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### Knowledge Sharing Among Librarians: A Literature Review

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#### **Abstract**

*Knowledge sharing encompasses exchange of ideas, innovations and insights among individuals engaged in related and/or mutually benefiting activities. The practice of sharing knowledge feeds strategically into knowledge management, orchestrating improvements in human intellectual capacity; facilitating growth, productivity, and competitive advantage, for individuals and organizations. Librarians, as purveyors of knowledge are saddled with the mission of providing information services to diverse categories of knowledge-seekers in the society. Discharging this onerous responsibility effectively, requires that librarians constantly improve on their capabilities through knowledge-sharing in collegiate arrangements. This paper establishes through a review of the literature, the existence of several reports about knowledge sharing practices among librarians' in other regions of the world. However, in the context of librarians in Nigeria, it was discovered that there is scarce exploration of their knowledge sharing practices in the literature. This gap was therefore, the focus of this review which aimed at generating understanding about librarians in Nigeria and their knowledge sharing practices.*

**Keywords:** Information, knowledge sharing, knowledge management, librarians

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Knowledge drives the activities of individuals and organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, leading to the emergence of knowledge economies across the universe. Today, knowledge is considered as central to the growth, development, survival and actualization of competitive advantage of institutions across the universe. Tella (2016) submits a concurring view that knowledge is a critical and strategic resource that leads to new ideas and spurs innovation, improves

employees' performance and supports innovations in organizations. This makes the strategic acquisition, storage, sharing and utilization of knowledge imperative.

Knowledge sharing is considered a fundamental aspect and most crucial activity of knowledge management. Knowledge is information that changes something or somebody either by becoming grounds for action, or by making an individual or an institution capable of different or more effective actions (Drucker, 1969 cited in Jain,

2012). There are two types of knowledge - tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is documented and articulated into a formal language; it is rule-based, stored in certain media and easily communicable and shared; for example, organizational databases, web-pages, subject-portals, policies and manuals.

Tacit knowledge is personal, undocumented and is used by people to perform their tasks every day. Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement in a specific context (Nonaka, 1994 cited in Jain, 2012). Thus, knowledge management is the management of knowledge that is critical for a person to work more efficiently in organizations, inclusive of both tacit and explicit knowledge. Managing knowledge involves a process and practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing, and using knowledge, wherever it resides, to enhance not only learning for individuals, but also performance in organizations (Jain, 2012).

Knowledge sharing encompasses exchange of ideas, innovations and insights among individuals engaged in related and/or mutually benefiting activities such as librarians. The practice of sharing knowledge feeds strategically into knowledge management, orchestrating improvements in human intellectual capacity; facilitating growth, productivity, and competitive advantage, for individuals and organizations. To this end, librarians, as purveyors of both explicit and tacit knowledge are saddled with the task of providing information services to diverse categories of knowledge-seekers in the society. To discharge this onerous responsibility effectively, requires that librarians should constantly improve on their capabilities through knowledge-sharing in collegiate arrangements within their communities of practice.

## 2.1 Review of Related Literature

### 2.2 The Concept of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is a process where individuals mutually exchange their (tacit and explicit) knowledge leading to the creation of new knowledge jointly. This implies that all knowledge sharing process consists of both bringing (and *donating*) knowledge and getting (or *collecting*) knowledge (Ardichvili, Page & Wentling, 2003; Van den Hooff & Hendrix, 2010). How well an individual, an organization, and an entire society can harness, access, share, and make use of available information and knowledge will ultimately decide their ability to generate economic growth and to enhance the quality of life for all (Weiner, 2013). There is increasing acceptance among scholars, that knowledge sharing amongst individuals working in a system is a crucial factor and positive force in the success and survival of the system and the individual.

According to Cheng, Ho and Lau (2009), sharing knowledge is about communicating knowledge within a group of people. The group may consist of members engaged in a formal institution, for instance, among colleagues in a workplace or informal for example, among friends and the interaction may occur between a minimum of two individuals to a multiple of individuals. The underlying purpose is to utilize available knowledge to improve the group's performance (Alavi & Leidner, 1999; Salisbury, 2003) in the execution of their responsibilities. In other words, individuals share what they have learned and transfer what they knew to those who have the collective interest and who have found the knowledge useful. The sharing process consists of collecting, organizing and conversing knowledge from one to another (Van den Hooff & De Ridder, 2004). As the sharing process involves more than just

collecting data and information, generally, the value of knowledge expanded when it is shared. Therefore, if managed properly, knowledge sharing can greatly improve work-quality and decision-making skills, problem-solving efficiency as well as competency that will benefit the organization at large (Yang, 2007; Cheng, Ho & Lau, 2009). Thus, knowledge sharing among workers in organizations would likely result to increased productivity

