

ROLE OF SPECIAL LIBRARIAN IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of knowledge management programs in organizations have improved a lot of business operations. The key professionals involve in knowledge management programs are usually information technologies and human resources managers. However, special librarians as the information professionals also play important roles as they have all the necessary knowledge to all sources of information needed by the organization. The aim of this study was to provide the evidence of the role of special librarians in knowledge management programs in special organization. 22 special librarians in charged on implementing the Information Packaging Services in Malaysia organizations were selected and interviewed. The entire librarians surveyed were working in organizations that have knowledge management programs but 32% of them did not involve directly in the programs. Factors such as gender, age and educational background did not seem to have any relationship with the involvement in these programs. Many of them involved in designing information architecture, developing taxonomy or content management of the intranet. Other played lesser role such as gathering information resources and providing research services as requested by the knowledge management team.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management comprises a range of practices used by organisations to identify, create, represent and distribute knowledge for reuse, awareness and learning. Knowledge Management programs are typically tied to organisational objectives and are intended to achieve

specific outcomes, such as shared intelligence, improved performance, competitive advantage or higher levels of innovation (Wikipedia 2007).

One aspect of Knowledge Management, the knowledge transfer, has always existed in one form or another. This includes the on-the-job peer discussions, formal apprenticeship, corporate libraries, professional training and mentoring programs. However, with computers becoming more widespread in the second half of the 20th century, specific adaptations of technology such as knowledge bases, expert systems, and "Repository" knowledge repositories have been introduced to further simplify the process.

Knowledge Management programs attempt to manage the process of creation or identification, accumulation and application of knowledge across an organisation. Knowledge Management therefore, attempts to bring under one set of practices various strands of thought and practice relating to:

- intellectual capital and the knowledge worker in the knowledge economy
- the idea of the learning organisation
- various enabling organisational practices, such as Communities of Practice and corporate Yellow Page directories for accessing key personnel and expertise
- various enabling technologies such as knowledge bases and expert systems, help desks, corporate intranets and extranets, Content Management and Document Management

Knowledge Management may be distinguished from Organisational Learning by a greater focus on specific knowledge assets and the development and cultivation of the channels through which knowledge flows. The emergence of Knowledge Management has also generated new roles and responsibilities in organisations, an early example of which was the Chief Knowledge Officer. In recent years, Personal knowledge management practice has arisen in which individuals apply knowledge management practice to themselves, their roles and their career development (Wikipedia 2007).

SPECIAL LIBRARIAN PERSPECTIVE ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Special librarians who work in administration, collection management, reference or technical services, have taken on new roles as knowledge managers. In this new role they can be

- Knowledge management developers, working more closely with all of the staff and departments in an organization to design, organize, and maintain a broader range of digital assets;
- Knowledge management integrators, having more active roles in the training and research mission of the organization, integrating information resources and services in research projects;
- Knowledge management educators; teaching and training the staff of the organization information literacy and how to organize, preserve, and share their own information resources and
- Knowledge management researchers, applying library and information science and new digital technology to create new organizational (metadata), retrieval and storage (preservation) options.

However, there is little evidence of involvement of special librarian in organization's knowledge management programs (Abell 2000). This brings to the general objective of this study that is to obtain evidence of special librarians' involvement in knowledge management activities. Specifically, the study objectives are to determine:

- Degree of involvement of Special Librarian in knowledge management activities
- Skills required to participate in knowledge management activities and
- Factors that inhibiting the participation of special librarians in knowledge management activities.

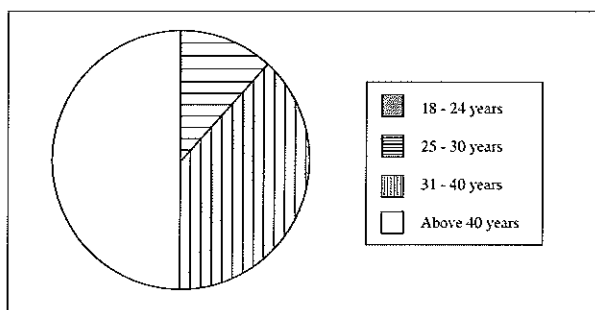
METHODOLOGY

This is a survey research with its potential subjects obtained from the respondent involved in the Expert Information Packaging Service in Malaysia's Special Library Survey done in 2006 by Noraziah (2007). The 22 respondents were purposely selected from the special libraries that offered automated Expert Information Packaging Services. These people were selected because of their perceived interest in knowledge

management and the fact that there is such program conducted in their organization. Structured interviews were conducted to obtain the information about the special librarians and their knowledge about the knowledge management programs using an interview schedule. In order to obtain in-depth information about their perceptions and experiences of being the information professionals in knowledge management, a tape recorder was used to record all their response during the interview sessions. The data collected using the structured interview schedules were analyzed using SPSS 14 software and the in-depth interview sessions were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

