



**KNOWLEDGE
SHARING
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LIS EDUCATION
IN NIGERIA**

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Knowledge Sharing in Communities of Practice: A Literature Review of Trends and Challenges for the LIS Educators

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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to develop a synthesis of literature that explores the importance of Communities of Practice (CoP) as a means of knowledge sharing and to outline the trends and challenges of the practice for Library and Information Science (LIS) educators. With the current challenge of knowledge explosion, teaching strategies and knowledge handling have been greatly influenced. This necessitates the need for LIS educators to become more involved in knowledge acquisition and sharing. Knowledge, be it tacit or explicit, can only become meaningful and appreciated when it is shared for others to benefit. Once knowledge has been captured and codified, it needs to be shared or disseminated in one way or the other. Hence this paper provides conceptual considerations of knowledge sharing and CoP. It highlights the major characteristics of CoP as well as the activities involved in the practice. The paper examines the reasons LIS educators should be involved in knowledge sharing through CoP and review empirical studies on the subject. Possible challenges to effective knowledge sharing within CoP in Nigeria were examined. The paper concluded that knowledge sharing through CoP among LIS educators should be given priority and be considered as integral part of LIS education. It was recommended amongst others that LIS educators should take out time and effort to set up a CoP and be committed to its activities for effective knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing, Communities of Practice, Library Science Educators, Tacit Knowledge, Explicit Knowledge.

Introduction

Knowledge is regarded as a vital resource that is created to be shared with others for it to be useful and relevant especially among people of common interest. Knowledge sharing is therefore perhaps the single most important aspect in Knowledge Management (KM), since the vast majority of KM initiatives depend upon it. Knowledge sharing can be described as either push or pull. Pull is when the knowledge worker actively seeks out knowledge sources (e.g. library search, seeking out an expert, collaborating with a co-worker etc.), while push is when knowledge is “pushed onto” the knowledge seeker (e.g. newsletter, unsolicited publications, etc.). At this point, LIS educators can be knowledge workers as well as knowledge seekers in this push and pull scenario of knowledge sharing.

Knowledge sharing has become a crucial activity that is adopted by many professional groups across the universe. It is believed to be a panacea for knowledge creation among groups of people. According to Variant-Anna & Puspitasari (2013), knowledge

sharing is quite popular and already implemented as a formal knowledge management programme in the developed world. Knowledge sharing, as noted by Akparobore (2015) is a process where LIS educators could mutually exchange knowledge and jointly create new knowledge for higher productivity. According to the author, knowledge sharing enhances the ability to seek studies-related help from one another in order to achieve desired outcome of learning.

One of the notable initiatives for knowledge sharing is the adoption of Communities of Practice (CoP). Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined CoP as groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in the area by interacting on an ongoing basis. It could be regarded as learning networks, thematic groups, or tech clubs as noted by remain one of the most convenient and effective ways to obtain knowledge. LIS educators can group themselves into communities to share experiences, knowledge, and ideas either at home, at work, or at school. The underlining message of CoP is that there is a free floating “natural” set of relationships and interactions, structured tasks and formal controls, and common understanding through which knowledge is generated, use and reuse for personal, professional, and institutional development.

Proper integration of communities of practice or any other knowledge sharing activity into academic environment could make learning and teaching more interactive and engaging. In spite of the importance of knowledge sharing for collaborative learning, there are not many library schools in Nigeria with initiatives to encourage knowledge sharing among information professionals. Majority of studies on knowledge sharing were mainly focusing on libraries and not so much is written about knowledge sharing practices among LIS educators. However, it becomes pertinent to explore the concepts of knowledge sharing in communities of practice with emphasize to its trends and challenges for LIS educators.