There are factors that may affect the pattern of knowledge sharing in all organizations. Yang (2008) notes that individual attitudes to learning, sharing and storing influence organizational knowledge sharing. In other words, two significant factors, individual attitudes to learning and sharing, significantly impact on organizational knowledge sharing. This implies that front-line managers should help rank-and-file employees to both learn and share knowledge, and encourage the habituation of such behaviour patterns, of which the practice would enhance organizational performance (Yang, 2008). In the university sector specifically, Chong, Teh and Tan (2014) note that personality traits, classroom and technological factors matter in knowledge sharing. Thus, some personality traits, such as extraversion and conscientiousness, instructor support, degree of competition and technology support, were instrumental in determining knowledge sharing patterns.

### **2.3 A Global Perspective of Knowledge Sharing among Librarians**

As earlier noted, knowledge sharing involves the action in which individuals diffuse relevant ideas, facts and information to others, either in organizations or institutions. Knowledge sharing can be done through formal, informal, unsystematic and non-daily routines. In the online environment for instance, findings have shown that

participation in discussion forums encourages intellectual support, which is sharing of knowledge and ideas among participants as well as improvements in learning performance and deepening of knowledge (Tella & Adu, 2014). The ultimate goal of sharing employees' knowledge is its transfer to organisational assets and resources for productivity. Additionally, sharing activities have to be voluntary and cannot be forced.

Nonaka (1994) identifies four modes of knowledge sharing – socialization, externalization, internalization and combination. Socialization is the interaction between two or more individuals for mutual understanding and benefits. Since tacit knowledge is intangible, through interaction, it can be understood and can create new tacit knowledge. Examples of such knowledge conversion is through chat rooms, tea rooms, professional discussion groups, round tables, brainstorming and thinking sessions and finding solutions to problems. Externalization can take many forms, including performing actions based on this knowledge, explaining it in a lecture or codifying it in an intelligent knowledge system. Internalization is the conversion of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. Internalization may occur during learning by doing activities in which concrete, articulated concepts emerge in interactive trial-and error processes, reading books, or trying to understand the codified knowledge in a knowledge base. Combination, on the other hand, ties together different bodies of explicit knowledge held by individuals through processes such as meetings, telephone conversations, and exchange of documents (Okonedo & Popoola, 2012).

Also, there is a range of technologies and tools to share knowledge such as the internet, intranets and extranets, groupware technologies, e-mails, discussion databases, chat rooms, expert-led discussions, web seminars, online meetings, virtual class room

sessions, videoconferencing, and sharing resources through library consortium (Jain, 2012). In addition, Parirokh, Daneshgar and Fattahi (2008) suggest numerous activities and strategies that can encourage knowledge sharing among librarians: research projects, training programs, online newsletters, teaching methods, knowledge-sharing policies and strategies, leadership and dedication of time, group discussions, communication channels, formal procedures including publication of manuals for staff and documentation of experiences.

Meanwhile, the decisions that may influence people such as librarians to involve in knowledge sharing activity are basically grouped into organizational, technological and individual factors (Van den Hooff & De Leeuw van Weenen, 2004; Cheng, Ho & Lau, 2009; Van den Hooff & Hendrix, 2010). Organizational factors are factors not derived from the individual personally. It can be environmental or caused by another individual to stimulate the knowledge sharing attitude. Incentive system, organisational culture and management system are part of external factors that are organisational. Technological factor relates to the knowledge management technology, such as software and hardware used in the sharing activity. Individual factors on the other hand are factors derived from individually-driven considerations. That means that it comes from the person's internal being, and examples of such internal factors are beliefs, perceptions, expectations, feelings and general attitudes of the individuals.

Knowledge sharing attitudes among librarians may either make or mar the provision of result-oriented services to library and information users. Aharony (2011) notes that knowledge sharing emphasizes the process by which knowledge possessed by an individual is transformed into a form that can be understood and used by others. It is the flow of knowledge from someone who has it to

someone who wants it. Cabrera and Cabrera (2002) propose that knowledge sharing is the contribution of individuals to the collective knowledge of an organization such as university libraries. Furthermore, Cabrera, Collins and Salgado (2006) suggest that knowledge sharing consists of two major elements: seeking information and ideas from co-workers and providing ideas and insights to others.

