

Full Length Research

Knowledge Sharing for Knowledge Retention and Growth

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This paper discussed knowledge sharing for knowledge retention and growth. The paper was divided into the following subheadings: types of knowledge management, concept of knowledge retention, concept of knowledge sharing, explicit versus tacit knowledge and the impact of knowledge retention in Library education. The paper also revealed that every organization and firm is now heading towards a specialized branch of management called knowledge management. The paper revealed that knowledge is something which is stored in the heads of individuals working within an organization and as such, managing such knowledge is a difficult task. The paper is of the view that knowledge management is knowledge retention. Thus, retaining knowledge and knowledgeable employees in organizations is the need of the hour for every business firm. Also, the paper discussed some contemporary issues that are related to knowledge sharing and how it facilitates sustainability of library and information science education in Nigeria. The paper also recommended measurement action can be done to in order implement knowledge retention and growth within the organization.

Keywords: Knowledge, Knowledge Retention, Knowledge Sharing, Information

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INTRODUCTION

The term knowledge management and retention cannot be over-emphasized especially as the world's economies are increasingly becoming knowledge-based (Maponya 2004). Knowledge is viewed as a strategic resource that offers a competitive advantage in organizations (Halawi, Aronson & McCarthy 2005). Although organizations have realized the value of knowledge, not many have actually started managing knowledge efficiently and effectively

(Kruger & Snyman 2005). Managing knowledge for value creation in organizations is still a 'management concern' (Ngoc 2006). Despite the fact that other organizational operations such as 'marketing, finance, sales or even supply chain' are well mastered, road maps for effective management of knowledge are still being investigated (Perez-Soltero, 2006).

Managing knowledge entails knowledge identification, acquisition, development, sharing and distribution, utilization and retention (Probst, Raub & Romhardt

2000:30). Knowledge retention, which is the focus of this article, includes knowledge assessment, knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer. The need to retain organizational knowledge is a well-known concern for most organizations including universities (UniSA 2007). It is widely recognized that the ability to retain organizational knowledge is a key characteristic for a successful organization in the knowledge economy. The magnitude of the problem is apparent considering the volume of research efforts aimed at addressing knowledge retention within organizations (Davidson, Lepeak & Newman 2007).

It is apparent that, the ability of educators within them to share knowledge with each other, particularly educational knowledge, is identified as one of the contributing factors to educational competitiveness. Sharing of knowledge helps educators and institutions build up knowledge. This is because it allows them to discuss and deliberate on certain topics which can encourage the generation of new knowledge (Fernie, et al., 2003). Despite the importance of knowledge sharing in building up institutional knowledge, which eventually improves the educator's competitive edge, there are reasons to believe that educators are not willing to share their knowledge voluntarily. For example a study by Michailova and Husted (2003) revealed that there are five reasons why educators are reluctant to share knowledge. The reasons includes (i) the fear of decrease personal value, (ii) cost involved, (iii) uncertainty of how the receiver will use the shared knowledge, (iv) accepting and respecting a strong hierarchical and formal power, and (v) actual negative consequences of sharing knowledge with colleagues. Although this study was conducted in Nigeria, a country where the authors themselves describes as hostile to knowledge sharing, it is quite relevant in other parts of the world. This is because it seems that the reluctance to share knowledge is also occurring elsewhere such as in Australia (Irmer, Bordia & Abusah, 2002), China (Hutchings & Michailova, 2004), Taiwan (Wang, 2004) and the United States of America (Jones & Price, 2004). Based on these findings one could expect this phenomenon to prevail in Nigeria given its cultural values concerning humility (Abdullah & Low, 2001).