Review of Related Literature

Knowledge is regarded as the vehicle that drives the growth, development, survival, and actualization of competitive advantage within and beyond different groups of workforce. It is a critical and strategic resource that leads to new ideas and creativity capable of improving employees' performance and supporting innovations in institutions (Tella, 2016). Knowledge could be tacit or explicit. The tacit knowledge is intuitive and experience-based knowledge. It is personal, undocumented, and used by people to perform their day-to-day tasks. According to Jain (as cited in Ugocha, Igwe, & Ibenne, 2018) tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement in a specific context. The explicit knowledge on the other hand is a rule-based knowledge. It is documented and stored in certain media. It is easily communicable beyond boundaries and shared among interested partners. It becomes imperative that both tacit and explicit knowledge be shared among LIS educators to bring about the desired positive change.

Knowledge sharing is a process of exchanging experience, events, thought, or understanding on anything (in general) with an expectation to gain more insights and understanding about something for temporary curiosity. Ugocha, Igwe, & Ibenne (2018) defined knowledge sharing as a process whereby individuals, teams, communities, or organizations mutually exchange both tacit and explicit knowledge leading to the creation of

new knowledge. It involves exchange of ideas, innovations, and insights in a particular area of specialization for mutual benefits of the members. On the whole, knowledge sharing involves the act of bringing or donating knowledge and getting or collecting knowledge. Davenport & Prusak (2000) noted that knowledge sharing process relies on a few key factors which include the following:

- **Articulation:** This demands that the key players in the knowledge sharing process and their present knowledge needs be defined. In other words, those who possess the knowledge and those who need the knowledge as well as what knowledge is needed should be clearly determined.
- **Awareness:** This involves the ability to know what knowledge is available. The knowledge provider or knowledge seeker should be able to conduct thorough search to be aware of the knowledge available according to areas of needs.
- **Access:** This entails being able to get to the knowledge. Several strategies need to be adopted for the purpose of providing seamless access to both tacit and explicit knowledge.
- **Guidance:** This has to do with defining the areas of expertise of the knowledge providers and guiding their contributions to avoid misinformation or information/knowledge overload.
- **Completeness:** This demands that access be provided to knowledge in its completeness. In other words, knowledge on a particular task should not be shared in fragments especially when it has to do with tacit knowledge. Knowledge shared should be meaningful, reliable, and potentially relevant to the identified knowledge needs of the community.

Nonaka in Ugocha, Igwe & Ibenne (2018) identified four knowledge sharing methods to include: socialization, externalization, internalization, and combination. Socialization refers to the interaction between two or more individuals for mutual understanding and benefits. Through socialization, tacit knowledge of one person is shared to another person and it becomes part of the other person's tacit knowledge. Externalization involves the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge using diagrams, sketches, analogies, etc. Here the tacit knowledge in the brains of experts is shared as concepts thus becoming explicit knowledge that can be further studied and refined. Internalization is a process of learning by doing or using. Combination, on the other hand, is a process of assembling new and explicit knowledge into a systematic knowledge.

In today's knowledge-intensive economy, such knowledge (both tacit and explicit) is becoming increasingly important for individuals with similar or dissimilar practices. According to Wyk (2005), the best approach to knowledge sharing among individuals with similar practices is the use of "communities". The idea of Community of Practice (CoP) is that learning occurs in social contexts that emerge and evolve in an environment, when members interact with each other for their pursuit of a common practice. CoP is a term originally developed by Lave & Wenger (1991) which describes a learning theory with a strong relationship to the social construction of knowledge. Mishra (2009) defined CoP as a group of people with common identity and professional interest who are ready to establish a fellowship in order to enhance learning and create a shared value for the group. Botha,

Kourie, & Snyman (2008) also referred to CoP as a group of professionals informally bound to one another through exposure to common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embodying a store of knowledge.

According to Wenger, McDermont, & Synder (2002), the key characteristics that identify a group as a Community of Practice are presented in the Figure 1 below:

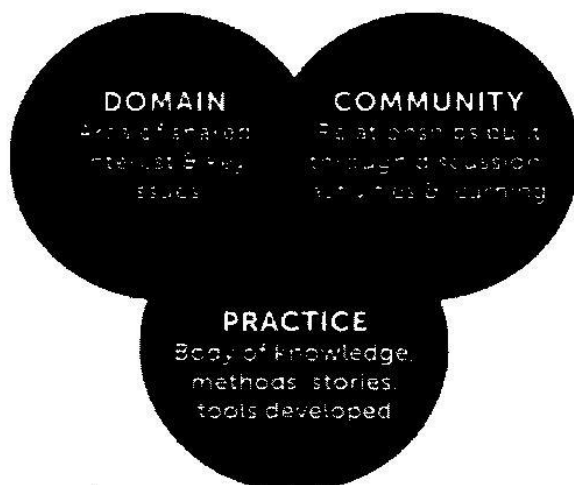


Figure 1: Characteristics of Community of Practice

Source: frailtyicare.org.uk.

