New and Noteworthy

Creating a Knowledge Infrastructure: KM in Libraries

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As library professionals, our daily stock in trade is information. We strive to provide our patrons with the information resources and services they need to be successful. However, how often do we focus our information gathering and dissemination skills inward, towards those in our own organization? Are policies and procedures adequately updated and disseminated? Are best practices written down? When employees leave the organization, are their years of knowledge and expertise captured? This is the focus of "knowledge management" (KM), a field that first gained prominence in organizational management circles in the early 1990s and has since gained traction in other fields including finance, computer science, public health, and library and information science.[1] KM can be loosely defined as:

> "a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously un-captured expertise and experience in individual workers." [2]

These materials are not necessarily the same as those we use on a daily basis with our clients and patrons. Rather, they represent the knowledge accumulated over months and years in the course of our work; knowledge that can severely impact the efficiency and success of our organizations if not curated and communicated properly.

We begin a discussion of KM in libraries with an excellent primer and how-to guide, Valerie Forrestal's *Knowledge Management for Libraries*.[3] Part of Rowman & Littlefield's "Library Technology Essentials" series, this guide offers a useful perspective on the importance of KM in libraries and a discussion of tools that can be profitably used in information organization settings. The importance of KM to library managers is clear:

> "Books, journals, and technology are key components of any modern library, but a library's most valuable asset is its staff. Providing platforms that can capture the knowledge and expertise of your staff, and facilitate communication and professional development among them, is an investment that will only build in value over the years" (p. i).

As with other titles in the series, this book follows a logical progression from a basic overview, "An Introduction to KM" to "Getting Started with KM," to chapters on tools and applications, examples and case studies, step-by-step library projects, tips and tricks, and future trends. The projects chapter is particularly interesting, offering inexpensive and straightforward instructions on creating knowledge bases using Google Drive, wiki software, Yammer, WordPress, Microsoft's Sharepoint, and Springshare's LibAnswers. The benefits and drawbacks of each platform is discussed in the tools and applications chapter. Chapters are liberally illustrated, and the recommended readings are well worth a look.

Knowledge Management in Libraries and Organizations, published under the auspices of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA),[4] offers a two-pronged view of the KM mission in libraries: the management of knowledge external to the library, and internal management processes of the library itself. Each essay in the collection is written by an experienced practitioner in the field, and reframes current topics of interest from a KM perspective. The book's editors have taken care to ensure the inclusion of a range of institutional settings, including academic, public, school, special and government libraries. The first section, "Knowledge Management of Library Users," discusses KM in relation to topics including the research cycle, open access, the viability of special libraries and the digital divide, among others. The second half of the collection, "Knowledge Management as a Tool for Changing Library Culture," emphasizes internal management of information organizations in a digital environment.

Knowledge management has recently been of increased interest in special libraries; as experts in managing specialized resources for government, legal, medical, and other areas, special librarians are well placed to lead KM initiatives in their organizations. *Knowledge Management Practice in Organizations: The View from Inside* is a collection of real-world examples of successful KM principles and practices in the special libraries environment, written by experienced special librarians and information managers.[5] Discussions encompass topics including knowledge culture, social media, enterprise social networks, use of targeted conversations, and leveraging external expertise. A particularly interesting chapter comes from Deborah Keller, "The Learning Organization," which discusses the high-level barriers that can hinder successful adoption of organizational KM practices, including internal politics, expense, lack of coordination, and so on, and offers suggestions to overcome these barriers. Although perhaps too pricy for some library collections (currently $164 for hardcover and free access), this title benefits from an excellent glossary and list of references, and offers useful bibliographies accompanying each chapter.

In addition to special libraries, a basic search of common databases and search engines will yield hundreds of articles and research papers about the growing field of knowledge management in a wide variety of library settings. To share only two examples, in a brief 2013 *AALL Spectrum* article,[6] Sarah Sutherland presents an interesting discussion of the issues in law libraries surrounding non-transactional work (work that, while essential, cannot be measured) and scalable work (beneficial work that can be leveraged repeatedly with little additional effort). While both types of work are unbillable, and hence problematic in a law library setting, each is vital to the growth and success of the firm. How can librarians and KM staff work to advocate for these initiatives? Also, KM in healthcare is addressed in Dina McKelvy's 2013 piece in the *Journal of Hospital Librarianship*.[7] The Maine Medical Center Library embarked on a project to develop and hospital-wide knowledge repository service, a system to gather scattered knowledge assets including staff research papers, presentations, manuscripts and other materials and make them available via an easily accessible portal.

In addition to using KM strategies for our organizations, librarians can also apply KM techniques to their own work using Personal Knowledge Management (PKM) techniques. Mary Axford and Crystal Renfro, writing in *Online* magazine,[8] offer suggestions for dealing with the deluge of daily information flow faced by library professionals. Using an "electronic notebook" such as Evernote or OneNote can help keep track of calendars, research, reports, contacts, future programs, meeting notes and more.[9]

How can we keep on top of the rapidly growing world of KM in libraries? In addition to new books and articles (only a fraction of which are mentioned here), useful websites are on hand to help review KM basics and discover new trends. The best of these is KM World (http://www.kmworld.com), which offers both subscription-based and free content (registration

required), including best practices white papers, buyer's guide, a twice-weekly newsletter, videos and more. Also see interesting KM-related articles from the *Harvard Business Review* at https://hbr.org/topic/knowledge-management.

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Notes

[1] An early and still popular text on the emerging field of KM is Ikujiro Nonaka's and Hirotaka Takeuchi's 1995 book, *The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press). Other titles of note include Davenport, Thomas H., and Laurence Prusak, *Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998); Von Krogh, George, Kazuo Ichijō, and Ikujirō Nonaka, *Enabling Knowledge Creation: How to Unlock the Mystery of Tacit Knowledge and Release the Power of Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Polanyi, Michael, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).

[2] Koenig, Michael E.D. 2012. What is KM? Knowledge Management Explained. *KMWorld*. Available at http://www.kmworld.com/Articles/Editorial/What-Is-.../What-is-KM-Knowledge-Management-Explained-82405.aspx.

[3] Forrestal, Valerie. 2015. *Knowledge Management for Libraries*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

[4] Bultrini, Leda, Sally H. McCallum, Wilda B. Newman, and Julien Sempéré. 2016. *Knowledge Management in Libraries and Organizations*. [IFLA Publications, Volume 173]. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Saur.

[5] De Stricker, Ulla, ed. 2014. *Knowledge Management Practice in Organizations: The View from Inside*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

[6] Sutherland, Sarah. 2013. "Law Firm Changes Offer Opportunities for Libraries." *AALL Spectrum* 17(6): 15-17.

[7] McKelvy, Dina J. 2013. "Know Thyself: A Knowledge Repository in the Hospital Setting." *Journal of Hospital Librarianship* 13(4): 307-326.

[8] Axford, Mary, and Crystal Renfro. 2012. Noteworthy Productivity Tools for Personal Knowledge Management. *Online* 36(3): 33-36.

[9] Also see the authors' Academic Personal Knowledge Management for Academic and Librarians blog at http://academicpkm.org, which ran a 26-lesson course in 2013 called "A Year to Improved Productivity for Librarians and Academic Researchers." The lessons, which are archived, covered "How to Improve Productivity," "How to Create an Efficient Academic Workflow," and "How to Develop a Learning Network."