

KNOWLEDGE-SHARING STRATEGIES AMONG LIBRARY STAFF AT SELECTED UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an investigation on knowledge-sharing strategies among library staff at selected university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study dealt with the following research questions: What factors affect knowledge sharing among library staff? What type of knowledge is shared among staff? What channels of communication are preferred for knowledge sharing? What capacity-building strategies are available for knowledge sharing among library staff? What policies, if any, are available to promote knowledge sharing? How can knowledge sharing be improved among library staff? The study was underpinned by the post-positivist paradigm and used the Nonaka and Takeuchi SECI model of knowledge creation as the theoretical lens. The study findings revealed that knowledge sharing at university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal was limited owing to a number of factors such as the lack of a knowledge-sharing culture, trust, and support from top management, hierarchical organisational structures, and the absence of knowledge-sharing policies. The study thus concludes that though library staff were acquiring both tacit and explicit knowledge through conferences and seminars and on-the-job training, the sharing of such knowledge was limited. It was recommended that continuous capacity-building and mentorship programmes that focus on gaps in succession planning within university libraries in South Africa be put in place.



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study is to investigate knowledge-sharing strategies (KSSs) among library staff at selected university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The field of knowledge sharing (KS) refers to the exchange of explicit or tacit data, ideas, know-how, expertise or technology among individuals or groups of employees (Nooshinfard and Nemati-Anaraki 2014). There are two main types of knowledge that are usually shared within and outside organisations – explicit and tacit knowledge. Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000) define explicit knowledge as that which is embedded in the processes and documentation while tacit knowledge is embedded in the heads of the workers. Consequently, explicit knowledge can be expressed in formal and systematic language and shared in the form of data, scientific formulae, specifications, manuals, and more. Furthermore, explicit knowledge can be processed, transmitted and stored relatively easily. In contrast, tacit knowledge is personal and consists of subjective insights and intuitions and can be expressed through actions, procedures, routines, commitment, ideals, values and emotions.

Explicit and tacit knowledge is generated and shared within organisations through formal and informal channels of communication such as intranets, blogs, wikis, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), social media, face-to-face communication, telephones, emails, and group interactions (Titi Amayah 2013). Other channels through which tacit and explicit knowledge is generated and shared especially at university libraries include institutional repositories, knowledge management (KM) systems, job rotation, staff development programmes, mentorship programmes, and conferences and seminars (Rowold 2007; Shepherd 2010; Vermeulen 2002). Through job rotation for example, staff can learn from one another and acquire competencies, skills, experiences and expertise (Järvi and Uusitalo 2004, 346). Earney and Martins (2009, 224) also believe that job rotation provides staff with an opportunity to gain a wider picture of the whole operation of an organisation. Similarly, through in-house and external development programmes, staff gain skills, increase interpersonal ties, and share norms and trust with one another. Cabrera and Cabrera (2005, 726) share the view that training is a useful tool in retaining organisational knowledge and intellectual intelligence. KS also occurs through mentorship programmes. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) mentorship is regarded as one way of externalising tacit knowledge from the experienced to new employees, from mentor to mentee. In this way, when a more experienced employee retires or leaves the organisation, the mentee can take over.

Since the 1990s, KS has gained great impetus within corporate and public sector organisations, including university libraries, as a strategy to enhance competitiveness and quality of services (Jantz 2001; Stec Dankert and Dempsey 2002). Wiig (1999)

outlines three driving forces behind the attraction of corporate and public organisations to embrace KS strategies. Firstly, external forces such as globalisation of business, the need to gain a competitive edge, and customers who demand quality and better services. Secondly, internal forces within organisations that have created opportunities for managing knowledge better to deal with customers' individual needs. Thirdly, the growing use of information technology to enhance a competitive edge over sophisticated competitors and also to meet the growing sophistication of customer needs.

In the context of university libraries, the increasing adoption of KSSs is motivated by various factors. For example, the changing role of academic librarians as knowledge managers has created the need to constantly update or acquire new skills and to remain relevant in order to meet the information needs of a large and diverse university community (Maponya 2004). Akhavan and Mahdi Hosseini (2016) have also shown that KS in organisations leads to improved organisational performance or innovation. KS has in addition been found to improve communication among staff and management, to lead to better decision-making, and to improve efficiency by reducing response time, enhancing a better performance, and promoting staff satisfaction. KS also leads to user-focused solutions and eliminates redundant procedures (Islam, Agarwal, and Ikeda 2015). Within university libraries KS is seen as an enabler that facilitates the transfer of skills, work-related experience, expertise, and the know-how among staff (Wang and Noe 2010). The importance of KS within university libraries has occasioned an increasing body of literature to focus on KM primarily from the perspective of librarians (Ugwu and Ezema 2010). This article is aimed at providing useful insights into how knowledge is being shared at university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal. This emerges from the realisation that library staff play a major role in knowledge generation, creation, acquisition and dissemination. Knowledge sharing is one of the key success factors for attaining an organisational competitive advantage.

CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focused on KSSs among library staff at selected university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The universities that were studied were the Durban University of Technology (DUT), the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), and the University of Zululand (UNIZUL). The DUT was established in 2002, the result of a merger between two much older institutions which operated exclusively for the substantial Indian population; and the equally racially defined Natal Technical College, for whites only (Durban University of Technology 2015). Similarly, the UKZN was formed in 2004, after the merger between the then University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville. The MUT and the UNIZUL were former black institutions established with the aim of supporting black marginalised people from disadvantaged backgrounds with the opportunity to further their education beyond matric. The MUT and the UNIZUL did not

undergo any mergers and so retained largely their organisational identities. This study is significant because it focuses on two universities of technology (DUT and MUT) and two comprehensive universities (UKZN and UNIZUL). The universities in this study in KwaZulu-Natal went through the transformation process proposed by the Department of Higher Education (Department of Higher Education 2002). Knowledge production is a key component of transformation in South African universities and KS is an important strategy in this process. The world global ranking of universities considers university libraries important facilities for managing the knowledge produced in universities and making it available (Orduña-Malea and Regazzi 2013).

Although library staff in universities in KwaZulu-Natal gain new knowledge through various ways such as attending seminars, workshops, conferences, training and development programmes, several studies reveal that the knowledge acquired is not subsequently shared (Maponya 2004; Mngadi 2007; Mushi 2009). Additionally, the core library functions such as knowledge generation and acquisition seemed compromised by factors such as a high rate of staff turnover, the lack of support from top management, poor channels of communication, and limited optimisation of existing staff. In the post university merger, libraries continued to evolve new organisational structures, organisational cultures, job expectations (promotion, demotion or retrenchment) thus causing instability in staffing skills needs, skills transfer and fear of the unknown (Roknuzzaman and Umemoto 2009).

Despite the above shortcomings staff at university libraries need to be motivated and encouraged to share knowledge. Implementing enabling strategies is therefore seen as an important way to motivate library staff to share knowledge and to fast-track skills transfer. Staff from different racial groups needed to adjust how to work and relate with one another. Sharing of knowledge among different racial groups was therefore guarded and this was expected to affect effective and efficient delivery of information services (Jayaram 2003; Muller 2006).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Awodoyin et al. (2015) observed that KS at university libraries is often uncoordinated and usually based on conversation. Library staff working at universities therefore need to equip themselves with relevant tacit and explicit knowledge and share it, in order to cope with the rapid changes occurring in their libraries. Evidence suggests that library staff at universities in KwaZulu-Natal are involved in creating new knowledge through seminars, workshops, conferences, and training programmes (Maponya 2004; Mushi 2009; Probst, Raub, and Romhardt 2000; Wamundila and Ngulube 2011). However, a number of factors seem to limit the sharing of such knowledge among staff. These factors include poor channels of communication, the lack of support from top management, fear of the unknown, and inflexible organisational structures (Adomi 2006; Maponya 2004; Mushi 2009; Parirokh, Daneshgar, and Fattahi 2008; Wamundila and Ngulube 2011).

Research has shown that library staff in general do not share knowledge of work-related activities. Besides, the channels of communication that exist in university libraries are not used to share knowledge among staff (Adomi 2006; Maponya 2004; Mushi 2009; Parirokh, Daneshgar, and Fattahi 2008; Wamundila and Ngulube 2011). Inadequate financial resources and poor IT infrastructure to ensure effective integration of KM does not make matters any easier (Nazim and Mukherje 2012). The lack of KM policies and strategies, changing and complex organisational structures, diverse organisational cultures and job expectations, and increased uncertainty occasioned by transformation of universities also influence effective KS (Jayaram 2003; Muller 2006). High staff turnover and a change process that is too drawn out are also said to be contributing towards limited KS in universities and their libraries (Lwoga, Ngulube, and Stilwell 2010). Munyua (2011) stresses the importance of a KS policy framework to facilitate the collection, processing and dissemination of knowledge in university libraries.

While factors that limit KS seem to be known, the extent to which they affect KS in university libraries is not well understood. Therefore, this article investigated KSS among library staff at selected university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study focused on the following specific research questions:

1. What factors affect KS among library staff?
2. What type of knowledge is shared among staff?
3. What channels of communication are preferred for KS?
4. What capacity building strategies are available for KS among library staff?
5. What policies, if any, are available to promote KS?
6. How can KS be improved among library staff?

LITERATURE AND THEORY

The study was underpinned by the socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation (SECI) model of knowledge creation by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). The SECI model is useful for investigating the types of knowledge shared among library staff and how knowledge is acquired and captured. The SECI model assists in comprehending the strategies available for KS in organisations. The SECI model proposes four ways that knowledge types can be combined and converted, namely socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. Socialisation is concerned with tacit-to-tacit knowledge exchange where knowledge is passed on through practice, guidance, observation, professional meetings, training, team discussions, apprenticeship and creativity. The SECI model asserts that face-to-face meetings are critical for KS to take place and gives room for interaction to happen (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). A culture of KS is also influenced through well-established norms created and sustained through the socialisation process (Cabrera and Cabrera 2005; Kim and Lee 2006).

