Linkage between Knowledge Management Practices and Library Users’ Satisfaction at Malaysian Universities

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Abstract

Evolving information and knowledge has impacted all organizations, including academic libraries. This has made knowledge management become more important. In the present world, knowledge and information has become a key resource and is very vital for the survival of the organization in future. Recently, the conventional function of academic libraries is to collect, process, disseminate, store and utilize information to provide service to the university community. However, the environment in which academic libraries operate today is changing. The successful of Knowledge management in libraries also depends on their ability to utilize information and knowledge practice of its staff to better serve of the organization needs. This paper proposed and discusses a linkage between knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction at Malaysian universities. A proposed theoretical framework of this research also discuss together with a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach which will be used as a tool to analyze the results in future.

Keywords: Academic Library, Knowledge Management, Knowledge, Information, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)
Introduction

In the present world, knowledge and information has become a key resource and is very vital for the survival of the organization in future. Faced with competition and increasingly dynamic environments, organizations are beginning to realize that there is a vast and largely untapped asset floating around the organizations. This realization not only occurs in worldwide business organizations but also in non-profit organization such as libraries.

Recently, the conventional function of academic libraries is to collect, process, disseminate, store and utilize information to provide service to the university community. However, the environment in which academic libraries operate today is changing. Whatever effects universities activity also affects academic libraries. Foo et all. (2002) stated the role of academic library is changing to provide the competitive advantage for the university to both staffs and students. The successful of Knowledge management in libraries also depends on their ability to utilize information and knowledge of its staff to better serve of the organization needs.

Knowledge management becoming a dynamic and cyclical process that involves all organizational processes, trying to map the existent learning, linking the essential processes and their strategy, in search of better organizational performance, development of the products and services, quality and client’s management among others (Castro and Costa, 2006; Wiig, 1997; Davenport & Prusak, 2000). This requires systems for the creation and maintenance of knowledge repositories and to cultivate and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and organizational learning. Organizations that succeed in knowledge management are likely to view knowledge as an asset and to develop organizational norms and values, which support the creation and sharing of knowledge (Rowley, 1999).

This paper presents an exploratory study that examines the linkage between knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction at Malaysian universities. More specifically, the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach and quality services for library users’ satisfaction will be discussed. The main expected outcome for this paper is a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach between KM practices and library users’ satisfaction at Malaysian universities.
Research Background

Since the announcement of Vision 2020, the concept of 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 7 – 10th March the same year was said to be the event that were largely responsible for this. At the opening of the Second Global Knowledge Conference, the then Honorable Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad noted 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.”

In present, Malaysia reported the interest of KM practices is still growing especially among Malaysian universities. Stoffle (1996) suggested that institutions of higher education need to gear up for a massive increase in the demand for educational services. Hawkins (2000) highlighted that collaboration requires the actual commitment and investment of resources, based on a shared vision. As a result, universities may be required to pool their resources in terms of human expertise, skills and competencies to achieve their goals. As such, these challenges which occur as a result of change and transformation demands that universities come to grips with the notion that collaboration is one of the means of competitive survival. The truth is big multinational companies still lead the way, but a number of large corporations 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 (Suraya and Jamaliah, 2005).

Nowadays, universities are faced with a challenge to create and disseminate knowledge to society. Traditionally, universities have been the sites of knowledge production, storage, dissemination and authorization. (Reid 2000). Universities and other higher education institutions face similar challenges that many non-profit and for-profit organizations face. The challenges are financial, increasing public demand, accountability, rapidly evolving technologies, changing role of staff, diverse student demographics, competing values and a rapidly changing world. (Naidoo, 2000).
Universities need to share information and knowledge among the academic community within and outside the institution. A knowledge management practice has become a key issue in the universities due to changes in knowledge culture. Universities are not isolated entities but exist as a part of society. They engage in teaching, research and community services. Therefore, knowledge management practices created in university through research and teaching should be relevant to the society, and promoting knowledge as a major factor of business of the university and higher education institutions. These demands require the development of partnerships universities and curricula customized to meet users’ satisfaction and needs.

