Knowledge Management and Social Media: A Case Study of Two Public Libraries in Canada

Eric Forcier & Dinesh Rathi
School of Library & Information Studies, University of Alberta

&

Lisa M. Given
School of Information Studies &
Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education,
Charles Sturt University

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Introduction

- Knowledge is a critical asset in this hypercompetitive environment and knowledge-based economy[1]

- Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) "*are also involved in knowledge work*" and are no less knowledge intensive organizations than For-Profit Organizations (FPOs)[2]
    - NPOs including public libraries experience many challenges such as competition, high customer service expectations and pressure to develop innovative programs

- Public libraries should consider adopting strategic approaches (as done by FPOs) such as KM practices to ensure their survival, manage resources efficiently and effectively, innovate, etc.[3]

[1]Rooney and Mandeville, 1998; Drucker, 1993 as cited in Iverson and Burkart, 2007.
[2] Dalkir, 2009; Lemieux and Dalkir, 2006.
[3]Teng and Hawamdeh, 2002; Jashapara, 2004 as cited in Renshaw and Krishnaswamy, 2009; Aharony, 2011.

Introduction

- Technology is a key enabler in KM as it helps in:[1]
  - Reducing temporal and spatial barriers in transfer of knowledge
  - Improving different aspects of KM such as organization, storage, archiving and retrieval
- Substantial budgetary allocations may be required to develop and maintain technological infrastructure for KM purposes

- Libraries of any size can make use of social media as they are low cost media, <u>if</u> a library has creative people in-house to manage the platform[2]
  - Social media tools have the potential to be the technology enablers for KM practices

[1] Anantatmula and Kanungo, 2010; Junnarkar and Brown, 1997; Ho, 2009.
[2] Dankowski, 2013 [as suggested by Johannes Neuer, Associate Director of Marketing, New York Public Library].

Introduction

- Public Libraries & Tacit Knowledge – KM Context
  - Reference librarians answer many questions each day – but…
  - Difficult to remember/know the best/most relevant sources
  - And – colleagues may benefit from sharing knowledge in their minds
  - (Hartman & Delaney 2010) = many will be retiring after 25 – 35 years
- Libraries' primary focus = explicit knowledge
  - i.e., "collecting, organizing and disseminating recorded information"[1]
- Gandhi 2004 – developing a KM system in this context could:
  - Provide answers to FAQs, quickly
  - Improve decisions about reference sources for specific queries
  - Improve collections
  - Enhance patron access to information

[1] Sarafzadeh et al., 2010, p. 208.

Literature Overview

- On the technology side, researchers are exploring the ways of implementing and the challenges faced in using technologies for KM activities, including the use of social media. For example:
  - "*Blogs have the potential to develop communities with all of the attributes necessary to provide environment for tacit-to-tacit as well as individual-to-collective knowledge conversion*"[1]
  - "*... wikis can be utilized in the information acquisition stage, information organization and storage and information distribution stage of the information management cycle*"[2]

[1] Martin-Niemi and Greatbanks, 2010 p. 21.
[2] Grace, 2009, p. 72.

Literature Overview

- Chu and Du (2013) conducted research on the use of social networking tools in academic libraries.
  - "*[social networking] tools were reported to facilitate information and knowledge sharing, service enhancement and promotion, interaction with student library users, at minimal cost*"[1]
- Other researchers have determined that social media tools are being used in different areas such as marketing, customer service, and community engagement[2]

[1] p. 72.
[2] E.g., Cahill (2011), Rutherford (2008), Kim and Abbas (2010), and Stephens and Collins (2007).

Research Issues Explored

- The aims of this study were:
  - To gain insight into understanding KM as a concept in the public library context
  - To explore the use of social media tools in communication and management of knowledge in two different types of public library in Alberta, Canada (i.e.,):
    - A large urban public library
    - A small rural public library

Methodology

- The study is part of a larger SSHRC-funded project examining the use of social media for KM in small/medium-sized NPOs
  - Interviews at NPOs (libraries and other organisations) across Alberta
  - Cross-Canada Questionnaire (now in progress)
  - For these cases = exploratory face-to-face interviews were conducted with library staff in both libraries
- Social constructionism informs this study's grounded theory approach to examine the attitudes and perceptions of individuals using and managing social media within both libraries
- The selection of these two cases relied on maximum variation sampling criteria, evident in the differences highlighted in each library's profile

Organizational Overview

- **Library A** is a multi-branch urban public library, which:
  - lists itself among the top five public libraries in Canada with the most active presence on social media tools such as Twitter
  - has an annual operating budget between $30-$50 million
  - has a full-time equivalent (FTE) staff complement of more than 400 people, across 15-20 branches
  - was an early adopter of Bibliocommons

Organizational Overview

- **Library B** is a small rural public library, which
  - is a single-branch library in an affluent rural community of approximately 10,000 people
  - recently adopted Zinio and OverDrive to support a growing demand for electronic resources
  - has 10-15 full-time and part-time staff

Finding – KM is a "fuzzy" concept

- (Big "K")"**K**"nowledge = library materials/resources

"*the total collection of materials on our shelves*" (Lorraine, Library B)

- (Small "k") "**k**"nowledge = organizational knowledge

"*Everybody shares… The average [staff member] in this library has worked here for over 15 years. It's an incredible amount of knowledge.*" (Lorraine, Library B)

Finding – Various types of organizational knowledge

Three types of organizational knowledge [1]:

- **procedural knowledge**, such as manuals and other documented processes;
- **expert knowledge**, as gained from experienced librarians;
- **community-generated knowledge**, where users provide valuable information

Redefining KM in Context

The 'small-K' knowledge most important to Library B was a shared ability to "*communicate*" 'big-K' Knowledge "*with our customers*" (Lorraine), and to "*access*" it for them (Anita)

Although Library B's adoption of social media proved more conservative than the approach used in Library A, the small rural library privileged the tacit (small-K) knowledge of staff to guide decision-making

[1] Forcier, E., Rathi, D. and Given, L. (2013)

Finding – Differences in Organizational Communication & Knowledge Sharing

- Library B (Rural) focused on in-person strategies:
    - "*We are a small enough [workplace] that we don't even email each other often*" (Lorraine, Library B)

    - Most interactions within the branch are conducted face-to-face

    - Email was identified as an important tool for knowledge sharing and a communication practice central to their work – <u>but</u> was used primarily for communicating beyond the branch
        - (e.g., members of the regional system within which the library operates, donors, vendors, etc).

Finding – Differences in Organizational Communication – cont'd

- Library A (Urban) focused on technology for sharing:
    - possess an elaborate intranet, developed in part using the Drupal content management system
    - uses blogs and a wiki for communication within the organization

        - "*Our intranet has a large number of really active blogs that are talk-based, team-based, location-based, service-based... That's another big chunk of the knowledge, that is*" (Richard, Library A)

Social Media as Tools for Engagement

- Library B (rural) start using social media, primarily Facebook, because they noticed a demand for it in the community
- Library B relies primarily on Facebook to engage library users

  – "*We try to put things on the Facebook page of events happening at our library. Our newsletter goes there…*" (Anita, Library B)

Social Media as Tools for Engagement

- Library A (Urban) considers itself on par or even ahead of the curve relative to other public libraries
  – The library uses many social media tools for outreach (e.g., Twitter, facebook, Pinterest, etc.)
- The library uses social media to engage users by seeking the aid of community "influencers" (i.e., individuals in the community that have a significant following on social media)
  – *"[User's name], for example, retweets something of ours, which he does every once and awhile…suddenly [we've] got forty thousand people getting something of ours. …That sense of endorsement and resharing is absolutely powerful and unique, I think. …the power of it is that it's going to people we don't even know exist."* (Richard, Library A)

KM Framework for Social Media Use
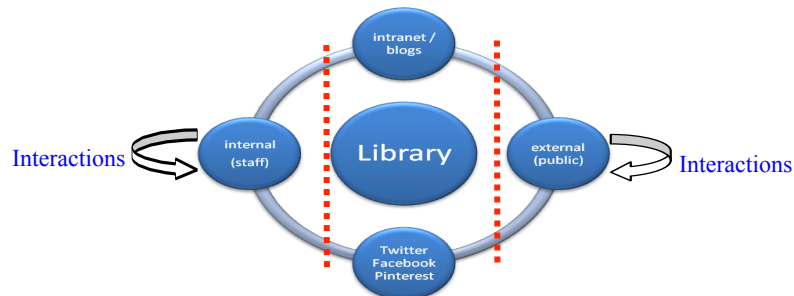
- The above figure depicts a cycle of knowledge:
  - That flows around the organization, generated internally through interactions and shared among staff, then directed externally.
  - New knowledge is generated from the public, in the form of customer "interactions" that provide feedback for the organization, which feeds back internally, into the organization.

KM Framework for Social Media Use
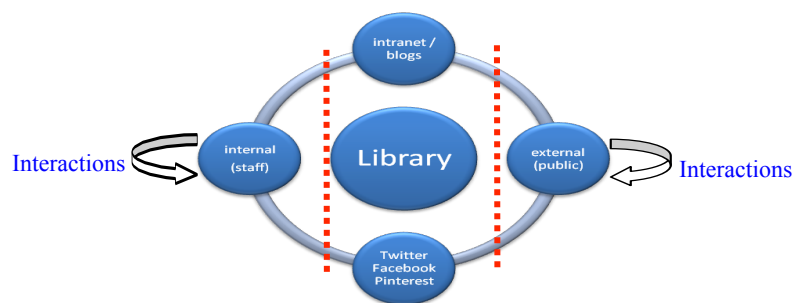
  - Social media, such as the examples described by participants (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook), facilitate the transmission of knowledge throughout this cycle
  - Social barriers (as shown by dotted lines in Figure), either real or perceived

Conclusion & Implications

- The barriers to social media implementation may also be determined by a difference in approaches to organizational decision-making [Centralized vs. Decentralized]. For example:
  - Library A demonstrates an environment that provides members of the organization more freedom to experiment and to push new initiatives [Decentralized Approach] (Karakowsky, 2002; Robbins & Coulter, 1999).
  - Library B demonstrates an environment in which members' activities and practices are more closely monitored and primarily driven by only one or a few key, high-level managers or executives [Centralized Approach] (Ibid.)

Conclusion & Implications

- The importance of management style to the integration of social media for KM practices is a key issue in addressing barriers to implementation
  - For example:
    - "*We were able to proceed in the absence of… anything too formal…just sort of soft guidelines…which has been good for us, but it could have held us up if [CEO's name]…had said, 'No, this is dangerous. I want a written policy before we start this.' Who knows where we would have gotten to and what we would have done. I think that can be a real danger*." (Richard, Library A)

Questions/Discussion

Please contact us at:

Lisa Given (lgiven@csu.edu.au)

Dinesh Rathi (drathi@ualberta.ca)