

Driving Knowledge Sharing Initiatives for Enhanced Collaboration in Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Libraries – A Case Study

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Abstract: Today's work environment comprises of different parts of visible (explicit) and non-visible (tacit) knowledge that are frequently exchanged between people and systems. Knowledge sharing is the process of exchange of knowledge between people, communities and organisation. Most organisations characterize and focus their approach in knowledge management around their own specific business objectives. Knowledge management plays an important role in universities, especially in academic libraries because libraries are considered as knowledge repositories and are one of the oldest areas using knowledge sharing concept. The purpose of the research initially was to assess knowledge sharing in the seven libraries within Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), in terms of common standards, guidelines and policies for patrons. The research employed both theoretical and empirical analysis and was based on a review of best practices from previous studies and from data gathered from library staff and management. The first part of the study investigated the motivation to share, use of technology tools in collaboration and the strength of knowledge sharing culture among the staff. The follow-up study focused on the measures initiated to implement a collaborative environment in the libraries. The research used tools such as interviews, surveys and focus group discussions to extract the information required for analysis. Through the use of these tools the main challenges and issues facing SQU libraries with respect to collaboration was examined. The results of the assessment study were shared with the library administrative head and as a first step a training program for knowledge sharing and standardizing the management process of the different libraries took shape. The following investigation addresses the main learning and developments that took place after the assessment and focuses on the measures taken up to initiate formal knowledge sharing. Direct and indirect benefits will be explored and analyzed. In addition, the implication of applying knowledge sharing in decision making within libraries will also be investigated.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, SQU libraries, collaboration, standardisation, culture

1. Introduction

1.1 Knowledge and knowledge management

"Right on-time" information or knowledge need has brought in a series of rapid and profound changes that comes in the forefront of information revolution. This revolution relies on advanced scientific knowledge and the optimal use of information flow resulting from rapid advances in computer science, information networks and digital technology. Organisations use technology in the management of this informational flood and storage process. But technological methods stand incapable of managing what is contained in the minds of individuals cumulated from years of education, skills and experience which can be considered to be the primary element of this era. In this day and age, the focus of the human element is in facilitating the management of knowledge and use technology as an enabling tool. Power and authority have become linked to the access to information of value, and the ability to use it innovatively (Dalkir 2005)(Alrashdi 2014).

Knowledge is primarily of two types: explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is characterized by external appearances and can be expressed in the form of books, the web and speech. This type of knowledge is easy to store and circulate, through the use of technology. Another type of knowledge is tacit Knowledge. This type of knowledge resides in the minds and behaviour of individuals, the internal intuition and common-sense. This type of knowledge is hidden and often is based on experience and difficult to express through technology. The below table 1 shows the difference between explicit and tacit knowledge (Park, Vertinsky and Becerra 2015).

In light of this fact, organisations tend to organise, manage and employ what is available from experiences, skills and abilities and the implicit and explicit information accumulated by employees to support the process of making decisions and increase the speed of response and innovation. This trend led to appearance of the principle of knowledge management at the beginning of the nineties. Knowledge Management (KM) can be defined as a multi-strategy concept to attain hierarchical targets by making the best usage of knowledge (Wickramasinghe et al. 2009). Three fundamental elements of an organisation need to be integrated together in order to make management of knowledge compelling. These three basic elements are: people, process and technology. People are considered to be

the vital factor in building the organisation which in turn grows by developing their employees. KM helps employees to become flexible and encourage each other. It leads the manager to empower the workers to facilitate and exchange valuable information. Process should contain three major dimensions: effectiveness, efficiency and degree of innovation. It is critical for process to be as clear and straightforward as would be prudent to be well understood by workers in the organisation (G. 2005)(Alrashdi 2014).

