

Knowledge Capital Building: A tool for Sustainable Library Growth

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Abstract

The paper is a theoretical approach to establish that knowledge capital has a relationship with sustainable library growth and how libraries should adapt strategies that will enhance knowledge capital building. Capital knowledge management is a key driver of organisational performance and is a critical tool for library survival, competitiveness and profitability. Examining the full advantage of the value of knowledge capital in this season of economic recession is highly recommendable. Therefore, creating, managing, sharing and utilizing knowledge capital effectively is very vital for library growth. The paper is anchored on the following objectives: To determine the importance of knowledge capital in sustaining library growth, to identify challenges working against knowledge capital building in the library, to know strategies of effective knowledge capital building in the Library and the necessity to have good knowledge management practices to enable workers create the right value for the economy. Others areas treated in the paper include strategies for creating organisational culture that facilitates the sharing of knowledge whether formal or informal, development of information and communication technology, making useful knowledge accessible for decision making, identifying the effective use of staff expertise, creating corporate culture and values that encourage knowledge capital building. The paper therefore emphasized that knowledge building of library staff should be a continuous exercise, and more attention should be paid to the level of knowledge acquisitions, organizations and disseminations of the library staff.

Key Words: Knowledge capital, Library Growth, knowledge Capital Building

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Introduction

Knowledge management in libraries entails two major areas which are resource management and knowledge capital management. Knowledge capital building happens to be an aspect of knowledge management of which this paper is focused on, specifically capital (intellectual) management of the Library staff. No organization can survive independent of the intellectual knowledge of the staff and it is the requirement for organizational performance, which further facilitates the realization of the value of human capital (Davidson & Voes, 2001). In an organizational context, knowledge is the sum of what is known and resides in the intelligence and competence of people. Igbeka (2008) defined knowledge as “the full utilization of information and data, coupled with the potential of people's skills, competencies, ideas, intuitions, commitments and motivations.” In today's economy, knowledge is stored in the individual brain, or encoded in organizational processes, documents, products, services, facilities and systems. As such, knowledge is more relevant for the sustenance of a business than capital, labor or land, though it remains the most neglected assets. Alegbeleye (2010) differentiated knowledge into explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is contained in documents, databases, electronic mail or other records. It is also exchanged through formal education, meetings and other personal interactions. While tacit knowledge is acquired through observation, practice and initiation. It relies on experience, judgment and intuition. An organisation's tacit knowledge is embodied in its employee's skills or “know-how”. Tacit knowledge can be difficult to articulate. It is transferred to others by shared experiences such as apprenticeships, mentoring relationships or similar form of on-the-job training. Tacit knowledge can be converted to explicit knowledge through externalization when converted to recorded form in documents and databases for users to make reference to. The tacit knowledge can thereby be equated with knowledge capital or intellectual knowledge.

From the above discourse, one can infer that knowledge is what is known and understood by people and it resides in them and when it is applied to doing something it produces results. Therefore, knowledge is very essential for organisational sustainability and growth. However, it has been observed that,

library staff majorly are unable to contribute maximally to library growth as a result of failure to build on knowledge earlier acquired. It is expected that on periodic basis, library staff are to undergo trainings or attend professional conferences and workshops in order to build their capital knowledge. This failure on the part of the employers probably could be associated to insufficient fund or no policy on ground to take care of such cases.

In view of the above, this paper focused on knowledge capital building of library staff, and to bring out strategies that can be adopted for sustainable library growth especially in an era of economic recession.

Knowledge capital according to business dictionary (2017) is the know-how that results from the experience, information, knowledge, learning, and skills of the employees of an organization. One can infer that knowledge capital resides in the employee. According to Rubin (2004) organizations basically rely on the inventiveness and innovation to survive and prosper. This means they rely on their employee's knowledge, skills and ideas (sometimes referred to as "intellectual capital" of the organization). This therefore implies that, effective strategies for capital building of staff must be put in place in order to sustain the library growth.

Library growth is in the areas of staff strength and capabilities, resources and infrastructure, and budget allocation. Knowledge capital building of library staff can enhance their performance and make them to become effective and efficient in service delivery which invariably helps in the growth of the library. To sustain the growth therefore, library management is expected to build the knowledge capital of the staff for effective and efficient job performance. Knowledge capital building is an investment in tangible assets also known as knowledge based capital (OECD, 2017). Therefore, the need for knowledge capital building has become a thing of necessity because it loses value as the individual ages. Though it is capital intensive, the library management needs to put conscious effort to train the staff to keep them abreast of new development in their area of specialisations so as to increase their productivity.