Domain-wise, a community of practice has a recognized shared domain of interest that members are committed to. The domain is not necessarily something recognized as “expertise” outside the community but it implies a shared competence, value, and expertise among members within the community.

Community-wise, pursuing an interest within a domain requires people to engage in joint activities which involve discussions and sharing of useful information that might benefit all members as a community or group. Members of this community do not necessarily work together on a daily basis but they must meet either physically or remotely on a regular basis as a mark of commitment and to keep the interest afloat.

Practice-wise, a practice is typically a field, a skill, or a technique. That means, members of a community of practice must belong to a particular profession and must be skilled in developing a shared repertoire of resources in form of experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems.

The responsibility of LIS educators goes beyond the transmission of knowledge to the facilitation of how knowledge could be sought, validated, assimilated, used, and reused as basis for further learning. This onerous task therefore places LIS educators at the vortex of using a “community-based” approach for effective knowledge sharing. It is highly desirable that LIS educators group themselves into CoP in order to gain knowledge that will enable them to function effectively and remain relevant in today’s knowledge society. Bratianu (2018) stressed that membership into CoP must be voluntary and independent of organisational boundaries; members should be able to identify and understand various trends in the profession, contribute knowledgeably and proffer solutions to issues at hand, and be competent in managing technological environment, etc. The guidelines guarantee a community that is capable of taking up activities for effective knowledge sharing. Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-

Trayner (2015) noted that some of such activities involve identifying gaps, priorities and common challenges, establishing physical and virtual talk rooms for discussions, invite guest lecturers, and encouraging students to work in groups, among others.

Kapucu (2012) acknowledged that knowledge sharing through CoP could lead to dependable source of practical information, reduction of barriers created by institutional structure, transformation of members to competitive learners, provision of opportunities for social capital, and preservation of knowledge, among others. LIS educators should also see CoP as spaces where insights, tips, and tricks concerning personal, professional, or institutional development are shared among practitioners which could further be developed into a knowledge base. The CoP platform enables LIS educators to share knowledge on several areas which may include conceptual considerations in librarianship; education and training; research and publication opportunities; job opportunities; curriculum content development and organization; lesson delivery strategies; management of learning environment; collaborative approaches; innovations in information management; etc. Consequently, LIS educators should embrace knowledge sharing in communities of practice for the following reasons:

- To create new relationships and maintain old ones among colleagues.
- To exchange ideas with colleagues and build professional identity.
- To provide access to research output.
- To create new knowledge and innovation that will improve performance.
- To respond to the growing demand for meaningful and relevant teaching, learning, and research.
- To develop intellectual capacity for global competition and economic efficiency.
- To improve the quality of learning outcome of LIS students.
- To harness the power of knowledge in LIS education.
- To develop and apply expertise to information handling process in order to solve related problems, among others.

It could be reliably inferred that knowledge sharing through communities of practice in the 21st century involves mostly ICT-driven initiatives. A wide range of technologies and tools exist for LIS educators to share knowledge among interest groups. Such includes Internet, intranet, extranets, e-mails, chat rooms, meetings, documented experiences, expert-led discussions, web seminars, virtual classroom sessions, video conferencing, webinars, and sharing resources through library consortium (Ugocha, Igwe, & Ibenne, 2018). Other tools that can encourage knowledge sharing among LIS educators include blogging, training sessions, social networking, instant messaging, vodcast, podcast, online gateways, etc.