Externalisation in contrast is a tacit-to-explicit knowledge conversion. This mode of knowledge transfer involves codification of tacit knowledge into explicit formats in the form of files, library collections, or databases (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). When tacit knowledge is converted to explicit knowledge, it is captured in the organisational system and retained in documents or databases. With the combination mode of knowledge transfer, explicit knowledge is combined to generate other explicit knowledge (Nonaka, Toyama, and Konno 2000). The combination phase allows for new concepts generated through externalisation and existing knowledge to be organised into organisational structures, which becomes systemic knowledge. This knowledge can be gathered either from inside or outside the library (Nonaka, Toyama, and Konno 2000). For the internalisation mode of knowledge transfer, explicit knowledge is converted to tacit knowledge. As explicit sources are used and learned, the knowledge is internalised, modifying the user's existing tacit knowledge. Internalisation involves taking explicit knowledge such as a document and sharing new ideas and taking constructive action. This process is facilitated by verbalised or visualised documents, manuals, reports or oral stories that originate from combination (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

The four modes of knowledge combination and conversion play an important role in knowledge generation, sharing and transfer. For university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal where issues of limited KS and loss have been raised, a number of multipronged approaches including but not limited to performance evaluation, using information and communications technology (ICT), mentoring, human resources development and job rotation polices are needed (Maponya 2004). Tan, Lye and Lim (2010) argue that a performance evaluation system motivates employees to share and transfer knowledge by attracting the right people with the right knowledge and abilities into the organisation. Several studies have found that practicing job rotation and implementing mentorship programmes provide the opportunity to transfer skills and share tacit knowledge within the organisation (Adomi 2006; Earney and Martins 2009, 224; Järvi and Uusitalo 2004, 346). Library staff benefit from job rotation by acquiring competencies and skills through sharing of experiences and expertise (Järvi and Uusitalo 2004, 346). After gaining organised knowledge in order to improve the daily operational process, library staff can utilise know-how through KS. Mentorship programmes on the other hand give the opportunity for senior management and well-experienced staff to share and transfer their skills to their junior counterparts before they retire or leave the organisation (Nonaka 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

Rah, Gul and Ashraf Wani (2010, 25) in their investigation on how university libraries can manage the creation and sharing of knowledge among their staff, encouraged the use of expert systems. Similarly, Awodoyin et al. (2015) posited that KS is based on the experiences which have been gained internally and externally in the organisation, and that if this knowledge is available to other organisational members, it will reduce duplication of efforts and serve as a basis for problem-solving and enhancing the decision-making process.

Support from top management enhances a culture of KS and competitiveness of the organisation (Kim and Lee 2006). Organisational performance is enhanced when employees are inclined and willing to share knowledge, skills and expertise with their colleagues (Chigada 2014). An organisational culture that recognises and rewards teamwork and mentorship plays an important role in creating an environment where employees are committed to share their knowledge and expertise (Dewah and Mutula 2014). A culture of trust among staff is an important factor in sharing their own knowledge, skills and experiences (Roknuzzaman and Umemoto 2009; Terra and Gordon 2002). KS is also enhanced when top management provides support and enabling policies to inspire, mentor, create mutual trust, respect, listen, and to train staff (Dewah and Mutula 2014; Wang and Noe 2010).

Three critical success factors (CSFs) are instrumental for KS to be enhanced and institutionalised within public sector organisations including university libraries. These CSFs are individual, organisational and technological factors. To these factors can also be added transformation factors especially in the context of South Africa's historical governance past. The individual factors relate more to trust, expertise, confidence, motivation and willingness to share (Nooshinfard and Nemati-Anaraki 2014). Organisational factors on the other hand relate to management support and leadership. Democratic leadership encourages more KS than autocratic leadership. Organisational factors also relate to organisational culture and organisational structure. A culture of teamwork encourages KS whereas decentralised structures are more amenable to sharing knowledge than centralised systems (Ma et al. 2014). Technological factors are concerned with the use of technology such as the Internet, social media, emails, skype, and discussion groups to facilitate sharing of knowledge within and outside organisations. The literature shows that many universities in South Africa, especially those in KwaZulu-Natal, lack KM policies and strategies to harness staff expertise for a competitive advantage, and enhanced service delivery. As a result of these gaps, existing human resources that are in short supply are not optimised to enhance library service delivery (Burke 2011; Chigada 2014; Maponya 2004).

RESEARCH METHODS

A survey research design was employed. Following the recommendations by Pickard (2007), a survey research design allowed data to be obtained from library staff located at different universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The study was conducted using a post-positivist paradigm. A post-positivist paradigm allows the application of quantitative and qualitative approaches and triangulation of multiple data collection methods in the same study (Pickard 2007). These approaches enable the researcher to unravel factors of both qualitative and quantitative nature that are instrumental for understanding the multiple perspectives of the phenomenon being investigated.

University websites were used as the sampling frame to identify all library staff including the interviewees. However, because of the possibility that information on websites becomes outdated quickly, the researcher made some follow-ups by telephone to senior managers and library directors to verify the staffing information that is presented on the websites. The total sample consisted of 130 library staff including eight senior managers (41 from the UKZN, 33 from the DUT, 29 from the UNIZUL and 27 from the MUT) as shown in Figure 1.