From all indication, knowledge has become the driving force for social development, and the attention as well as demands for knowledge is on the increase. Even with the emergence of computer technology and computing

capabilities, knowledge is still considered an important resource for development than mere raw or unprocessed data and information (Edem&Ani 2010). For librarians to meet the changing needs of library users, they are expected to continuously enhance their capabilities and strategies in order to improve productivity, efficiency and competitiveness in knowledge economy. In the technology age, librarians must develop their knowledge and competency to carry out effective library services, accessing CD-ROMs, accessing Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) among others. Librarians therefore need sufficient knowledge about technology to use for work and to teach such to users. These can be achieved through the knowledge capital building tools like constant training, attending seminars, symposium, and workshops among others. Knowledge capital building requires adequate funding which the libraries may not have because of economic recession. This calls for strategies that can be adopted by library management in order to develop capital knowledge of library staff in this period of economic recession.

This paper is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the knowledge capital building in the library
2. To determine the importance of knowledge capital building
3. Identify challenges working against knowledge capital building in the library
4. Identify effective strategies of knowledge capital building in the library.

Knowledge Capital Building in the Library

Knowledge capital, also called intellectual capital, is the intangible asset that represents valuable ideas, methods, processes and intuitive talents that belong to an organization. In other words, knowledge capital relies solely on the talents of people rather than the work machines. Which means, libraries that want to grow and maintain knowledge capital, must be ready to grow and maintain the talent in their employees. Knowledge capital can give organizations significant competitive advantages in that, it is very difficult for competitors to replicate. In some organizations, knowledge capital can be the bulk of the organizational

asset base or revenue stream. However, knowledge capital can lose value as an individual ages. It should be noted that the productivity of labour is not only based on wages but, productivity comes from knowledge capital stored in the employee's head in the form of useful training and organizational relevant experiences (Strassmann, 1999). For instance, for an employee to increase their earning capacity, they rely on the organisation to invest in developing their skills beyond whatever investments they make on their own, such as reading books, attending courses and getting involved in professional activities, therefore employees always hope to acquire marketable knowledge that has a greater value than their compensation.

Organisations basically rely on inventiveness and innovation to survive and prosper. This means they rely on their employee's knowledge, skill and ideas to create new services and products. This innovation and inventive thinking requires collaboration and sharing of information among the employees. As well as creating enabling working environment for knowledge development of the employees which could be at formal or informal levels. Melnery (2002) observed that, capital knowledge is dynamic because it is dependent on human experience. It changes based on personal interactions. It is active and has a social dimension. Knowledge evolves as it is influenced by the thoughts, feelings and experience of others.

From the foregoing, there is the need for continuous building of knowledge capital to increase productivity in order to sustain library growth in an economic recession.

Challenges of Knowledge Capital Building in Libraries

Most developing countries with particular reference to Nigeria are faced with a lot of challenges when it comes to knowledge capital building of library staff. Few of such obstacles are discussed below:

- 1. Poor funding:** Inadequate funding has been a major challenge to building knowledge capital in libraries. With poor funding, heads of libraries find it difficult to send staff to update their knowledge in their areas of specialization that could boost the growth and services in the library. This has led to lack of staff training in most libraries. They are not sponsored for conferences, seminars and workshop or to pursue further

studies. Very often the parent organisation complain of no money and this affect Government owned university libraries where they suffer low budgetary allocation.

2. **Inadequate ICT facilities:** Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and networks which is the bases for building knowledge capital is inadequate in most libraries. This is attested by Edem and Ani (2010) who observed that, there is no special budget in most Nigerian libraries towards acquisition and maintenance of ICT infrastructural facilities by libraries. Which invariably means that, electronic development which is the norm for building knowledge capital has been over looked by most libraries. In most cases, parent institutions fail to allocate sufficient funds for the provision and use of computer services in the library.
3. **Erratic Power Supply:** Erratic power supply has become a great challenge In Nigeria to be specific especially with libraries with ICT facilities. Most times, the use of such facilities are hampered by lack of electricity. Ironically, not all libraries can afford to run generator to facilitate knowledge acquisition in the library. It is a general observation that power supply is unreliable and the alternative is expensive. As a matter of fact, electric power supply is much below expectation despite the huge investment the Government claimed to have made to address the problem of incessant power outage. Since ICT depends on electricity power to work, libraries need reliable power supply to provide access to the electronic resources
4. **Unsupportive attitude of Parent Organisation:** The negative attitude and the lack of support from the parent organisation equally affect knowledge capital building in libraries. This is a situation where staff are often denied training whereby they cannot even attend workshops and conferences as a result of lack of funds for sponsorship. This can be devastating and definitely leads to disillusionment.
5. **Uncooperative attitude among Library staff:** Lack of cooperation among staff to create and share knowledge is a major challenge in knowledge capital building in the library. Most library staff are not willing to work with their colleagues in the area of collaborative research. Either the seniors are not interested in mentoring the junior ones or the younger

staff are not ready to be mentored by the seniors. In such a situation, knowledge capital cannot be developed for effective library growth,

- 6. Lack of ICT Technical know-how among librarians:** Most librarians are yet to be ICT compliant. Sass (2001) contended that to ensure our relevance to a new generation of users, "we need to be where our users are, even if they are not inside our libraries". When librarians are not computer literate, utilizing the facility would be a problem. In other words if the librarians are not able to use ICT, it would be difficult for them to use it for building and sharing of knowledge.