Table 1: Differences between Explicit and Tacit Knowledge (Park et al 2015)

Factors	Explicit Knowledge	Tacit Knowledge
Where it is/location	Written in documents electronically or manually	In the minds of individuals
Shape	Books, manuals, work or procedures, tapes, reports	Experiences, mental models, beliefs, skills
The possibility of transfer	It can be passed down from one generation to the next	If this knowledge is not captured then it will be forgotten
The possibility of exchange	Easy to share	Difficult to exchange and share
The possibility to express them	Easily expressed in different forms	The knowledge can't be easily expressed
The possibility to measure and evaluate	It can be measured in the form of data and software and expert systems rules ... etc.	It is difficult to measure because it is difficult to convert that knowledge into cognitive services

1.2 Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing (KS) is one of the most important pillars of knowledge management, the life cycle of which includes many disciplines as it goes through a number of stages, starting with the production of knowledge, organisation and in the end the exchange of knowledge and use. Business organisations started initiatives towards sharing of knowledge even with competition in order to promote innovation, increase productivity and provide better services; therefore it becomes necessary for academic institutions and their components like libraries to follow the same trend. There is no doubt that the field of libraries is considered one of the oldest areas that used knowledge sharing and expertise sharing. Foremost of these processes are inter-library loan operations, but this application depends on the extent to which the library support knowledge sharing on one hand and use of modern automatic systems on the other hand. Also, it depends on the role of libraries managers support for the application among themselves (Anna and Puspitasari 2013)(Alrashdi 2014).

1.3 Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Libraries

Libraries are among the most important tools that help people to spread culture and gain knowledge. It is a place where one can find various types of information to develop knowledge. The aim of libraries is to facilitate the use of the library content by information specialists and to provide the academic community with all sources of knowledge. University libraries should concentrate on improving their ability to make a new environment for knowledge sharing and nurture collaborative culture.

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) opened in September 1986 to keep pace with the progress of the educational process in the country. SQU includes the following libraries: main library, medical library, library of college of economics and political science, Omani studies center library, college of art and social sciences library, college of education library and mosque library. SQU libraries are a place for students, doctors, staff, faculty, researchers and also citizens who are from outside the campus to take advantage of their services. The biggest is the main library which exists in the new building at the Cultural Center and consists of five floors. The libraries collections of books, periodicals, government documents, databases, audio-visual materials and thesis are classified and maintained (University n.d.). Staff in the library comprise of locals or citizens and expatriates from different parts of the world.

1.4 Objective of study

The main objective of the study was to assess the librarian's knowledge and their understanding of concepts such as knowledge management, knowledge sharing and their willingness to participate in the planning and implementation of knowledge exchange among the different libraries within SQU and also to standardize the management processes among different libraries which will support better services and collaborative work. It is important to note that libraries are one of the main pillars in education. Thus it is important for the researchers to understand how knowledge sharing will impact the librarians' decision making skills and improve the overall effectiveness of the role libraries play in the academic progress within the country.

Although this case study is purely triggered within SQU and its structure, this study will help other researchers to benefit from the findings about the impact of knowledge sharing and participation level of librarians in the decision making within academic universities.

2. Literature review

Research shows modern literature that refers to the existence of a large number of empirical studies that deal with the application of the concept of knowledge management in academic libraries. The subject of the study was the focus of attention of the researchers and has been studied extensively. A select set of studies in terms of the latest ones, and how it relates to the subject of study, is presented below.

Actually, knowledge can be called an essential asset for improvement. The general public is more interested in data and knowledge which prompts the way that individuals get to be more eager for new information and new knowledge.

In this regard, Radoje Cvejic and Jelena Mijailovic indicated the study of "knowledge management and change management in university libraries" in (2009) (Cvejic and Mijailovic 2009).

The study showed how to apply the concept of knowledge management in university libraries because of the very great importance in contemporary time to raise the quality of work and level of services provided by adopting two proposals: the first is to build a knowledge management system through staff by helping and supporting them and creating a new database management system. The second proposal is to let university libraries play a key role in building a social environment because the university is the entity that brings together all different kinds of society through the use of modern technology (Cvejic and Mijailovic 2009).