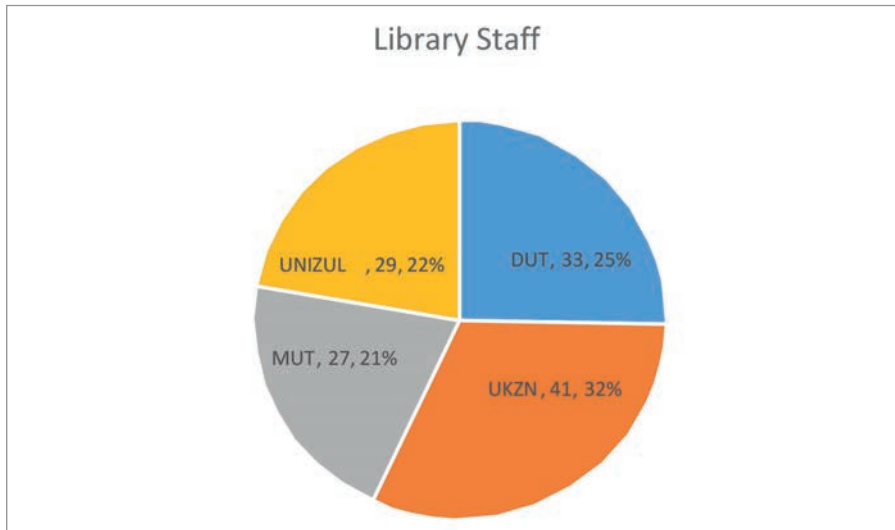


Figure 1: Relative population of the study

Because of the size of the population, an enumeration of the entire population was taken. Israel (1992) indicates that if the sample size is 200 or less it is advisable to conduct a census. Conducting a census for a small population eliminates sampling errors and provides data on all the individuals in the population. The professional library staff at the four university libraries included acquisitions librarians, library assistants, subject librarians, senior managers and directors.

Data were collected by administering a questionnaire to the 122 professional library staff and the eight senior managers or directors of the libraries. Furthermore, interviews were administered to the senior managers or directors of the library. In addition, observation and a document analysis were used to collect more data to complement the data that were collected through the questionnaires and interviews (Yin 2003, 80). The observation schedule focused on the organisation’s structure and line of reporting, communication tools and facilities available such as notice boards and schedule announcements of training programmes (workshops, seminars and conferences). The documents were reviewed to understand the policies, mission statements and annual reports and the extent to which KS was institutionalised at the universities.

Quantitative data gathered through questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics facilitated by the SPSS computer software program and these data were presented using charts, tables and graphs. On the other hand, qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations and document reviews were first coded and categorised into themes for easy interpretation (Leedy and Ormond 2005). In some instances, interviews were reported verbatim. In the next section, the findings are presented and discussed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the quantitative data are presented using descriptive statistics while findings of the qualitative data are presented thematically.

Response Rates

Out of 130 questionnaires distributed to the respondents a total of 102 were returned giving a response rate of 78 per cent. Figure 2 gives the demographic profile of the respondents.

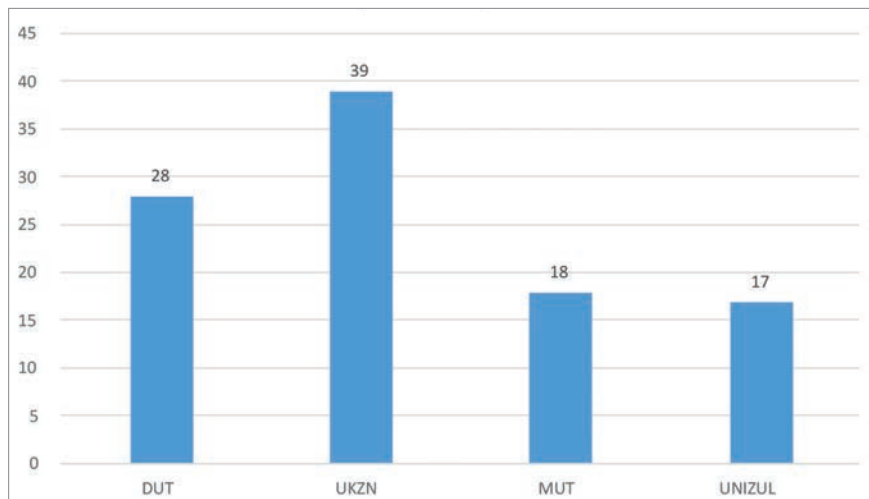


Figure 2: Responses from each institution (N = 102)

The responses given show that the majority 39 (38.2%) were from the UKZN, 28 (27.5%) from the DUT, 18 (17.6%) from the MUT, and 17 (16.7%) from the UNIZUL. Generally, most of the respondents were from the UKZN, possibly because the UKZN is the largest university with the highest enrolment of students and staff. Table 1 gives the work experience of the respondents.

