by others in the organization.

1.2 Statement of problem

Since its establishment in the year 1966 the National Library of Malaysia has seen a succession of individuals holding the post of Director General and other top executives in the National Library of Malaysia. In search for excellence for the department, ideas and management varies from one to another and this come in the form of changes in the management style, ideas, directives, policies, practices etc. Some of the management changes are available in print and document forms but most of the times are not.
According to Al-Ali (2003, p.81) most organizations, depend on knowledge of a few people in the organization. Knowledge is stored in the memory of these individual staff and is gone once they change job or retire. "The memory loss problem is compound by another deficiency in the organizational brain- the brain drain wherein valuable knowledge resources are lost with employees leaving the organization. It happens when management fails to capture the tacit knowledge of its employees by transferring it to explicit knowledge". This statement is somewhat similar to the situation faced in the National Library of Malaysia. In the library environment especially the National Library, the dominant asset is of course intellectual asset that is the knowledge held within the staff especially the professionals and these intellectual assets need to be captured. It will forever belong to these individuals or knowledgeable people unless initiatives are taken to capture, organize and facilitate access of the knowledge to be shared across the organization and thus become the intellectual asset of the organization. Knowledge mapping initiatives should be undertaken to simplify the job of managing knowledge. There will be less problems identifying explicit knowledge of the organization but the greater challenge comes where tacit knowledge is concerned.

Another problem that this study addresses is how to exploit knowledge as a competitive advantage and become a knowledge-base organization. A knowledge-based organization is one that harnesses human capital to enable the institution to achieve a competitive advantage to attain strategic objectives. The National Library like any other organizations in Malaysia presently has Internet connection, Intranet and even has its own Web Portal but are these amenities being fully utilized to
facilitate the process of managing knowledge of the organization? Assessing the working environment of the organization will help us identify these problems.

1.3 Aims and objective of the study

This study is carried out for the following aims and purposes:

- To survey the current status of knowledge management in The National Library of Malaysia.
- Investigate how the organization creates, disseminates and applying knowledge within The National Library.
- Determine whether the working environment of The National Library supports the implementation of knowledge management in the organization.
- Propose a knowledge management model or conceptual framework for the implementation plan for The National Library.

1.4 Research questions

In order to examine the purpose of this study, relevant data will be sought to answer the following questions:

What is the level of understanding of knowledge management among the staff of National Library of Malaysia?

Will the working environment support the implementation of knowledge management?

Do knowledge sharing practices occur in the organization?

vii. What are the systems used in the National Library of Malaysia to capture the knowledge created?
1.5 Significance of the study

This study should be able to provide the National Library of Malaysia with some useful information as to whether the working environment will support the implementation of knowledge management in the organization. The findings of the study can be used as ingredient in formulating successful knowledge management strategies for the National Library of Malaysia in its pursuit to become a knowledge-based organization. It is also hoped that the report of the study will produce useful data for other libraries in Malaysia to perceive and be aware of the constraints and benefits that they would acquire if they were to manage knowledge in their organization.

1.6 Expected Research Outcomes

This research is expected to gain some information as to whether the National Library of Malaysia is ready to embark on the process of managing knowledge in the organization. The main issues investigated are of course the willingness of the workers, the working environment and also the present infrastructure.

At the conclusion of this research, it is intended to propose a conceptual framework of managing knowledge in the National Library of Malaysia which should be able to act as a medium for knowledge capturing and dissemination in the organization. It is hoped that if implemented the framework would be able to serve as a knowledge source that facilitates the delivery of captured knowledge in the organization to the right person at the right time. Effective management of the organization's knowledge will certainly allow it to improve the quality of its services while operating more efficiently. The potential value to the organization is certainly huge and immense.
The National Library was chosen as the place for research because it is seen as an organization that is very wealthy of knowledge and knowledgeable employees where lots and lots of information were being deposited and again retrieve for the use of research and learning by the people of the country. Besides that the researcher is also a librarian employed under the Common User Library Service Scheme, working under the supervision of the Director General of the National Library and was very much aware of the fact that that there are a lot of implicit knowledge that is circulating around in the organization that needs to be captured and organized so that it could be used by other employees in the organization to enhance their working capability.

1.7 Operational definitions

It is important to provide a few brief operational definitions of the key terms used throughout this research. The definitions provided in this section will be further explained in the literature review.

- **Data:** Data is a set of discrete facts about events and is considered raw facts and figures that must be further processed to become in form at ion.

- **Information:** Information is processed data

- **Knowledge:** 'Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information.' (Davenport and Prusak, 2000).
• **Explicit knowledge:** It is the knowledge found in books, documents, records, databases, and e-mails. It is 'public' knowledge rather than 'private' (Davenport and Prusak, 2000).

• **Tacit (implicit) knowledge:** Implicit knowledge is difficult to capture and communicate. It is private knowledge. It is personal knowledge stored in the mind of the individuals. Tacit knowledge is job or task specific and related to context (Crowley, 2001).

• **Knowledge management:** 'It is the explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge and its associated processes of creating, gathering, organizing, diffusion, use and exploitation. It requires turning personal knowledge into corporate knowledge that can be widely shared throughout an organization and appropriately applied' (Skryme, 1997). Knowledge management deals with people, culture and technology to enable organizations to achieve strategic objectives.

### 1.8 Limitations of the study

The study will be conducted on a limited number of samples and only focus on the National Library of Malaysia: its staff, and their working procedures. As such, it cannot be said to represent the total view of knowledge management implementation in libraries per se and therefore the findings cannot be use to generalize the same situation that would happen if the study is to be carried out at other libraries in Malaysia. Furthermore, the focus of the study is only related to one aspect of knowledge management in the organization, that is its working environment, therefore it cannot be said to provide a complete overview of the effectiveness of knowledge management implementation in the organization. Other factors like the
organizational structure; finance, and incentive must be taken into account to determine as to whether other libraries are ready to embark on knowledge management implementation.

1.8 Assumptions

It is assumed that when this study is carried out, the National Library of Malaysia has not started the practice of knowledge management in its organization. There might be some isolated cases whereby the staffs might be practicing knowledge management in certain divisions or units but not as a holistic approach.

1.9 Organization of the Thesis

This introductory chapter has covered an introduction to the subject and the aims of the study. Operational definitions are provided in this chapter together with the assumption, limitations and the significance of carrying out the study.

Chapter 2 commences by looking at knowledge, followed by some discussion of what knowledge is, and various aspects of knowledge. The facts surrounding knowledge management studies done by other researchers will be covered in the same chapter. This chapter then leads to the formulation of research instrument for data gathering.

Chapter 3 takes the research questions, and proposes a methodology by which to test them. This includes the justification of why the questionnaire is chosen as the main research instrument.
Chapter 4 displays and analyses the results from the questionnaire, and draws key findings of the study. It also provides a detailed evaluation of the processes involved in the study, and the final outcome of the study.

Chapter 5 is the summarizing chapter that discusses the conclusions drawn from the study, and whether it answers the research question. Finally this chapter outlines possible paths for future work.

Appendices are included at the end of the report for further information and to justify the findings. A list of referred text and articles will be noted as the last accompanying material that is labeled as the Bibliography.