With the global trend of knowledge economy based on intellectual capital, the adoption of knowledge management will become one of the most fundamental pillars inside SQU libraries. The present SQU management is keen on ensuring that knowledge management initiatives are embedded as part of modern management. Although knowledge management is a conversion of tacit knowledge into collaborative knowledge in order to improve the performance of the library, it covers a broader dimension of how knowledge is acquired and disseminated too in the libraries. In order for organisations to capitalize on their tacit knowledge, there is a need to implement systems and applications where knowledge can be shared and managed efficiently. This type of investment is key for the future success for any organisation more so an institution such as a university where knowledge is the key to all operations.

"Knowledge sharing of academic staff: A comparison between private and public universities in Malaysia" showed that majority of respondents stated that the knowledge sharing is very important in public universities as well as in private universities. Another important finding is that the top management of both public and private universities understand the importance of knowledge sharing and its benefits. They were more aware of such concepts and wanted to improve communication and awareness programs with some knowledge sharing initiatives. Chin Wei Chong, Yee Yen Yuen and Geok Chew Gan (2013) found there was a high rate of willingness from respondents to participate in knowledge sharing (knowledge donating) and low rate of willingness to share knowledge from their colleagues (knowledge receiving). It was clear from the research results that the top three barriers facing knowledge sharing are: lack of rewards and recognition systems, lack of time to share knowledge and lack of formal and informal activities to cultivate knowledge sharing in both public and private universities They concluded that public and private universities need to develop strategies for effective knowledge sharing (Chong, Yuen and Gan 2013).

The world is moving towards a new knowledge-based economy where the importance of knowledge management and knowledge sharing becomes an important ingredient to the new economy which is based on intellectual assets. Many organisations realized that the key element in improving production and service is to capitalize on knowledge that is

leading to innovation, creativity and problem-solving. Thus, the survival of the organisation is linked to its ability to build a knowledge wealth based on their respective fields. "The Study for Adapting Knowledge Sharing Technologies into Indian Education Market" discusses how Indian companies can do their business in private higher education sector while increasing their effectiveness and their capacity through knowledge sharing (Sagar and Kim 2015).

The study "exploring the use of knowledge management practices in an academic library in a changing information environment" by Judith Mavodza and Patrick Ngulube in (2011) pointed out that there is consensus among understudies and staff that "library assets and services are not sufficient". The reasons are monetary and additionally commonsense. Firstly, the library can't get by in-confinement and give 100% of what the university library users need. Since the expense of books and other data assets has ended up restricting the procurement, organising with different bookkeepers and libraries for interlibrary loaning and rebates when acquiring material has gotten to be fundamental; however, this is still not sufficient. Secondly, space and capacity limits are an issue. Thirdly, such a variety of resources are currently available online that the library need to discover a balance between what is accessible in print and what is accessible online. Notwithstanding the above difficulties, data environment driven by quick innovative progressions has brought extra demands (Mavodza and Ngulube 2011).

The study also indicated that there was no central place to store student projects, which could be resolved using some social media such as wikis, Facebook and Twitter in order to create a collaborative learning environment that encourages learning and education. Also, it recommended building knowledge portals, and this leads to innovation and the creation of new knowledge (Mavodza and Ngulube 2011).

Mohammad Nazim and Bhaskar Mukherjee introduced the study for "managing and sharing knowledge in academic libraries" in (2012) which explained implementation of knowledge strategies in academic libraries in India. They found that internal networks (Intranet) greatly help in the exchange of knowledge and create gateways to information and resources. Through the survey, they observed most of academic libraries using content storage and property documents, which make easier for information retrieval. Also the appearance of Web 2.0 has made a significant change in the relationship between users and the library in the sharing of information and communications. The study indicated that the use of codification and personalization effect the implementation of knowledge management in academic libraries strategies (Mukherjee and Nazim 2012).

Jaspal Singh had conducted a study on "practicing knowledge management system" in (2013) to address the practices of knowledge management system (KMS) in organisations. Singh observed that the KMS is used for consulting and professional services. Also, that organisations should use rewards and incentives on individual basis in order to continue the exchange of knowledge between professionals and staff. The study illustrated some metrics to evaluate the benefits of KMS i.e. customer satisfaction, product/service innovations and time to market....etc. which lead to add value to organisations. The study showed that technology is the key driver for KMS and the used of internal networks are very important in supporting knowledge management activities (Singh 2013).