Table 1: Work experience of respondents (N = 101)

Work experience (years)	Frequency	Percentage
	102	100
0–5	20	19.8
5–10	28	27.7
10–15	19	18.8
15–20	21	20.8
20–25	8	7.9
More than 25	5	5.0
Total	101	100

Source: Field data collected in 2015.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Among the 102 respondents, 76 (74.5%) were female and 26 (25.5%) were male. This indicates that the university libraries surveyed were female dominated. In terms of qualifications, the majority of the respondents held a bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science (LIS), 25 (24.5%) held honours degrees, 20 (19.6%) held a Master's degree, 16 (15.7%) held a diploma, 6 (5.9%) held a certificate, and 6 (5.9%) held a Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) in LIS. Only 3 (2.9%) respondents held a PhD in LIS. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Qualifications of respondents (N = 102)

Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate	6	5.9
Diploma	16	15.7
Bachelor's degree	26	25.5
Master's degree	20	19.6
B. Technology	6	5.9
Honours	25	24.5
PhD	3	2.9
Total	102	100

Source: Field data collected in 2015.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Several factors such as age, positions held, the level of education, the lack of succession planning, the organisational culture, and inflexible organisational structures were highlighted as affecting KS among library staff.

With regard to age, most of the library staff at the universities surveyed were within the age range of 41 to 45 years and above 45 years. An interview with one of the library directors indicated that young people were leaving the library to look for better positions and promotion elsewhere, resulting in knowledge loss in the organisation. This was caused by the lack of opportunities for promotions, low salaries and motivation in their current organisations. Kim and Lee (2006) confirmed that many organisations are finding it difficult to retain expertise since many staff are leaving for other opportunities elsewhere.

Kim and Lee (2006) are of the opinion that it is important to discuss the demographic profiles of library staff since these affect KS. Demographic profiles such as positions held, age, experience and level of education were found to affect KS among library staff in universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The responses from all eight senior managers indicated that, although they believed KS reduced the workload, they also felt that it was a form of exploitation to give away their experiences, skills and knowledge. One senior manager had this to say:

If you share knowledge especially when you are about to retire you cannot be superannuated.

Senior managers had the belief that if they shared knowledge before retirement they could not be superannuated because they would have given away their skills and experience to their successors. The policies reviewed showed that the universities did not have succession planning for retiring people. A lack of proper succession planning affects work processes, especially when experts leave the organisation upon retirement or in pursuit of other options. University libraries in KwaZulu-Natal need to establish effective succession planning policies as a KSS to ensure knowledge retention and expertise. Durst and Wilhelm (2012, 639) observed that implementation of KSSs such as succession planning is one way university libraries can survive in the knowledge economy. Wamundila and Ngulube (2011, 9) affirmed that succession planning as a common KSS avoids knowledge loss through attrition challenges.

Staff also seemed to believe that knowledge was a competitive asset to be guarded rather than shared. However, documents reviewed suggested that universities surveyed had policies on phased retirement (superannuation), which gave employees an extended period of working after retirement, based on exceptional skills and productivity. Extant literature indicates that in situations where the retirement of staff is identified as a driver for knowledge loss, KS is viewed as a threat to job security (Hall 2012; Lee and Al-Hawamdeh 2002; Rubenstein and Geisler 2003).

Staff that had stayed with the organisation up to the age of retirement tended to hoard their knowledge, to keep their positions. Resistance to share knowledge and

experience was attributed to the lack of awareness among staff and the lack of support from top management to encourage KS. The work experience and level of education of the respondents in each university were also investigated. The findings showed that educational differences affected the staff attitude to and perception of KS as indicated by 59 (57.8%) of the respondents. Staff with lower levels of education had a negative attitude to KS perhaps because they did not have much knowledge to share. The following were sentiments shared by some of the interviewees:

It is difficult to share knowledge with someone from a different cultural background, for example when you are talking to a white person you have to look the person straight in the eye that is a sign of respect. With other cultures you are not allowed to look your elders straight in the eye as this shows disrespect.

... when you are a very junior staff it is very difficult to approach or share work-related issues with top management.

All eight participants interviewed mentioned that it was difficult for library staff to share knowledge with someone from a different culture or ethnic group. Cultural backgrounds seemed to greatly influence KS among library staff. As a result, staff were reluctant to share knowledge whenever they found it difficult to get their message across. Roknuzzaman and Umemoto (2009) also noted that culture plays an important role in the success of KS as it defines relationships among individuals within organisations. The findings of the libraries surveyed revealed that when sharing knowledge with another person from a different ethnic group, such as white people, direct eye contact is important to show respect. Similarly, Zhang (2006) found that in Western countries with high numbers of white people, direct eye contact during conversations reflects a sign of attention, concern and respect. Research has also shown that the ethnic group in which an individual belongs affects the intention to share knowledge in multicultural organisations (King, Kruger, and Pretorius 2007). However, in African cultures, direct eye contact may imply disrespectful behaviour. Zhang's (2006) study found that people from East Asian countries usually avoid making direct eye contact, as it is a sign of disrespect. Consistent with Zhang's (2006) study, cultural differences were responsible for the lack of KS culture in university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal. In general, there was little intra-organisational KS between staff of different cultures, especially where there was a lack of trust. Furthermore, the integration of different cultures in the university environment provided the opportunity for staff to gain access to knowledge that they did not have before. The challenge, however, was how to convert the opportunity for KS into reality. KS following university mergers in South Africa, posed serious problems as there was limited trust among the different cultural demographic groups (Stewart 2007).