Still, Hofstede's (2000) study indicated that the Nigerian society is collectivistic in nature. In such a society, knowledge sharing should happen naturally because it is the tendency of a collectivistic society to help each other. Abdullah (2001), on the other hand, maintained that the Nigerian workplace is characterized with unique values and work culture. The Nigerians are often considered as very shy people and are very concern about saving 'face', or should we say afraid of 'losing face'. Most of us are afraid of making mistakes and receiving negative feedback, even though we are not sure that we will be getting one. Furthermore, the idea of giving and receiving

praise also makes some of us feel ill at ease. Therefore, when it comes to sharing knowledge, some of us can be quite reserve in expressing our ideas and opinions, much less voluntarily offering our knowledge to other people. Besides, there are other countries which are also considered as having a collectivistic culture but having problems where knowledge sharing is concerned, for example China (Hutchings & Michailova, 2004). Hence it is the objective of this paper to discuss knowledge sharing for knowledge retention and growth.

Types of Knowledge Management

Knowledge is not an easy concept to discuss. In order to understand what knowledge is, it is important to understand how it relates to data and information. In general, past literatures have identified the distinctions between data, information, and knowledge. Data is commonly described as a set of discrete, objective facts about events; while information is a collection of data and associated explanations, interpretations, and other textual material concerning a particular object, event, or process. Knowledge on the other hand, is a more complex concept to define. Bergeron (2003) defined it as information that is organized, synthesized or summarized to enhance comprehension, awareness, or understanding.

In short, knowledge by far is more comprehensive and more valuable compared to information and data. It is mainly attached to the individual who owns and uses it, and manifests itself in many different ways. For example, we can see knowledge at work by the way people make decisions, by a certain peculiar way people do their jobs, and through people's creativity in completing their work.

There are several ways in which knowledge is categorized. For example, knowledge can be categorized into declarative and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge is basically the 'knowing that' type of knowledge which relates to factual information, while procedural knowledge is the 'knowing how' type of knowledge which concerns the process underlying actions (Leach, Wall & Jackson, 2003). However, most literatures categorize knowledge into two major forms; tacit and explicit (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nevertheless, there are others who identified a third form of knowledge known as implicit knowledge (Bergeron, 2003).

According to Bergeron (2003), explicit knowledge is the type that can be easily explained and codified, and are available in books, manuals and other types of publications. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is the type that is difficult to verbalize and codify because it is ingrained at a subconscious level. Implicit knowledge is the type of knowledge that is somewhere between tacit and explicit. Like tacit knowledge, implicit knowledge exists at the subconscious level, but it can be extracted

through the process of knowledge engineering (Bergeron, 2003). Despite these distinctions, most discussions focus on tacit and explicit knowledge only because most of the time, implicit knowledge is treated as explicit knowledge due to its codifiable nature. Thus, institutions are like seas of knowledge. There is no limit to the amount of knowledge that an institution has. However, where the issue of knowledge sharing is concerned, it is most important that educators share their job-related knowledge with each other, so that they will be able to perform their job better and eventually lead to higher educational performance.

Concept of Knowledge Sharing

There are vast literatures discussing knowledge sharing at various levels of the institution and from different points of view. From these literatures it can be concluded that knowledge sharing behavior was studied from the educational perspective (Argote, & Ingram, 2000; Giroud, 2000), department or group perspective (Hansen & Haas, 2001; Kane, Argote & Levine, 2004; Koskinen, Pihlanto & Vanharanta, 2003), and also at the individual perspective (Ipe, 2003). Studies on knowledge sharing from the educational perspective commonly focused on 'knowledge transfer' or 'technology transfer'. Technology transfer is basically the transfer of technology and know-how from one educator to another or any possible benefit through their long-term relationship and the exchange of information (Giroud, 2000). Studies on technology transfer are mainly interested on how much knowledge is being transferred from one institution to the other, and what are the factors that contribute to this process. Similarly, studies from the group perspective are looking at factors that ease the transfer of knowledge from one group to another. Finally, studies from the individual perspective, which is the main interest of this study, simply relate to the behaviors of educators. Specifically, these studies examined the retention and growth that make educators share or hoard knowledge, and seek to identify what motivates educators to share knowledge.