Problem Statement

Whilst undertaking a review of the KM literature, many librarians still believe that knowledge management is simply managing information and explicit or documented knowledge, which is what they have been doing for many years, and that eventually everyone else will deduce this. However, information and knowledge is not the same thing at all. Yet, information is simply contextualized data. To become knowledge, there needs to be an added human element. Information tends to be tangible, whereas knowledge is information that is interpreted and synthesized (Koina, 2003). In addition, many librarians seem to be missing the point that KM encompasses the whole organization, not just the bits in the library, and it includes tacit knowledge, as well as explicit (Al-Hawamdeh and Delen, 2009). Any KM program must be aligned to corporate goals, and so strategic thinking and alignment is part of the process.

Another challenge that universities face, is demographic changes which can affects the institution’s delivery of education and also the library’s delivery of service. Library users’ satisfaction has been used in a number of research efforts as a surrogate measure of system effectiveness, but such scales are not fully appropriate in a KM context (Ong and Lai, 2004).

Another issue has to be considering is that image of the librarian. Information which resides in the organization has up till now always been treated in discrete sections, or 'silos' rather than as a whole. For example, librarians have focused on the acquisition or distribution of information acquired externally to the organization, while records managers focus on documents internal or integral to its management. In such a scenario no one group appears to have an understanding of overall information needs. Librarians have recently moved to being 'information managers'; as such, 'librarians are seen by many as effective, intelligent, problem solvers with a high level of
research, technical and specialist skills' (Houghton, Poston-Anderson and Todd, 1998). Unfortunately, this often escapes the attention of senior management in organizations. There is also a perception that librarians seldom interact with 'the business', have a very narrow view of KM, and of the organization as a whole. There is an acknowledgment within the literature that no matter which path librarians take for their future, a greater awareness of their value and skills within organizations needs to be promulgated.

Another issues pointed by Susarla, Liu & Whinston (2003) that some staff may have difficulty in expression and communication. Some staff may not want to share their knowledge for the fear that once their knowledge is shared, they might no longer be valued or indispensable. Others, some staff may not share their knowledge for free, as there are free riders who take others knowledge for granted but never share their own. This problem can be leading to the unsuccessful knowledge management practices in university.

It is also a challenge to academic libraries to support the needs of students for virtual learning. Due to these challenges, it is clear that academic libraries must turn to be “libraries without walls” and the information they deal is now in multi-format. Academic library collections are no longer collections comprised almost entirely of printed materials but collections comprised almost of materials in multiple formats and media (Budd, 1998). Therefore, Information technologies such as computers, multimedia and CD-ROMs are bringing unprecedented abilities to academic libraries in providing services and resources to the university community.

While there has been numerous researchers (Al-Hawamdeh, S., 2002; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) conducted on KM practices in universities, but only a few focused on the KM practices in Malaysian universities. Most of the researchers discussed the KM practices in business and organizational perspectives. Furthermore, these studies will be conducted in developed countries like Malaysia. Since there are not many studies have been done in the area of KM practices and library users’ satisfaction at Malaysian universities more specifically on structural equation modeling approach, there is a need of study to be conducted which solely focus on this issue.

Nevertheless, several factors need to be in place or cultivated strongly for the implementation of knowledge management in practices to be a success. (Al-Hawamdeh and Teng, 2002).
Research Aim

The aim of this research is to:

1. Present an exploratory study that examines the linkage between knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction at Malaysian universities.

2. Discuss why knowledge management practice remains a problem for academic libraries especially Malaysian universities.

3. Develop a structural equation model that links between knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction at Malaysian universities particularly in academic libraries.