Organisational structures of the surveyed university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal were not flexible enough to enhance KS among staff. Findings gathered through observations confirmed that the organisational structures in the university libraries surveyed mirrored that of their parent university structures, which were very formalised and hierarchical and did not facilitate any KS. It was observed that rules and procedures

governed what needed to be done and no one could make a decision without approval from the line manager. At the organisational level, Kim and Lee (2006) clearly indicate that organisational structures that are too hierarchical have a negative impact on KS among employees. Similarly, organisational structures that are too formalised tend to empower top management rather than other staff to create knowledge (Kim and Lee 2006; Nonaka 1994). A combination of formal and non-hierarchical structures is suited to improving knowledge creation and sharing in an organisation (Kim and Lee 2006).

KNOWLEDGE-SHARING STRATEGIES AT UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN KWAZULU-NATAL

This section indicates the types of knowledge shared, how knowledge is shared and the KS activities of the surveyed universities.

Types of Knowledge Shared

KS is important as it ensures that staff gain new insights into current trends and practices (Variant-Anna and Puspitasari 2013). Library staff were asked about the types of knowledge shared. The participants indicated that they shared tacit knowledge and codified knowledge of work-related activities. The responses are reflected in Table 3.

Table 3: Types of knowledge shared

Knowledge shared	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Mean	SD
I share classification and cataloguing skills about library materials with colleagues (N = 102)	50 (53.8%)	31 (33,3%)	12 (12.9%)	2.57	14.48
I share knowledge and expertise using online databases with my colleagues (N = 99)	40 (40.5%)	43 (43,5%)	16 (16.2%)	2.93	1.437
My colleagues share new working skills they learn with me (N = 100)	34 (34%)	40 (40%)	26 (26%)	2.99	1.345
My colleagues share new skills in library practices with me (N = 100)	32 (32%)	40 (40%)	28 (28%)	3.02	1.303

Source: Field data 2015

Librarians’ experiences and expertise have been found helpful in providing an adequate foundation in KS. For example, knowledge about classification schemes and controlled vocabularies are helpful in organising resources, since the experience of cataloguing and classification provides an excellent foundation for metadata creation (Nazim and Mukherje 2012). The findings showed that 31 (33.3%) respondents revealed that they shared codified knowledge of classification and cataloguing skills about library

materials with colleagues. Overall, the survey findings revealed that library staff at university libraries surveyed were unwilling to share their skills and expertise, as reflected by 40 (40.0%) of the respondents who disagreed that they share knowledge and expertise using online databases with a mean score of 2.93. The findings revealed mean score values on the types of knowledge shared ranging from 2.57 to 3, indicating unwillingness of staff to share their knowledge.

Apart from this, KS in university libraries took place through staff training and development, attending conferences, seminars and brainstorming. When library staff were asked about how they share knowledge, the responses revealed that the highest percentage, 48 (47.1%), of the respondents acquired and shared new knowledge through seminars, workshops, conferences and networking. However, the information obtained from both the survey questionnaire and the interview seemed not to agree that knowledge that was acquired was subsequently shared among staff. A total of 44 (44.4%) of the respondents either agreed or disagreed that knowledge acquired was subsequently shared. Fewer than half of the respondents, 37 (37.4%), with an average mean score of 3.23, were positive that the knowledge generated and acquired within their organisation was shared amongst staff. Findings at one of the universities indicated that staff shared knowledge through postings on a SharePoint platform. An integrated system such as SharePoint is an important tool for sharing knowledge as it allows staff to contribute their experiences regularly and to share knowledge (Voelpel and Han 2005).

Preferred Channels of Communication

The SECI model of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) asserts that the exchange of ideas and experiences through socialisation encourages knowledge retention within organisations. Respondents were asked about the preferred channels they use to communicate and share knowledge. Table 4 shows the preferred channels used by staff at university libraries to generate and share explicit and tacit knowledge.

Table 4: Preferred channels of communication

Communication channels	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Mean	SD
I prefer using social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, wikis and blogs in my library (N = 98)	41 (41.8%)	26 (26.5%)	31 (31.6%)	2.76	1.131
I use videoconferencing to share knowledge with co-workers (N = 100)	49 (49%)	19 (19%)	32 (32%)	2.48	11.23
I use the intranet and knowledge repositories to share knowledge with my co-workers (N = 101)	41 (40.6%)	36 (35.7%)	24 (23.8%)	2.80	1.123
I prefer to share knowledge through storytelling (N = 100)	48 (48%)	20 (20%)	32 (32.0%)	2.5	1.121

Source: Field data collected in 2015.