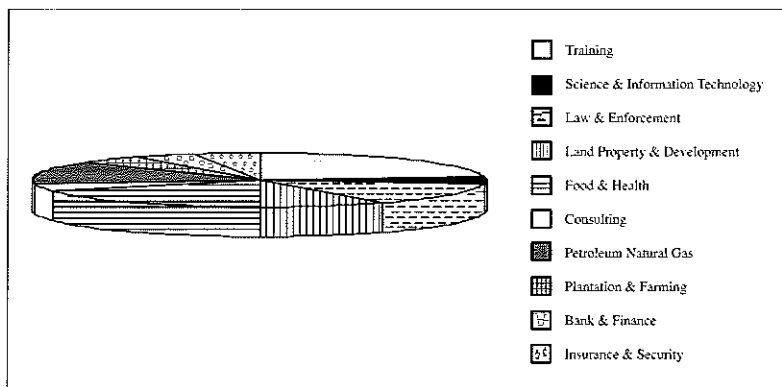
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Figure 1: Respondent Background



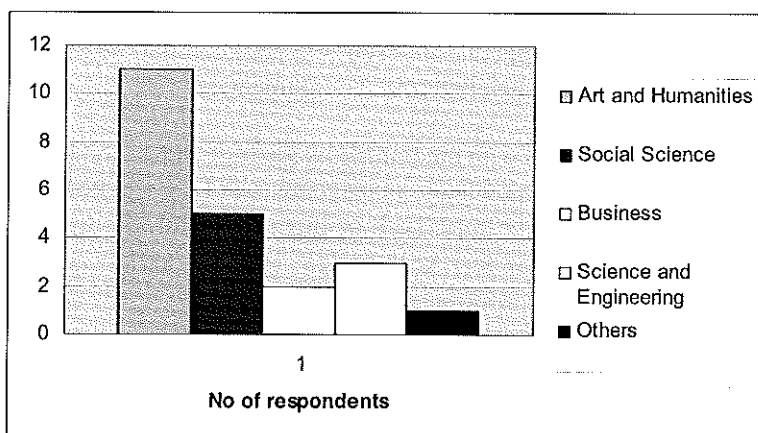
Most of the respondents were female (72.7%) with almost half of them were above 40 years old (45.5%).

Figure 2: Organizational Setting



They worked in various organizational setting which includes special training institutes, health and food centre, law firms and petroleum and natural gas organization. According to Merritt (2002) and Ramsey & McCorduck (2005), librarianship and Information Science have long been the profession dominated by women and it is high time for women to play a much bigger role in knowledge management and organizational learning.

Figure 3 Subject Discipline



In terms of educational qualifications, most of the respondents have diploma (13.6%), degree (50%) and master (22.7%) in information science, library science, information management, information technology and archival studies. This is inline with the general practice in the profession. In addition, some have also attended workshops or continuing education courses in order to update their knowledge.

PERCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Most of the respondents have read about knowledge management in the literature but not many of them have attended any course on the subject. According to Wilson (2002), even though knowledge management is a hot topic in the literature of information technology and science, only a few schools are offering the course and most of them have different approaches and subject covered for their programs. That also goes to the

training on the subject in training institutions all over the country.

More than half of the respondent strongly disagree (18.2%), disagree (9.1%) or not sure (27.3%) whether knowledge management is a new term for special librarianship. However, most of them agree (68.2%) that knowledge management is going to last longer compare to the other fad in management and special librarian must play important roles in their organization knowledge management programs. Although many of them disagree (45.4%) that knowledge management is just another aspect of librarianship, most of them agree that information management (68.1%) and special librarianship (77.3%) is part of knowledge management. Most of them also agree that special librarian (72.8%) can handle knowledge management program much better in an organization.