Research Objectives

The main research objectives of this study are:

1. To indicate the type of knowledge management practices in the library.
2. To compare a significant relationship between information seeking and library users’ satisfaction.
3. To compare a significant relationship between information retrieval and library users’ satisfaction.
4. To recognize a significant relationship between KM practices and library users’ satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

The underpinned framework for this study was derived from the in-depth factors and theoretical statements made in the literature or Structural Equation Model (SEM) and other related subjects. Figure 1.0 illustrates the factors that influence information seeking and information retrieval to achieve library user’s satisfaction for the study.
Figure 1.0: Theoretical Framework

(Adopted from: Gold, Malhotra and Segars, 2001.)
Theoretical Considerations

Different types of knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction reviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Steps/ components</th>
<th>Advantages/ Benefits</th>
<th>Most suitable situation applied</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cullen (2001)</td>
<td>• Improve services in order to survive.</td>
<td>• Evidence-based approach</td>
<td>• To find gaps between user expectation and perceptions.</td>
<td>• SERVQUAL</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Library need to re-examine the range and quality of services provided</td>
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<td>Tyran and Ross (2006)</td>
<td>• Problem to use information technology to support advising services.</td>
<td>• “Faculty” model</td>
<td>• To conducting a survey to all students assigns to the department.</td>
<td>• SERVQUAL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Difficulties with respect to the quality and availability of academic advising.</td>
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<td>Crossno et al. (2001)</td>
<td>• To test the comparability of the results of SERVQUAL with a revised shortened instrument modeled.</td>
<td>Gaps model of service quality: • Tangibles • Reliability • Responsiveness • Assurance • Empathy</td>
<td>• To measuring customer satisfaction.</td>
<td>• SERVQUAL</td>
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<td>Kristensen and Eskilden (2008)</td>
<td>• Measuring customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.</td>
<td>• EPSI Framework</td>
<td>• SERVQUAL can successfully</td>
<td>• SERVQUAL Structural Equation</td>
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<td>Model (SEM)</td>
<td>Framework -Service quality dimensions:</td>
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<td>Wang and Shieh (2006)</td>
<td>• Investigates the users’ degree of important and the performance provided by library. • It also explores overall users’ satisfaction as well.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tangibles • Reliability • Responsiveness • Assurance • Empathy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Service quality has a significantly positive effect on overall users’ satisfaction.</td>
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<td>Maponya (2004)</td>
<td>• Role of academic libraries changing to provide the competitive advantage – a factor that is crucial to both staff and students. • Challenges occur because only a part of knowledge is internalized by the organization and others by individuals. • Organization should rethink and explore way to improve their services. • Restructure functions, roles and responsibilities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Tacit and explicit knowledge • ICTs • Knowledge creation • Knowledge capture and acquisition • Knowledge sharing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Understanding the knowledge situation of the library • To establish the ways in which the academic librarians could add value to their services by engaging with knowledge management.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Descriptive research design – Case study • Questionnaire • Interview • Observation</td>
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Research Design

Scandura and Williams (2000) highlighted that there is no perfect research that is suitable to any research condition and unit of analysis. Since most of the researchers will be honed by three dilemmas in research which in turn results in more or less:

1. Generalizability to the population that support the issues of external validity;
2. Precision in measurement and control of the behavior variables that affecting internal and construct validity.
3. Realism of the context

Thus, population generalization and measurement precisions are two aspects in research that require an appropriate approach to address by researchers. Burton (2000) pointed that the degree of generality of macro approaches often leads to the view that is suggestive and requires more rigorous, detailed investigation. Ketchen and Bergh (2004) from their perspectives, it has become more acceptable in recent years to combine quantitative and qualitative research. It is because qualitative approaches can assist quantitative work in a number of ways by providing hunches or hypotheses to be tested by quantitative research. Many research questions contain of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in nature and most fully answered through SERVQUAL.