Social networks as strategies for KS are some of the most common tools of Web 2.0 technologies that support informal relationships through collaboration, interaction and communication among users from different places (Balubaid 2013). The Internet, particularly Web 2.0, has dramatically changed the way people locate and share knowledge in an organisation. Web 2.0 technologies engage library staff and users in a two-way communication, thus enhancing KS. For instance, through Web 2.0 technologies the staff can deliver services to users via the university website, instead of users physically visiting the library. Previous studies have shown that the most widely used Web 2.0 tools in university libraries are community of practice social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter, blogs and RSS feeds) (Munigala 2014; Nazim and Mukherje 2012). Facebook, for example, allows the creation of groups discussing library activities through wall posting of such activities, while Twitter allows libraries and librarians to disseminate and share knowledge with users. Generally, social networks offer a greater opportunity for library staff to gather and share knowledge through interaction with one another (O'Dell and Grayson 1998).

The use of online social networks (OSNs) such as Twitter, Facebook, email, library blogs and wikis were helpful in communicating social activities and enhancing social relationships among staff, both inside and outside the library. Staff at the university libraries who were surveyed did not perceive informal channels of KS as useful. The mean value of those who preferred informal channels of sharing knowledge was 2.8, accounting for 35.7 per cent, which is less than half. In addition, 26.5 per cent showed interest in KS using social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, wikis and library blogs, while 20.0 per cent felt comfortable sharing knowledge through storytelling with co-workers. Only 19.0 per cent of the respondents showed an interest in sharing knowledge using videoconferencing. Stafford and Mearns (2009) observed that in most organisations employees abuse the use of social networks for social purposes, rather than for organisational KS of work-related activities. Previous studies conducted at university libraries in Africa found that, although staff displayed a high level of awareness of the use of Facebook and Twitter, their usage in sharing library work-related activities was very low (Jacobson 2011; Makori 2011; Ram, Anbu, and Kataria 2011). The lack of skills and expertise to use information and communication technologies could be responsible for the negative attitude of staff to KS. These findings seem to concur with those of Roknuzzaman and Umamoto (2009), which revealed the low willingness of staff to share their expertise and skills and high difficulties in managing tacit knowledge in libraries.

Again, staff revealed a lack of understanding and familiarity with the concept of storytelling as an informal channel of KS. Storytelling gives an opportunity for staff to interact and share their work-related experiences and the know-how on how to generate new ideas (Kim and Lee 2006). Storytelling also enables employees to learn through other people's experiences. However, storytelling as an informal channel of sharing knowledge was viewed negatively among library staff as they believed that stories were

not relevant to the workplace. Several problems of informal channels of communication, such as oral delivery and capturing of stories for sharing knowledge, have been identified in the literature. The main drawback of using stories to share knowledge is that most of the stories are not work-related and they are told from the individual's point of view (Wijetunge 2012).

CAPACITY-BUILDING STRATEGIES FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Library directors and senior managers were asked about the strategies that are available to facilitate KS among staff. The respondents revealed that they did not know of strategies in place to promote the sharing of knowledge. One of the library directors had this to say:

We have no repositories for knowledge sharing but we have institutional repositories (IRs) to keep theses, research articles and journals.

For example, the university libraries surveyed in KwaZulu-Natal did not have ICT infrastructure that support KS among staff, although they did have open access repositories for academic research. Nevertheless, findings from the interviews at one of the university libraries confirmed that they had mentorship programmes and a SharePoint tool for sharing knowledge. Mentorship as a strategy for KS gives an opportunity for the mentor to share and transfer knowledge to the mentee (Darwin and Palmer 2009). Level and Mach (2005) established that top-down peer mentoring supported and contributed towards KS through skills development and transfer. The other three university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal seemed to lose operational knowledge of experienced staff when they retired or left the organisation since tacit knowledge was not captured or shared.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Appropriate strategies and policies assist organisations to effectively achieve organisational goals and objectives. A policy is a deliberate plan of action to guide decision-making (Zhang, Dawes, and Sarkis 2005). Respondents were asked if they knew of a policy on KM. The results are depicted in Figure 3.