Knowledge sharing enables librarians to share their insight and experiences in order to allow for fast, efficient and effective provision of information services to their users. Sharing knowledge involves learning, understanding, extending and repeating the information, the ideas, the views and the resources among persons, connected on a specific ground. The success of knowledge sharing among librarians is claimed to build upon the amount and quality of interactions among librarians, as well as upon addressing issues related to the reluctance to share knowledge, and the willingness and ability to use knowledge of others (Okonedo & Popoola, 2012).

Knowledge sharing capabilities is one of the critical success factors of university libraries, with the development of knowledge sharing culture as backbone. A knowledge sharing culture is conducive to knowledge creation, enhances performance and reduces duplication of efforts. Such knowledge sharing culture involves both organization and librarians. Organizational support is the availability of appropriate knowledge management enablers such as organizational procedures, culture and technological infrastructures. Unfortunately, studies like Parirokh, Daneshgar, and Fattahi (2008) and Jain (2012) establish that knowledge sharing issues had not been institutionalized in the majority of university libraries. This may act as an impediment to knowledge sharing on issues such as information literacy (IL),

thereby affecting pattern of service provision to users in libraries. On an individual basis, knowledge sharing attitudes refers to librarians' personal interests and the degree of enthusiasm for sharing knowledge (Parirokh, Daneshgar, & Fattahi, 2008). It is the degree of positive or negative feelings an individual has towards the intention to share knowledge with colleagues on issues about IL. Willingness and eagerness are positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing (Van den Hooff & Hendrix, 2010). Attitude towards knowledge sharing is formed from behavioural beliefs, and higher attitudinal disposition towards knowledge sharing increases knowledge sharing intentions.

An employee's attitudes and competencies may impede knowledge sharing. Some individuals may possess an attitude of indifference to sharing, due to personal insecurity, such as a fear of being seen as ignorant and therefore unfit for job advancement or new career opportunities. Employees may also fear a loss of superiority and knowledge ownership after sharing their own personal knowledge. No doubt therefore that a key factor in knowledge sharing is the issue of employee attitudes, not necessarily the motivation that leads to sharing. Notwithstanding, university libraries as constituents of their parent universities should rethink and explore ways to improve their services and become learning organizations in which to discover how to capture and share tacit and explicit knowledge within the library (Maponya, 2004). The changing role of academic librarians as knowledge managers emphasizes the need to constantly update or acquire new skills and knowledge to remain relevant in today's library environment.

Garaoufallou and Asderi (2011) conducted a study of four European countries (Greece, Czech Republic, Portugal and Slovenia) on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivating workplace knowledge sharing among librarians and discovered that digital

working environment affects the way in which librarians share knowledge. It also recognized the important role of intrinsic motivation in knowledge sharing, and that team-based culture leads to the success of knowledge sharing initiatives among librarians and within libraries. The intrinsic factor that motivated librarians more for knowledge sharing was that sharing knowledge was important value and part of their job for them whereas the extrinsic factor that mostly motivated them to share knowledge was the evaluation of their job performance. Overall, there was a relationship between knowledge sharing attitudes and motivational factors among the librarians.

In Israel, Aharony (2011) sought an understanding of the factors that support or constrain the individual's sharing of knowledge in organizations. Specifically, the study explored whether personality (self-efficacy and self-esteem) and situational (cognitive appraisal: threat versus challenge) characteristics influence participants' knowledge sharing in the organization. The results showed that personality and situational characteristics influence participants' knowledge sharing in the organization.

In the same vein, Hosseini and Hashempou (2012) surveyed the status of the use of web 2.0 tools in knowledge sharing among librarians in Iran. Findings indicated that they desire to use such tools with the most important reasons for the usage of web 2.0 tools in knowledge sharing being speed and ease of use, managing personal knowledge and easier communication with users and colleagues. More than half of the librarians stated that lack of knowledge in the use of these tools and lack of familiarity with these services are the main obstacles. The relationship between age, gender, education, level of experience, library section they belong to and the rate of usage of web 2.0 tools in knowledge sharing, and the level of

familiarity with knowledge sharing concept was discovered not to be significant. However, there was significant relationship between librarians' education and the usage of web alerting as well as between the level of familiarity with knowledge sharing concept and the level of use of some web 2.0 tools.

