RESEARCH ARTICLE

APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN COLLEGE LIBRARY

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*
	Knowledge Management (KM) is an emerging field, much tooted or hyped since late 1990s. However, due to the complicated nature of knowledge per se and its consequent management, it is open difficult to estimate or demonstrate the value of knowledge management. College libraries, with limited budget and human resources, may hesitate to follow the business sector and plunge into the uncharted sea of knowledge management. This paper suggests a pragmatic approach to the implementation of knowledge Management for college libraries: utilizing the existing staffing, technology and management structure.

Introduction:-

College libraries are information centers established in support of the mission of their parent institutions to generate knowledge, and people equipped with knowledge in order to serve the society and advance the well-being of mankind. In digital age, college libraries face challenges from both within (academia) and without (the business sector).

The prove their relevance and value, academic libraries must strive to provide the right amount of information to the right clientele at the right time with a right expense of financial and human resources. With a stagnant or library budget, college libraries have to increase their operational efficiency in order to meet the challenge. One management tool that can help in this regard is Knowledge Management (KM). Knowledge Management is a new emerging field. Since late 1990s, both academia and the business sector have shown unprecedented interest in Knowledge Management and conducted much research in underpinning its theories and ventured in its implementation.

Knowledge Management as reflected in Library Literature:
A cursory review of library literature on knowledge Management reveals the following trends: a) of all types of libraries, special libraries, especially business and corporate libraries, are taking the lead on Knowledge Management research; and b) of academic libraries, public libraries and digital libraries are in the limelight.

Knowledge Management in College Libraries:
Knowledge Management has been tooted and hyped since late 1990s, first in the business sector, and then in higher education and now in library management. The impetus for embracing knowledge management in academic libraries is mainly from a combination of library budget shortfall and higher user expectations. Rather than adopting an often

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trumpeted high –tech approach, it is more practical to utilize the existing staffing, technology and management structure for academic libraries.

Why implementing Knowledge Management in college libraries:-
College libraries are pinched on both sides: reduced budget and increased demand from faculty and students. To implement Knowledge management in college libraries is mainly driven by its mission rather that by the competition from internet – based reference services or electronic books.

Impetus
Where there is a new phenomenon emerged, there must be an impetus. In Knowledge Management, the driving forces the necessity to survive in the business sector in face of fierce competition with rival firms or other competitors. The goal of Knowledge Management is to make full use of the Knowledge existed in a corporation to increase the productivity and/or operational efficiency so as to build an edge in the competition. What's the driving force for academic libraries?

Mission
Libraries depend more on the support from their parent institution and immediate user constituents. To survive or thrive, libraries should constantly gauge and cater to users' needs. Moreover, libraries should be more proactive in marketing their services and values to their user constituents. We should change our mindset and tradition of just waiting for users to come to the library. We need to reach out to our users and advertise/market our services. If they se the value of our services, they will support us more, and would not allow such a valuable institution as libraries to be close or scale down.

How to implement Knowledge Management in College Libraries:
Most researchers consent that Knowledge Management consists of two components: human factor and technology. And most proponents of Knowledge Management advocate a top-down approach under a Knowledge Officer (KO). While a top-down approach is preferable, a bottom-up approach might be more practical in many instances.

Human Factor
Knowledge Management is a new paradigm in college libraries in the sense concerted efforts need to be exerted to manage knowledge systematically. Instead of establishing a new network of Knowledge Managers under a Knowledge Management star or Knowledge Officer, it is more practical to utilize the current management structure. Managers at all levels shall be charged to implement Knowledge Management in their respective units so that a network of Knowledge Management managers is in place. In addition to managing staff and workflow in their units, each manager is responsible for managing knowledge pertaining to their unit's goals and operations. This calls for not only gathering knowledge existing currently in their units but also knowledge relevant to their operations from other units/departments and even other libraries or professions.

Technology
Many advocators of Knowledge Management stress the importance of using advanced technology to store and retrieve knowledge. And many advocate for a centralized turnkey Knowledge Management software product or system. Theoretically, a knowledge Management system could encompass anything. In reality, no such system exists. A centralized Knowledge Management product entails a pricy initial capital investment whether purchased from the market or developed in –house. Besides, subsequent and on-going maintenance and upgrades of hardware and software may not be affordable with the ever-shrinking library budget. More importantly, such an approach overlooks the technology competence and preference of individual Knowledge Management managers. It would be costly and unrealistic to train all staff to use such a knowledge Management system.

Top-down or Bottom –up:
Depending on the priority of the library administration or the library structure, Knowledge Management can be started from either bottom-up or top-down or in the middle. A top-down strategy has the advantage of the support and direction from the library administration. In places where such an option is not available, knowledge Management can be implemented first in the front-line units. Operational knowledge can be collected and shared within the unit or beyond. A concerted effort will surely yield more efficiency. If knowledge Management starts by middle managers, they can coordinate units to reduce the redundant or overlapping workflows and thus ensure a

better efficiency. No matter where it starts, Knowledge Management will definitely increase the operational efficiency and thus enhance our services and benefit library users.

Implementing Knowledge Management from bottom-up with existing staffing and technology is "a valuable low-cost and low risk way of proving the viability of a knowledge Management approach". Experience gained and benefit reaped shall encourage the library administration to implement Knowledge Management in the whole library.

What to cultivate in Knowledge Management implementation:
According to Grant, only 10 percent of an organization's knowledge is explicit. That estimation might be low. But it points to a fact that a large portion of knowledge in an organization is tacit, "deeply embedded within individual experience, judgment and intuition". As such, it is "difficult to express and communicate". Rather than trying every means to extract such tacit knowledge from individual staff, I would advocate that we delegate this task to the human resources and staff development to manage. If tacit knowledge is hard to express or communicate, why bother to extract it? Also, as tacit knowledge is closed related to one's personal experience and intuition, we might run the risk of violating privacy to extract it.

Conclusion:-
Knowledge Management is an emerging field, much tooted or hyped since late 1990s. However, due to the complicated nature of knowledge per se and its management, it is often difficult to estimate or demonstrate the value of knowledge Management. In spite of the fact that there are many knowledge base products on the market, none of them is well suited for libraries nor flexible enough to cope with the dynamically changing environment in the digital age, not to speak of the initial capital investment and future upgrade and maintenance costs. Libraries, with limited budget and human resources, should utilize the current management structure and technology to implement knowledge Management, either bottom-up or top-down. With a concerted effort, Knowledge Management will help to increase libraries operational efficiency and cater to the ever-increasing needs of our clientele.

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