Working plan for Strategies of Knowledge Capital Building in the Libraries

Having observed the significance of knowledge capital building, therefore, the need for libraries to create some strategies that would enable knowledge capital building will be a welcome idea. This will further enhance the sustainability of the library growth and empower their status, which has become imperative. Hence, the strategies proposed by Rubin (2004) can be adapted for effective knowledge capital building in libraries as it relates to sustainability and growth.

Creating an environment to stimulate knowledge growth

Library staff are expected to be trained in order to enhance sustainable library growth. This is because they possess vast experiences in form of capital knowledge that can be recorded, indexed and updated and made accessible through electronic databases that are created and maintained by the libraries (Kabir 2008). The knowledge and experience of library staff should therefore be appreciated, valued and shared through writing, publishing, lecturing, mentoring among others. All these should be recognized by the higher authorities and should be rewarded and this will eventually serve as an encouragement to them. The following enabling environment should be created for sustainable knowledge growth in the library:

- 1. Staff Training:** As learning organisation, libraries should set aside funds from their annual budget that will take care of the provision of continuing education and re-training of all library staff on periodic basis. This can be in form of attending conferences, seminars and workshops and going for further studies to acquire higher degrees. Such knowledge can then be shared among other library staff who are unable to attend. To prevent

knowledge from becoming stagnant and outdated, knowledge must be rewarded and expanded.

2. **Collaborative Research:** Research world is currently clamoring for collaborative research where ideas are shared among two or more individuals to come up with sustainable results. Library staff should be encouraged in collaborative research. This will make them work together thereby leading to knowledge creation and building that enhances their academic growth. In economic recession, library management may not have enough funds for training all the staff.
3. **Self-Development:** Library staff should endeavor to develop themselves when the organization fails to do so. For instance, the library staff can sponsor themselves to attend conferences, seminars or workshops not paid by their organisation. They can also make effort to solicit for sponsors from other organisations that offer such facilities. They can go online to find such organisations that will be willing to sponsor training in the field of librarianship especially in areas of their specializations.
4. **Research Grant:** The library staff can write good papers to attract sponsors like the case of TETFund in higher institutions in Nigeria. The practice in academic libraries where librarians must publish certain number of articles in journals or book writing before they are promoted should be maintained. This makes the librarians to continuously research and build their knowledge and share the acquired knowledge either within or outside the country.

Creating an organisational culture that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and collaborative processes

The organisational culture influences the way people interact, the content within which knowledge is created, the resistance they will have towards certain changes and ultimately the way they share or not share knowledge. Organisational culture for sharing of knowledge and expertise should be established in libraries and for this, the head of libraries should take strong leadership and commitment as a critical issues. Libraries can create the culture that facilitates free interaction and sharing of knowledge among staff. Leask et.al. (2008) proposed the following for sharing of knowledge in an organisation both

formal and informal and this can be applied to libraries.

- 1. Community of practice:** A community of practice is a network of individuals with common problems or interest who come together to explore ways of working, identify common solutions and share good practice and ideas. In other words, they are group of people who share a craft or a profession and they evolve naturally because of the members' interest in a particular domain or area. However, the group can be created deliberately with the goal of gaining knowledge related to a specific field. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally (Lave&Wangar, 1991). Community of practice can exist in physical settings. For example, a lunch room work, a field setting or elsewhere in the environment, but members of community of practice do not have to be in the same place. They can form a “virtual community of practice” (Dube, Bourlis& Jacob, 2005). Where they collaborate online, such as within discussion boards and news groups, or a Mobile Community of Practice (MCoP). Members can also communicate with one another via mobile phones (Kletzmman, et. al. , 2013).For instance, the library staff can participate in LinkedIn platform where they connect with other professionals to build their capital knowledge
- 2. Knowledge cafe:** This is a means of bringing a group of people together to have an open, creative conversation on a topic of mutual interest to share ideas and to gain a deeper collective understanding of the subject and the issues involved. It constitutes a small group of people. Here facilitator is needed but the facilitator never takes the lead in the talk. The aim of knowledge café is to gain mutual understanding of a complex issues; gain a deeper understanding of other people's perspectives; gain a deeper understanding of ones' own views and thinking processes; flush out issues which need airing and exploring and help build a consensus around an issue or topic (Gurtean&Remenyi, 2011). This can be used in libraries to explore how people might better communicate and work together. Libraries can invite experts in librarianship or in other fields to facilitate in knowledge café. Though it can be hard to keep informed of issues and ideas and perspectives of colleagues and peers, knowledge cafe brings to

the surface, in an informed environment, all the understanding we have in an area.