In South Africa, at the University of Kwazulu-Natal Library, Maponya (2004) carried out a study to find out if librarians were systematically sharing their know-how, expertise and experiences through various mechanisms. Respondents indicated that they shared knowledge informally within the library (87.0%), preparing written documentation such as newsletters (82.6%), and in collaborative work by teams (52.2%). The study also examined the level of knowledge sharing in the library. Overall, 47.8% of the participants said that knowledge sharing in the library was on average; 21.7% mentioned that it was good, 17.4% said it was poor and 13.0% indicated that it was unsatisfactory. It was also discovered that the critical skills needed for KM in university libraries are ability to map internal and external knowledge, understanding of information and knowledge needs of users, building knowledge taxonomies (for organising knowledge resources on websites and portals) as well as understanding of the library's information and knowledge flows. The study recommended that more emphasis should be placed on formalising knowledge sharing activities among library staff.

From the angle of reference and information services, a study was carried out to identify knowledge sharing requirements of librarians in university libraries (Parirokh, Daneshgar & Fattahi, 2007). Reference librarians who are members of Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of ALA formed the target population, which were contacted through their electronic discussion group. Findings revealed that librarians investigated are quite friendly

towards knowledge sharing and majority of them value the importance of knowledge sharing. However, it was also discovered that knowledge management policies and strategies are missing in majority of the university libraries.

The study recommended adoption of policy, which supports knowledge management and sharing, residing in the minds of librarians that perform different reference and information services, such as those that run information literacy sessions or conduct user satisfaction surveys. This can be achieved through content management system that is accessible to all in the library. The creation of knowledge management unit and officer for enhancement of knowledge sharing activities; appropriation of ICT infrastructures for supporting cross-functional areas, such as alert system, library mailing lists of users, staff database, e-library newsletter, virtual reference desk, library weblogs and social networks as well as provision of various communication channels for knowledge sharing activities were also recommended.

In a similar study in South Africa, Jain (2012) investigated university libraries in South African Development Community (SADC) with reference to knowledge management and knowledge sharing. The study identified reasons for knowledge management in the university libraries, of which knowledge sharing is the most important aspect, to include improvement in library services and library productivity as well as establishment of best practices, among others. The study debunked any doubts about IL programmes being key aspect of library services that indicate alignment with global best practices in service delivery and requiring continuous improvement and productivity for the benefit of users. However, lack of clearly defined guidelines on knowledge management implementation,

inadequate staff training, constant budget decline, lack of incentives, insufficient technology, and most importantly, lack of knowledge sharing culture were pointed out as challenges in knowledge management.

Djokotoe-Plockey and Alemna (2009) examined the extent of knowledge sharing among staff the Balme Library, University of Ghana, and found that sharing knowledge and experience benefits colleagues of the library, but there was no formalized avenue on this in the library. The study also revealed that the library has no policy with respect to knowledge sharing, thereby affecting the level of awareness of activities within the library and beyond. The study recommended creation of specific knowledge management policies and strategies, which should include publication of library newsletters and creation of database of staff publications.

#### **2.4 Knowledge Sharing among Librarians in Nigeria**

Ugwu, Eze and Idoko's (2012) study of the attitude of librarians towards knowledge sharing in the University of Nigeria libraries reveal that there were significant positive relationship between personality traits of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and attitudes towards knowledge sharing among the librarians. The study recommended a reward system that will encourage librarians to share knowledge and collaborate with other colleagues as well as the inclusion of knowledge management in the curriculum of library and information science.

Similarly, the effect of self-concept, knowledge sharing and utilization on research productivity of librarians in public universities in South-West Nigeria was investigated by Okonedo and Popoola (2012). The study revealed that the level of publication of librarians is moderately high, while also there was relative effect of self concept and knowledge utilization on

research productivity of the librarians. Knowledge sharing was not relatively significant on research productivity. Furthermore, the finding established that the joint effect of self concept, knowledge sharing and knowledge utilization on research productivity was significant. It was concluded that librarians who possess high self-concept and who properly make use of knowledge gained through knowledge sharing will have high research productivity. The study recommends that internal seminar and workshops should be organized every quarter of the year where it will be made compulsory for each librarian to present a quality paper. This will encourage knowledge sharing and will increase librarians' zeal to utilize knowledge and also have more research publications.

Similarly, Anasi, Akpan and Adedokun (2014) studied the extent of using ICTs for knowledge sharing among librarians in South-west, Nigeria. The study found that librarians are using ICT platforms for knowledge sharing. Challenges such as lack of awareness of existing ICT-based knowledge sharing platforms, limited ICT skills, and unhealthy technology environment are major hindrances to knowledge sharing among the librarians. The study recommended maximum use of ICT platforms for knowledge sharing and collaborations for professional development, scholarly communication, and efficient service delivery.