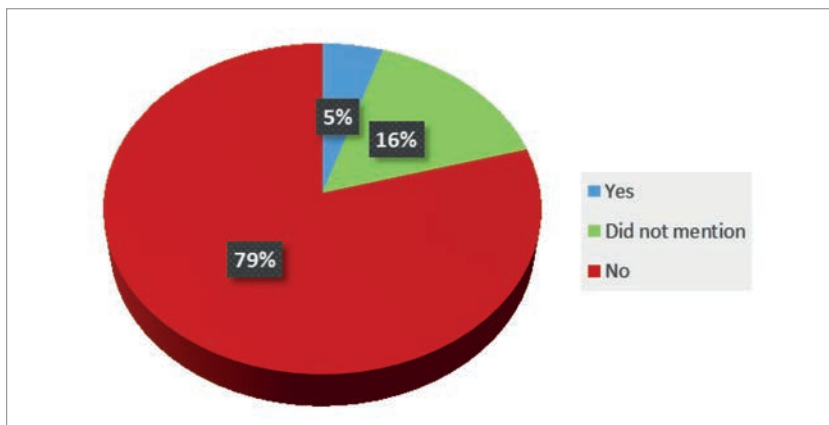


Figure 3: Policy for knowledge sharing

Of those who responded, 81 (79.4%) said that no KM policy existed in their universities and only five (4.9%) seemed to suggest that KM policies existed in their institutions. Another 16 (15.7%) of the respondents did not respond to the question. Badu (2009), in a study of academic libraries in Ghana, also found that they did not have KM policies. The lack of policies was reported to be responsible for limited KS practices among library staff in the other three university libraries surveyed. Respondents who said that KM policies were available were further asked to elaborate on what the policy says about KS. Only three (2.9%) of the respondents pointed out that the KM policy was about the use of a SharePoint for sharing knowledge. The perception that the use of SharePoint amounted to a KM policy was a reflection that the staff did not seem to understand the meaning of a policy. The SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995) put emphasis on the externalisation of tacit and explicit knowledge into explicit formats in the form of files, procedures, policies, manuals, library collections, or databases. KS is likely to happen if there are policies and procedures that enable it to happen (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Library staff were asked to state the ways which could improve KS in their libraries. The respondents were confident that a performance management system (that includes appraisal and evaluation) would encourage staff to share knowledge. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Ways of encouraging knowledge sharing

Ways of encouraging KS	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Mean	SD
KS can become a culture in the organisation if top management regularly displays and reinforces the theme that knowledge is the lifeblood of an organisation (N = 101)	9 (8.9%)	78 (76.8%)	14 (13.9%)	4.11	1.019
Non-monetary rewards will be more effective in encouraging KS (N = 101)	8 (8%)	66 (65.3%)	27 (26.7%)	3.92	1.055
KS can be encouraged if it is aligned with the performance appraisal of the staff (N = 100)	9 (9%)	69 (69%)	22 (22%)	3.92	1.125
KS can be encouraged if there is a policy which promotes job rotation among employees (N = 102)	11 (10.7%)	68 (66.6%)	23 (22.5%)	3.86	1.194
KS can be encouraged through staff development and providing adequate resources (N = 102)	11 (10.8%)	78 (76.5%)	13 (12.7%)	4.03	1.164

A total of 78 (76.8%) of the responses, with the highest mean score being 4.11, strongly believed that support from top management would encourage staff to share knowledge. Generally, staff showed strong support for any strategies that would improve KS in their organisations. For example, the respondents believed that if a performance management system was implemented, staff would be motivated to share knowledge because their contribution to knowledge would be seen and recognised. The respondents further strongly believed that the provision of adequate resources and staff development would enhance KS among staff. They pointed out that staff development would rectify weaknesses in job performance and build confidence among staff to share knowledge. Literature reveals that support from top management is instrumental in enhancing the level and quality of KS (Holsapple 2003; Li, Mirmirani, and Ilacqua 2009; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Wang and Noe 2010).

In addition, 78 (76.5%) of the respondents were very positive that KS could be encouraged if staff were capacitated and provided with adequate resources, including ICT infrastructure and human capital. A total of 69 (69.0%) emphasised linking KS with performance evaluation of staff as a strategy to motivate staff to share tacit knowledge. Adomi (2006) found that enabling strategies such as job rotation gave library staff opportunities to share knowledge and develop diverse skills. Job rotation helps staff to transfer and share relevant operational knowledge (Adomi 2006; Wamundila and Ngulube 2011). The findings from the libraries surveyed seemed to suggested paucity of strategies to facilitate the sharing of knowledge among staff. Kim and Lee (2006) suggest that top management can influence KS among employees by recognising and supporting those who contribute towards KS in the organisation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The article focused on the following research questions: What factors affect KS among library staff? What type of knowledge is shared among staff? What channels of communication are preferred for KS? What capacity building strategies are available for KS among library staff? What policies, if any, are available to promote KS? How can KS be improved among library staff?

The study findings revealed that both tacit and explicit knowledge was generated in university libraries in KwaZulu-Natal. However, the sharing of knowledge generated in conferences, seminars, training workshops and on-the-job training was limited owing to a number of factors such as the lack of KS culture, hierarchical organisational structures, the lack of support from top management, the absence of KS policies, the lack of trust, and the fear of losing one's job by ageing staff. Where there was an attempt to share knowledge, staff preferred formal to informal channels of sharing such knowledge. The findings further revealed that job rotation and mentorship programmes were some strategies used to encourage KS.

The study therefore made the following recommendations:

- i. the strengthening of formal channels of sharing knowledge such as the intranet, Internet, blogs, wikis, Facebook, Twitter and Web 2.0 technologies. These can allow interaction and collaboration among staff and enhance KS;
- ii. enabling KS strategies such as performance evaluation, rewards, and teamwork to promote KS within the organisation; and
- iii. creating an environment that encourages KS through mentoring, job rotation, and human resources development.

The results and recommendations presented in this article have implications for research, theory, practice and policy. Firstly, the evidence from the study provides a strong basis for implementing appropriate strategies to promote KS among library staff and knowledge managers at universities. Secondly, the results provide a foundation for creating awareness among policymakers and practitioners about the need for KS to enhance the quality of information service delivery. Lastly, the results contribute to the body of knowledge on KS from a developing country context such as South Africa.

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