3. **Peer Assist:** Peer assist are face-to-face or virtual gathering that brings colleagues together to share knowledge, best practices, or lessons learned on a particular topic (USAID, 2017). In a peer assist, an individual or group presents an issue or challenge that they are facing in their work to another group with experience in that issue. By sharing their thoughts and suggestions, the experienced group and the hosts engage in participatory learning. Peer assists are customized depending on topic, location, and available time. Peer assist can be an extremely learning activity to facilitate knowledge sharing, participatory learning and collective problem solving. They create a designated space for learning and knowledge sharing and can help prevent individuals and projects from making the same mistakes others have made. Talking to experienced peers about the best way to approach new projects saves time and money and avoids repetition of mistakes. Aside this, it also creates strong links across team and relationship between people or colleagues.
4. **Knowledge Market Place:** A knowledge market place could be seen as a dating service for knowledge. It is a place where people show case what they know and what they need to know on a particular subject, which connects them appropriately. The knowledge market place can be facilitated online, via email or face-to-face. It can be used in many situations, and it is particularly useful when delegating roles and responsibilities within a new project team. However, sustainable success depends on the willingness of participants to both contribute and benefit in equal measure from exchanging knowledge. It is highly dependent on the degree of trust between individuals. It can be difficult to find or know people with the knowledge, skills and experience you need on a specific topic. A lot of useful specialist knowledge remain untapped in most organisations. The knowledge market place provides a forum to discover this knowledge and make it available to the public.

Development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

For creation and sharing of knowledge capital, libraries should provide the necessary ICT for use by library staff. The head of the library will need to partner or

collaborate with other departments in their organization such as finance department and computer Centre to develop the necessary ICT for library use. The ICT requirements should include computers, internet, intranet, electronic database and the necessary software programmes facilities that will facilitate knowledge creation, building and sharing.

Acquisition of ICT Skills by Librarians

Librarians should acquire relevant skills in the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT). Human resources development in ICT has become fundamental and the information managers, especially librarians must build on the positive aspect of information era while alleviating the negative aspects of globalisation. Infact, the effective management of new technologies depends largely on the availability of skilled workers and the society's level of literacy. Librarians must be aware of the advantages of ICTs in libraries and information sector. Librarians must learn to use social media such as Blogs, Twitter, WhatsApp, and others for service delivery and for connecting with colleagues.

Making useful Knowledge Capital Accessible for Decision Making

Heads of Library should be democratic to allow participation of their staff at meetings where decision are made. Some decisions that concern the library work and staff should not be taken alone by the heads of libraries. Other staff should be involved to make their contributions during meetings and to engage them as head or members of committees. This will make the knowledge capital of the staff to be useful and offer opportunity for the staff to share such knowledge and experiences with others.

Identification, Development and Effective use of Staff Expertise

Staff who are good and have the experience and the capability to do certain work should be identified, trained, retrained and used effectively. For instance, library staff who are good in ICT utilization or in other library work like cataloguing and classification, should be developed and used to improve library services.

Creating Corporate Culture and Values that Encourage Knowledge Building and Sharing

Corporate culture refers to the beliefs and behaviours that determine how a

company's employees and management interact and handle business transactions. In libraries senior officers should be able to work with the junior officers where knowledge can be shared. In this regard, in-house training where senior officers share knowledge with junior officers should be organized from time to time. Senior officers should be able to carry junior officers along in current issues that pertains to the job.

Development and Maintaining Processes that enable the Effective use of Individual knowledge

Libraries should schedule duties or work to be done by the staff that will facilitate the use of their knowledge capital for productivity and thereby speed up the growth of the libraries. In other words, it is expected that library staff who are developed should be used maximally. Also, rotational posting of staff to various divisions and sections in the library will go a long way in the use of their knowledge.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to examine the knowledge capital building and strategies to sustain library growth. In today's innovation driven world, building knowledge capital has become the key success for international competitiveness. For libraries to compete favorably at a global level, there is need to mobilize the knowledge capital of the library staff at all levels. Knowing full well that knowledge is the heart and soul of any organisational performance. Hence, the importance of knowledge capital building in the library cannot be over-emphasized. It should be a continuous exercise for library staff. It is the knowledge that resides in the staff and if developed and maximally utilized it can enhance library growth. Technology is no longer enough to drive an organisation rather, staff and the knowledge that resides in them are very vital for the sustainable growth and success story of any library. Therefore, attention must be paid on knowledge capital building of the library staff who are the source of knowledge acquisitions, knowledge organisation and knowledge dissemination.

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