There are numerous factors that could influence the process of knowledge sharing among LIS educators. Sharratt & Usoro (2003) identified such factors to include institutional structure, technical infrastructure, trust, career advancement, sense of community, and value congruence. Kathiravelu, Mansor, Ramayah, & Idris (2014) emphasized on organizational culture either visible or invisible as being influential in knowledge sharing process. The authors explained that the visible organizational culture includes philosophy, mission, and espoused values that guide the teaching and learning process. The invisible organizational culture, on the other hand, has to do with the perceptions of teaching staff, non-teaching staff,

and students within the library school. Ugocha, Igwe, & Ibenne (2018) identified motivation system, organizational structure, and management support as other factors that can influence knowledge sharing practices among LIS professionals.

There seems to be paucity of empirical researches on knowledge sharing among LIS educators in Nigeria. However, studies have been conducted on teaching staff and knowledge sharing practices in tertiary institutions. Osunnade, Philips, & Ojo (2007) conducted a study to investigate the limitations in knowledge sharing among academic staff in Nigerian. Although the study was limited as far as knowledge sharing is concerned in that it examined only academic skills in conventional web pages search but it revealed that many academic staff admitted they do not like to share knowledge due to prejudice. The study recommended among others that university management should create massive awareness about the need for academic staff to embrace knowledge sharing among academic staff.

Chadel & Savita (2012) examined the knowledge sharing behaviour among academics in Maharshi Dayanand University with emphasis on factors affecting the willingness to share knowledge and how institutions can improve the knowledge sharing capabilities of teaching staff. The findings revealed that most of the respondents are satisfied with their contributions to the actualization of the vision of their departments through knowledge sharing. It was also acknowledged that the more experienced teaching staff are always willing to share knowledge. However, it was recommended among others that the university should motivate their teaching staff members more by allotting them some more challenging works.

Lawal, Agboola, Aderibigbe, Owolabi, & Bakare (2014) examined the extent of academic staff involvement in knowledge sharing in Nigerian university of Agriculture. The study revealed a very low awareness about the importance of knowledge sharing among academic staff despite the growing focus on the role of knowledge sharing in communities of practice. Tella (2016) developed and tested a statistical model to examine the factors that determine the intention of information professionals including LIS educators in Nigeria to share knowledge with their colleagues. The results revealed among others that there exist a high correlation between citizenship behaviour and knowledge sharing intention. That means citizenship behaviour is an important factor that could encourage people to share their know-how and experiences.

Abbas (2017) investigated the phenomena of knowledge sharing among academic staff in four Nigerian universities. The study found the evidence of knowledge sharing among academics in the universities studied through seminars and conferences, membership of professional associations, and readiness to share knowledge and other resources with colleagues. The study recommended that universities and lecturers in Nigeria should re-evaluate and re-strategise the present scenario, particularly the use of modern technologies to increase awareness and networking for knowledge sharing practices. Lawal, Oriogu, Ogbuyi (2017) investigated the influence of demographic factors on knowledge sharing among academics in research institutes in Ibadan, Nigeria. The results indicated that cultural background, gender, and educational level exert influence on knowledge sharing.

Amini-Philips & Nwanosike (2018) conducted a research to investigate knowledge sharing among lecturers in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study revealed a high level of knowledge sharing among teaching staff through teamwork and collaboration, and positive attitude which according the researchers are strong instruments for ensuring

quality education delivery in the university system. Bamigboye, Nihinlolawa, & Abimbola (2018) examined knowledge sharing and research output among academic staff of Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. The findings of the study revealed that the channels through which academic staff share knowledge include face-to-face interaction, use of mobile phones, e-mails and news letter, bulletin and discussion board, social media, etc. The study recommended that academic staff should be encouraged to send all their research findings to institutional repository established for such purpose, among others.