SERVQUAL is the most popular approach for measuring service quality and it used to compare customers’ expectations before a service encounter and their perceptions of the actual service delivered (Kristensen and Eskilden, 2008; Mapoya, 2004; Tyran and Ross, 2006). The SERVQUAL instrument has the following five generic dimensions:

1. Reliability: ability to deliver the promised service
2. Responsiveness: willingness to provide prompt service
3. Assurance: ability to inspire trust and confidence
4. Empathy: individualized attention to customers, caring about the customer
5. Tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, personnel, and materials.

As noted by Hoffer, George, & Valacich (2008), survey questionnaires can be a particularly efficient way to gather information. Tyran and Ross (2006) highlighted that SERVQUAL questionnaire includes scales for five different aspects of service quality: information resources,
reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Engelland et al. (2000) notes that researchers have examined the application of the SERVQUAL instrument for many different types of service organizations ranging from retail organizations to universities. While there has been considerable discussion in the literature regarding the stability of the factor structure of the SERVQUAL instrument and its use of “gap scores” to assess service quality, it is generally concluded that SERVQUAL can serve as a useful basis for service quality assessment.

This study will rather emphasize on quantitative technique rather than qualitative. This research will start quantitative (questionnaire) approach seeking for the clarification of the result and enhancement of how the knowledge management being practice towards library users’ satisfaction in that organization.

**Significance of the Research**

Even though, many previous research of knowledge management practices have applied in various theories to understand the decision to outsource, little research has been done to provide a perspectives on the problem faced in the linkage between knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction especially in developing countries like Malaysia. In academic libraries, Maponya (2004) stressed that knowledge management is also aimed at extending the role of librarian to manage all types of information and tacit knowledge for the benefit of the library. Knowledge management can help transform of the library into a more efficient, knowledge sharing organization. It also leads to the improvement and development of service to the users and functioning of the academic library.

In addition, successful libraries are those that are user-centered and are able to respond to users’ needs. As users became more sophisticated, academic libraries need to develop innovative ways to respond and to add value to their services. Academic libraries need to be aware and to aim at capturing the knowledge that exists within them (Tian-Hui You et al., 2006).
Implications of the Research

Knowledge management, in the sense of used here relates to the organizations (i.e. universities library) and encompasses both process and outcomes. It can be described as the way organizations build, supplement and organize knowledge and routine around the activities and within their culture, and develop organizational efficiency by improving the use of employee skills (Pan and Scarbrough, 1999). It seems likely that the emerging knowledge-based practices of the organizations may permit greater understanding of emerging organizational structures. (Nonaka, Teece, 2001).

In order to investigate how knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction may be fostered and to provide prescription that knowledge practices, this research have to identify the factors that facilitate library users’ satisfaction at Malaysia universities. Grant (2001) focused on knowledge as the critical resource in the production of all goods and services helps clarify the central issues of coordination. The challenge of coordination is to devise mechanisms by means of which the knowledge resources of many different individuals can be deployed in the production of a particular product. Webster (2007) pointed out that the greatest challenge facing librarians moving to KM is moving from the traditional role of housing information to analyzing and using the information. Information can be viewed as the explicit form of knowledge and LM as management of the tacit knowledge inside people’s heads to make it accessible to others as possible.

Conclusion

It can be clearly seen that the environment in which academic libraries operate is changing. It is both faced with challenges and opportunities. Academic libraries need to respond to these challenges in order to better serve the needs of the entire academic community. One way of doing that is engaging in knowledge management practices, that is, creating, capturing, sharing and utilizing knowledge to achieve the library goals. Knowledge management is a viable means in which academic libraries could improve their services and become more responsive to the needs of users in the university. People gain knowledge from their experiences and their peers’ expertise. Academic libraries need to recognize the knowledge its staff and create an environment in which their knowledge can be valued and shared. This paper lays out the
foundations for knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction at Malaysian Universities. The contribution of this research is to elaborate and integrate some of the factors that can influence the knowledge management practices and library users’ satisfaction. The expected outcome of the theoretical framework also provides some direction for future additional research on KM practices and library users’ satisfaction in Malaysian universities.

REFERENCES