This findings corroborates with the finding by Shamel (2001) and Margulies (2006) that shows that knowledge management and special librarianship have strong connection because both of them deal with the finding and distributing information and knowledge in organization. However, special librarianship and information management only involves management of explicit knowledge like documents while knowledge management involves the management of both explicit and tacit knowledge.

ROLE IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

All of the special librarian involved in this study work in organizations which have knowledge management programs. However, half of these organizations were in the planning stage of knowledge management program (50%) and still in a current pilot project of the knowledge management program (27%).

For the launching of the program, most of the organizations involved have just launched their knowledge management programs in less than five years time (86%). Most of them are less than a year (36%), between 1 to 2 years (27%) and between 3-5 years (23%).

In term of the degree of involvement, nearly half (41%) of the respondents regarded themselves as non-key members of the knowledge management program teams and 32% (others) of them are not involved directly with the programs. Only 27% of the respondents regarded themselves as the

key members of the program and none of them is the leader of the team. This shows that most of the organizations that have knowledge management programs does not see the importance of the special librarian involvement in the programs. They are only considered as the supplier of reading materials for the people involve in the program and cannot play any important role in getting or distributing the right information for the knowledge workers in their organizations. According to those who regarded themselves as the key role of the program in their organization, they are mostly involved in the design of information archi-

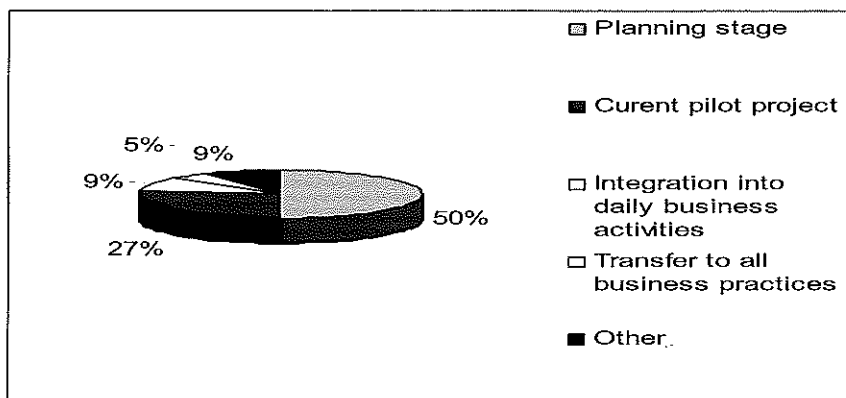
Table 3: Perceptions of knowledge management

	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Knowledge Management is a new term for what special librarians were already doing	18.2	9.1	27.3	27.3	18.2
Knowledge Management is going to last longer than any other fad in management	9.1	9.1	13.6	27.3	40.9
Special librarian must play an important role in Knowledge Management	4.6	4.6	27.3	36.4	27.3
Knowledge Management is just another aspect of librarianship	31.8	13.6	22.7	18.2	13.6
Information management is part of Knowledge Management	4.6	13.6	13.6	54.5	13.6
Special librarianship is part of Knowledge Management	4.6	4.6	13.6	45.5	31.8
Special librarian can handle Knowledge Management better	13.6	4.6	9.1	36.4	36.4

ture, developing taxonomy and content management of the organization intranet. One of the librarian interviewed claimed that he is only the director of knowledge management services for the branch office while the main leadership direction comes from the headquarters.

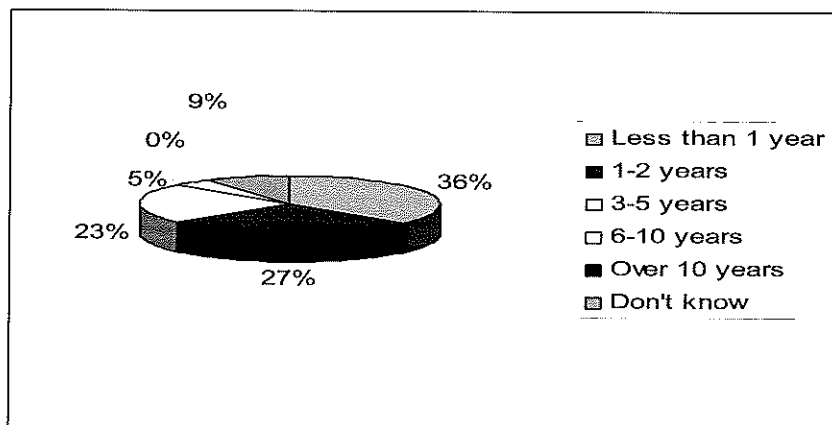
Based on their experience in the knowledge management programs, all of the respondents agree that the member of a knowledge management program should have skills in communication, networking and team working. This is because knowledge management involves working in group and getting information from all sort of resources explicitly and tacitly. Most of the respondents also agree that knowledge management members should acquire information access skills (90.9%), mentoring skills (95.5%), coaching skills (86.4%) and persuasion skills (90.9%) in order to be able to get all the information needed by the organization and distribute them to the right people to help the organization achieve its main goal.