Akosile & Olatokun (2019) initiated a study to examine the factors that influence knowledge sharing practices among academics in Bowen University, Nigeria. The findings revealed that university policy, trust, gender, personal satisfaction were factors identified to influence knowledge sharing while academic cadre and faculty do not. The study recommended that there should be a university policy on knowledge sharing which should be accompanied by rewards. Zimmerman et al (2020) conducted a study to examine the ways in which teachers used online communities like Facebook for discussions related to their teaching areas. The research indicated that using the lenses of communities of practice enables teachers to share new ideas and experiences which help in increasing the learners' understanding about the discussed concepts. It was also revealed that most teachers and students utilise online communities of practice to share and gain knowledge among themselves.

Potential Challenges to Knowledge Sharing in Communities of Practice

The process of knowledge sharing within communities of practice is not without challenges. According to Lofti, Muktar, Ologbo, & Chiemeké (2016) some of the potential challenges associated with knowledge sharing within CoP in Nigeria include negative personality traits, low degree of enthusiasm, attitude of indifference, pressure on productivity, lack of implementation of shared knowledge, among others.

Negative Personality Traits

Some LIS educators display negative personality traits like selfishness, self-pride, dishonesty, etc instead of displaying personal traits that could promote knowledge sharing such as extroversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. The negative personality traits seem not to enhance the relationship among community members.

Low Degree of Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm remains a significant predictor of intention to engage in knowledge sharing behaviour (Sugashwarprashanth & Thenmozhi, 2016). It is observed that a number of LIS educators lack interest for knowledge sharing thus results to low degree of enthusiasm among them.

Attitude of Indifference

Regrettably, some LIS educators may possess an attitude of indifference to knowledge sharing due to fear of being seen as incompetent, fear of losing superiority and knowledge ownership. For successful knowledge sharing, information professionals are expected to show positive feelings towards the practice.

Uncertainties

LIS educators are faced with a number of uncertainties. First, the provider of knowledge is unsure that the receiver will understand and correctly use the knowledge. Second, the recipient of the knowledge is unsure about the truth or credibility of the knowledge in question.

Pressure on Productivity

LIS educators may be under pressure on certain tasks which are expected to be done with a short time frame (deadline). Such activities do not give them enough time for other activities that could encourage knowledge sharing.

Lack of Implementation of Shared Knowledge

Most times, ideas and opinion already shared among LIS educators are not implemented. This could be attributed to a number of factors like inadequate funding, lack of cooperation, inadequate infrastructure to support the ideas and opinion, lack of management support, etc.

Problem of Ownership

The notion that knowledge is property and ownership is very important. LIS educators do not engage in knowledge sharing process because they are not certain on who gets the credit. This can be countered by assuring individuals that authorship and attribution will be maintained for the knowledge product they created.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From this literature reviewed, inference is drawn to the fact that there is dearth of literature on knowledge sharing in communities of practices pertaining to LIS educators, especially the empirical evidences. Be that as it may, the review provided a general overview of knowledge sharing in communities of practice with particular reference to trends and challenges for LIS educators. The basic knowledge areas in LIS education and key factors for successful knowledge sharing practices were highlighted. It further discussed the different technologies and tools used for knowledge sharing and the reasons LIS educators should practice knowledge sharing. The paper identified the key characteristics of CoP as well as basic considerations for setting up CoP. Potential challenges to knowledge sharing in CoP were also examined. The paper equally reviewed empirical studies on the subject matter for teaching staff which includes LIS educators. The literature base of this paper reveals that there is need for expansion through more researches and empirical studies to ensure that the idea of sharing knowledge in communities of practice is given apt attention and be considered as integral part of LIS education. In this regard, the paper provided the following recommendations:

- i. Management of tertiary institutions should acknowledge the importance of CoP as mechanism for knowledge sharing among teaching staff.
- ii. The management should provide and maintain the necessary infrastructural, human, and financial resources needed for effective knowledge sharing in CoP.

- iii. The management should train and re-train LIS educators in order to **acquire** knowledge which can be shared among colleagues.
- iv. Professional bodies like NLA, LRCN, etc should create social networks or **platforms** for different groups of information professionals.
- v. LIS educators should take out time and effort to set up and belong to CoP.
- vi. LIS educators should be committed to ensuring smooth running and continuity of CoP.
- vii. LIS schools should adopt rational education and learning strategies that support knowledge sharing among lecturers and students.

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