The Concept of Knowledge Sharing Behavior

In general, knowledge sharing occurs when people who share a common purpose and experience similar problems come together to exchange ideas and information (Storey, 2001; as cited in MacNeil, 2003). The process of knowledge sharing between educators involve the conversion of the knowledge held by an individual into a form that can be understood, absorbed and used by other educators (Ipe, 2003). It is basically a mechanism by which knowledge is transferred from one individual to another.

Knowledge sharing has been defined in several

different but similar ways by different researchers. In general knowledge sharing has been defined as the action of educators in making knowledge available to others within the institution (Ipe, 2003). Similarly, Bartol and Srivastava (2002) viewed knowledge sharing as the sharing of institutionally relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise with one another. Along the same line, Ryu, Ho and Han (2003) defined knowledge sharing as the behavior of disseminating one's acquired knowledge with other members within one's institution. Lee (2001), on the other hand, gave a broader definition of knowledge sharing indicating it as involving activities of transferring or disseminating knowledge from one person, group or institution to another. In short, all these definitions agree that knowledge sharing is a mechanism to disseminate information and knowledge from one individual, group, or institution to another.

Even though most studies defined knowledge sharing at the individual level as a single dimension construct, there are also those who proposed a two dimensions perspective. For example, Van den Hooff and de Ridder (2004) defined knowledge sharing as the process where educators mutually exchange their knowledge and jointly create new knowledge. This definition implies that knowledge sharing process consists of 'donating' and 'collecting' aspects of sharing. According to Van den Hooff and de Ridder (2004), knowledge 'donating' means communicating to others what one's personal intellectual capital is, while knowledge 'collecting' means consulting colleagues in order to get them to share their intellectual capital. Similarly, Renzl (2008) defined knowledge sharing as a reciprocal process of knowledge exchange, and thus entails contributing, as well as accumulating knowledge from the mass.

The knowledge 'donating' aspect essentially is similar to the mainstream definitions of knowledge sharing. However, the knowledge 'collecting' aspect seemed to receive less attention from the researchers in this area. This is because most of the time knowledge 'collecting' or knowledge 'acquisition' occurs naturally, whereas knowledge donating or sharing requires effort and some people are even reluctant to share knowledge for various reasons. Therefore, like many other studies, this study defines knowledge sharing behavior as a voluntary act of communicating and disseminating one's acquired job-related knowledge with other members within one's institution. Thus, referring to the job-related knowledge being shared, as discussed earlier that there are two general types of knowledge; tacit and explicit. The sharing of tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge requires different medium and effort.

Explicit versus Tacit Knowledge Sharing

It is commonly agreed that disseminating and

communicating explicit knowledge is easier than sharing of tacit knowledge (Ipe, 2003). That is why most studies focused on either knowledge sharing behavior in general (eg. Galletta, McCoy, Marks & Polak, 2002; Hong, Doll, Nahm & Li, 2004) or tacit knowledge sharing alone (eg. Evans & Kersh, 2004; Koskinen, et al., 2003; Selamat & Choudrie, 2004). It is rare to see studies that look at explicit knowledge sharing alone. This is probably because sharing of explicit knowledge can be done by means of books, manuals, video clips, databases and expert system, as well as through formal training. Therefore, the sharing of explicit knowledge can be done easily and requires not much encouragement for it to happen. Yet, by no means can it be neglected. Sharing of explicit knowledge is beneficial to the institution because it can improve educators' ability to complete their work more efficiently in terms of time (Hansen & Haas, 2001).

Sharing of tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is more challenging (Hendriks, 1999). This is because according to Koskinen et al. (2003), tacit knowledge represents "knowledge based on the experience of educators. It expresses itself in human actions in the form of evaluations, attitudes, points of view, motivation, and etcetera. Usually it is difficult to express tacit knowledge directly in words and often the only way of presenting it is through metaphors, drawings and different methods of expression not requiring a formal use of language". As such, the tacitness of knowledge is a natural impediment to the successful sharing of knowledge between educators in institution of learning (Ipe, 2003). Therefore, it is a more interesting area of research.