Figure 4: Status of Knowledge Management Program



The respondents also identified that the ability to identify and analyze business process, the ability to identify and analyze the main information in an information resource and the ability to manage data, document and information effectively as the core competencies in knowledge management. Knowledge management program members should also have the ability to handle and manage a project. However, through the in-depth interview done with the respondents, many of them suggested that pro-

Figure 5: When Knowledge Management Program was launched



professional bodies such as the Malaysian Librarian Association and National Library should develop a program of awareness activities that target corporate sector organizations to demonstrate the potential roles that special librarians can play in convincing the upper level administrators of both government and private organizations the need to include librarians on their knowledge management teams. Some of them also suggested that special librarians should be made to enter a knowledge management certification training program that would certify their competencies in knowledge management.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided the evidence that many organizations in Malaysia do not have special librarians involved in the program actively and many special librarians in Malaysia still lack of management's recognition of their role in the knowledge management program. The major roles being performed by the special librarians at the moment include the designing of information architecture, development of taxonomy and content management of the organization's intranet while the minor roles include the provision of information for the intranet, gathering intelligence and providing research materials as requested by the knowledge management team. Skills in communication, networking and team working were identified as the most important organizational skills required by special librarians to function in knowledge management program while the ability to identify

Figure 6: Degree of involvement

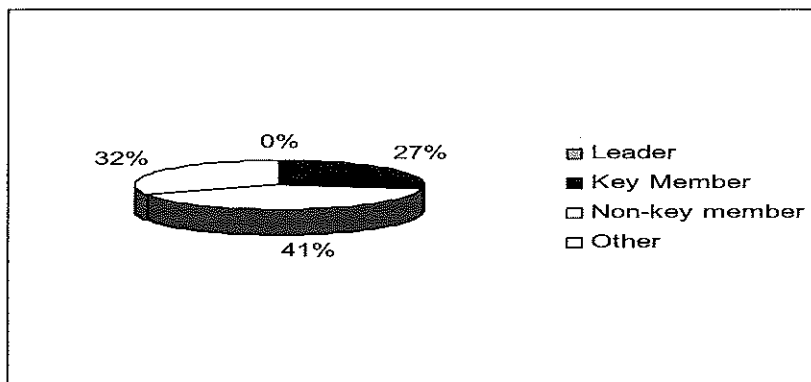


Table 4: Skills and Competencies for Knowledge Management Program

Skills	No. of Respondents	%
Communication Skills	22	100
Leadership Skills	14	63.6
Facilitating Skills	11	50
Networking Skills	22	100
Negotiating Skills	15	68.2
Consensus Building Skills	12	54.5
Persuasion Skills	20	90.9
Team Working	22	100
Coaching Skills	19	86.4
Mentoring Skills	21	95.5
Information Access Skills	20	90.9
Cataloguing Skills	10	45.5

tify and analyze business process, the ability to identify and analyze the main information in an information resource and the ability to manage data, document and information effectively as the most important required competencies for the special librarian in a knowledge management teams.

Table 5: Skills and Competencies for Knowledge Management Program

Skills	No. of Respondents	%
Ability to identify and analyze business processes	22	100
Ability to understand the knowledge process within the business process	14	63.6
Ability to use information technologies	11	50
Ability to change and accept changes	15	68.2
Ability to synthesis information so that it can be the knowledge ready to be used by the clients	12	54.5
Ability to handle and manage a project	20	90.9
Ability to identify and analyze the main information in an information resource	22	100
Ability to manage data, document and information effectively	22	100

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