Akparobore (2013) examined knowledge sharing among librarians in university libraries located in south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. The study reveals that the main subjects of knowledge sharing among librarians are in the areas of ICT and networking, database management, knowledge management and cataloguing; but however, not satisfied with the extent of knowledge sharing among them. The study

recommended that regular seminars should be organized for encouraging knowledge sharing among the librarians for productivity and development.

A study on knowledge sharing among librarians in federal universities in Nigeria was conducted by Onifade (2015), using questionnaire for data collection. 362 librarians responded to the survey, and it was found that although there is low level of knowledge sharing, which are mostly through verbal discussions, workshops, seminars and workshops, they also have positive perception about knowledge sharing. Unfortunately, no intentions were given to those that share knowledge. The study recommended for improved sharing of knowledge among librarians in the country.

Awodoyin, Osisanwo, Adetoro and Adeyemo (2016) investigated knowledge sharing behaviour of librarians in selected academic libraries Nigeria. Their findings reveal that librarians share knowledge using face-to-face interaction, mobile phones, email and newsletters, which enhances innovation, efficiency, effectiveness, and emotional relief. However, knowledge sharing was not yet adopted formally in the libraries studied. The study recommends that knowledge sharing should be a routine which library management should enforce in the studied institutions.

Tella (2016) developed and tested a statistical model that examined factors that determine the intention of information professionals in Nigeria to share knowledge with their colleagues. The result revealed correlations between the overall score for intending to share knowledge and other knowledge sharing intention factors among information professionals. Thus, citizenship behaviour had the highest correlation with knowledge-sharing intention, followed by creativity and innovation, then by frequency of interaction. Furthermore, the result of regression analysis showed that ten independent variables (i.e. citizenship

behaviour, peer reliable role performance, interaction frequency, trust, self-efficacy, creativity and innovation, organization management policies, interest concern, sense of belonging, as well as organizational motivation) jointly explained 76.5% variation in the knowledge sharing intention by the information professionals in Nigeria. The research findings have implications on policy formulation and decision making in information and knowledge organizations, the public and private information sector players, professional associations, and information and knowledge training institutions, especially in Nigeria.

It could be reliably inferred that management and information services to users of libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, require that librarians should share their ideas and insights on best practices. There is the need for librarians to embark on knowledge sharing in contemporary and innovative methods which foster the delivery of services that attract and retain the confidence of information users. Within this domain, areas such as delivery of information literacy programmes, digitization processes and retrospective conversion of bibliographic records, web-based information services, emerging issues in education and training of librarians, would be at the forefront due to their contemporary relevance.

Existing knowledge sharing practices among librarians in Nigeria on the best methods for the delivery of information literacy (IL) programmes need to be empirically explored. This owes to the probability that sharing knowledge on IL issues will enable librarians to utilize ideas, insights and experiences of colleagues for efficient and effective provision of result-driven IL instructions to the users. Exploring and reporting this aspect in the literature will most likely enable librarians in Nigeria learn faster, develop creativity and improve their methods of inculcating IL competence in their



diverse users. It has been averred Sharing knowledge on IL related issues require commitment, creativity and interactive learning process among librarians for creating new knowledge on contemporary IL matters, whereas, unfavourable disposition towards sharing knowledge on IL issues among librarians can be detrimental to librarians' achieving set performance targets (Igwe, Emezie & Uzuegbu, 2014).

Besides IL programmes, other aspects of information sharing and knowledge management activities contingent to effective service delivery by librarians in Nigeria, should also be explored and reported, in order to bolster the literature base and scaffold understanding of the subject.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This literature review highlights that several studies indicate that librarians engage in knowledge sharing in various ways owing to a positive perception on its benefit. With the extent of reports indicating wide acceptance of knowledge sharing as strategic, essential, and beneficial for personal and group effectiveness among librarians in other regions of the world, there is no doubt that knowledge sharing should be similarly encouraged among librarians in Nigeria. The literature base on this subject for librarians in Nigeria needs to be expanded through more empirical studies. This owes to the fact that there are still other strategic areas that needs to be explored in relation to the subject for librarians in Nigeria.

Thus, in view of the foregoing, it is therefore recommended that studies on knowledge sharing attitudes, pattern, and influencing factors among librarians in Nigeria should focus on the following specific areas:

- delivery of information literacy programmes;
- creation and management of

institutional repositories;

- creativity and innovations in serving users' information needs;
- digitization and digital preservation strategies;
- web-based information services;
- use of social media for innovative information services;
- managing diverse user information behaviour;
- contemporary education and training methods;
- effects of open access (OA) initiatives and movements, open educational resources (OERs) and mobile online open courses (MOOCs) in services delivery of libraries; and, e-publishing of scholarly communication.

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