Tacit knowledge sharing is argued to be a product of socialization and dialectic debate among educators (Fernie, et al., 2003) and it requires face-to-face interactions (Fernie, et al., 2003; Koskinen, et al., 2003). Furthermore, as proposed by Selamat and Choudrie (2004), the diffusion of tacit knowledge requires institutions to encourage the development of individual's meta-abilities, i.e. personal, acquired abilities that underpin and determine how and when knowledge will be practiced within the institution of learning. Thus, sharing of tacit knowledge requires a lot effort and determination.

Nonetheless, tacit knowledge sharing is important to the institutions because a study by Hansen and Haas (2001) revealed that it improves quality, sustainable of the educators' research outcomes and it signals competence to researchers. Furthermore, as Selamat and Choudrie (2004) pointed out in their literature review, the presence of explicit knowledge is meaningless without tacit knowledge to augment it. This is because only with tacit knowledge that we can put the explicit knowledge into practice.

Regardless of the types of knowledge being shared, this study does not make any distinction between the two types of knowledge sharing because both are important to institutions and their educators. However, this study

does emphasize the importance of knowledge sharing at the individual level. Although the importance of knowledge sharing at the institutional and group level cannot be denied, the sharing of knowledge between educators is considered to be more important since it serves as the foundation for knowledge sharing at other levels.

Concept of Knowledge Retention

Knowledge sharing is the process of transferring or disseminating knowledge so that it can be utilized and applied by an institution or group (Lichtenstein and Hunter 2006). However, knowledge shared cannot be utilized if it is not retained for later use in some way. Knowledge retention is about keeping the knowledge accessible. Argote et al. (2003) state it "...involves embedding knowledge in a repository so that it exhibits some persistence over time". Knowledge repositories include physical, virtual and mental storage approaches. Keeping access to knowledge within the institution or group is critical as continually creating new knowledge or recreating lost knowledge is inefficient and can be costly (Marsh and Stock 2003). Retention of institutional or group knowledge provides a number of advantages, such as: refining core competencies based on experiences (Hedberg 2001); increase learning amongst personnel (Hedberg 2001); increase group and individual autonomy through improved decision making (Churchmann et al. 2007); reduce costs in developing new projects, ideas or products (Walsh and Ungson 2001); and increased, effective functioning and operations (Schatz, 2001). Research has examined a number of solutions, primarily technologically-based, for retaining the explicit and tacit knowledge.

Many of these solutions have been successfully implemented in the institutional context, such as virtual communities, use of expert systems and centralised digital repositories (Braga de Vasconcelos and Kimble 2007; Hender et al. 2001). However, implementation of technology-based approaches for knowledge retention can be inhibited by limitations and of Information Technology (IT), behavioural factors that influence adoption of technology processes, motivation to contribute and a predilection by staff to use personal networks to seek knowledge (Bresnan et al. 2003). There has also been research into human-based solutions for the retention of personal knowledge in institutions. Proposals include establishing mentoring systems to allow experienced educators to pass on their knowledge, exit interviews to capture the insights of departing educators or providing rewards to keep knowledgeable educators within the institution of learning (DeLong 2007). These solutions are internal methods that look at capturing knowledge before personnel leave. Ward and

Wooler (2010) thus suggest maintaining relationships with alumni to maintain contact if needed in the future though this relationship method does take time and effort.. Human-based methods of knowledge retention may have more success. Fostering mentoring systems or maintaining relationships through informal networks with members once they have moved on may provide continued access to knowledge. Informal networks provide opportunities to supplement other formal interactions (Alexander 1993; Katz and Kahn 1966). Regular, formal interactions, such as those held as part of an inter-institutional collaboration, provide a mechanism for people to develop informal networks with each other (Assimakopoulos and Macdonald 2003). These networks can provide knowledge sharing and retention benefits where educators use their informal networks for information or advice (Sitlington 2012). Inter-institutional collaborations provide members with formal interactions at meetings that aid in the promotion of informal networks. Where use of technology-based knowledge retention methods is limited, informal networks may provide the best knowledge retention processes.

Impact of Knowledge Retention in LIBs Education

The core business of LIBs Education in Nigeria is to create, manage and retained knowledge (Association of Commonwealth Universities 2006). However, according to Ratcliffe-Martin, Coakes and Sugden (2000) in Maponya (2004:8), LIBs education fails to recognise the importance of knowledge as a strategic resource. As libraries operate in the knowledge era they must focus on retaining their institutional knowledge both in the tacit and explicit format. For instance, the retention and management of knowledge enhances performance and may benefit institution by:

- facilitating better decision-making capabilities
- reducing 'product' development cycle time (i.e. curriculum development and research)
- improving academic and administrative services
- reducing costs
- preserving corporate memory
- combating staff turnover by facilitating knowledge capture and transfer (Kidwell, Vander Linde & Johnson 2000:31).

Importance of Knowledge Sharing for Knowledge Retention and Growth

Essentially, the beauty of knowledge sharing is that knowledge grows when it is retained, used and shared with another, and it depreciates in value when it is kept to

oneself (Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004). Moreso, as a result of knowledge sharing, the intellectual capital locked up in their hearts and minds can be retained and sustained for educational of library and information science educators in Nigeria. Therefore, it is important to know knowledge sharing can be retained and grow among educators.

However, most importantly, knowledge sharing at the individual level is important because there are many ways in which knowledge sharing can benefit the institution of learning. One of them is that the dialogue involved during sharing often lead to the generation of new ideas, which is considered as having the potential for the creation new knowledge (Nonaka, 2004). As a result, it leads to educational effectiveness (Chen, 2006) and improved institutional innovativeness (Hong, et al., 2004).

Besides, knowledge sharing can also benefit the institutions in less tangible ways. First of all, Hislop (2003) pointed out that the success of any knowledge management initiative is highly dependent on the educators' willingness to share their individual information and knowledge. Knowledge management involves activities that focused on capturing knowledge, and disseminating it accurately, consistently, concisely and in a timely manner to all who need it (Bollinger & Smith, 2001). Therefore, it requires the educators to share their experiences and personal interpretation of information in order to be successful.

Knowledge sharing also assists in institutional learning, and in its absence, the gap between individual and institutional knowledge widens (Ford & Chan, 2003). Central to institutional learning is the conversion of individual knowledge into institutional knowledge, and this can happen if educators share their knowledge with the rest of the educational members.

In addition, if institutional educators engage in knowledge sharing, the institution can avoid redundancy in knowledge production, and at the same time ensure the diffusion of best practice throughout the education (Husted & Michailova, 2002). Besides that, Husted and Michailova (2002) also claimed that the systematic sharing of knowledge among institutional members enables the institution to solve problem by making relevant personal knowledge available to the problem solving process regardless of where the knowledge is originally obtained and stored in the institution.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, there are many ways to ensure knowledge sharing behaviors among educators retained and growth for sustainable of LIBs education in Nigeria. Institution's management authorities need to develop management strategies and implement practices for retention and growth that encourage knowledge sharing. Focusing on

management strategies and practices is crucial since any actions taken by the management can influence educators' behavior, especially when those actions are directly aimed at the educators themselves. The educators of an institution are by nature heterogeneous resources that are difficult to replicate, not readily mobile, and not easily duplicated (Barney, 2001). This provides a basis for institutions to develop these internal assets by employing practices, specifically human resource management practices that can encourage educators to behave positively including sharing knowledge with their colleague so that institutional knowledge is enhanced. The focus is on human resource management practices because in order to foster positive behaviors from the educators, institutions must be able to provide positive working conditions. This can be explained in the theory of social exchange that was developed by Blau (1964).

Basically, this theory posits that all human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. In relation to human resource management, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that human resource activities affect the development of educators' trust, and commitment. Therefore designing institutional human resource management practices that can build trust and commitment among the educators can result in positive educators' behavior which leads to improved institutional effectiveness (Whitener, 1997). Furthermore, as proposed by Thite (2004) human resource management has a critical role to play in the knowledge economy since it creates people centric partnerships which is important in the creation, retention, growth and sharing of knowledge.

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