The researchers Nove and Dyah conducted a study on "knowledge sharing in libraries: a case study of knowledge sharing strategies in Indonesian university libraries" in (2013) to describe the strategy of sharing knowledge in five university libraries in Indonesia. The study recommended the libraries have to develop a strategic plan for the sharing of knowledge, and in the meanwhile use the leaders who have long experience in the sharing of knowledge and provide incentive to employees. The study also pointed the need to use the Internet in order to reach all segments of society to establish knowledge society and use some of the easiest ways to get to the knowledge in the future (Puspitasari and Anna 2013).

The majority of the concepts of knowledge management is considered to be process driven. Knowledge is derived from information (both internal and external sources). In this regard, it is worth to note that knowledge if not driven through a structured process, will lead to no value. Therefore, the process of how knowledge is created and disseminated is driven towards generating value. The knowledge management processes work in sequential and integrated manner with each other. "Creating self-generating knowledge sharing spirals: improving motivation in a knowledge economy" uses knowledge sharing spiral concept adapted from Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). The knowledge sharing spiral can be explained as the process of how to transfer tacit knowledge into the organisations. In addition, the knowledge spiral is explained by Nonaka and Takeuchi as the creation of knowledge into organisation which starts from individual level to top management. Although the study covered how to develop a general model for improving knowledge sharing performance, the focus of this paper is mainly on how the employee engagement is promoted by using knowledge sharing spirals which become self-generating and lead to increase in organisation performance and employee motivation (Turner and Petrunin 2015).

3. Research methodology

3.1 Overview

The methodology used in this research was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative and quantitative methods are the most well-known methodologies utilized by different researchers arranging to lead investigations in knowledge management (Mavodza and Ngulube 2011). The methodology employed included,

- Collecting the data and information by conducting interviews with the top management for more in-depth information about the current knowledge sharing practices in the libraries, four managers were selected for interviews.
- Using of literature review and document analysis, followed by questionnaire response from 30 respondents among staff in the seven libraries. All 30 questionnaires were returned, which represented the rate of response as 100 %.
- Also successful case studies of libraries that applied knowledge sharing were studied.
- A follow-up focus group study after the assessment study was used to gather data on knowledge sharing initiatives and plans across the libraries to support collaborative working.

3.2 Research problem and questions

The university libraries play an important role in scientific research and support the academic curriculum of different universities and academic institutions and community service. Consequently, SQU Libraries do not have any umbrella entity that oversees all the libraries and coordinate the sharing of knowledge and experiences among them. They do have one administrative, financial and technical support unified that serves all libraries at the same time, but each library has its own structure. The current situation of university libraries does not allow creating a common interactive and cognitive environment due to the autonomy of each library. This research sought to answer the main question: what is the possibility of nurturing knowledge sharing culture among the seven libraries in Sultan Qaboos University? The research hypothesis is "Libraries should be centralized to provide knowledge sharing, which will lead to provide more quality services to patrons ". This study tried to investigate and answer the primary research questions: How do SQU libraries staff share their knowledge? And from that questions develop short questions as follows:

- What are the possible knowledge-sharing barriers that are obstructive to effective knowledge sharing at SQU libraries?
- What are SQU libraries staff's views on strategies to promote knowledge sharing?

3.3 Purpose of research

Professionals involved in the field of library science and information are constantly faced with the challenge of improving and expanding knowledge exchange networks and experience gained over many years of professional work and achievement. Having electronic technology that improves the exchange of information and lastly the exposure to the reality of overload of information without having the ability to screen this information in terms of quality and authenticity.

The purpose of this research was to initially assess the scope of knowledge sharing in seven libraries within Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), in order to have common standards, guidelines and policies for patrons. This study contributed to the provision of recommendations and proposals working on the importance of applying the knowledge sharing in the university libraries and the results of this study will help to benefit the relevant authorities and decision-makers to move towards creating the reality of the knowledge sharing in libraries. The study additionally investigated the post assessment measures taken up by the library administration to initiate a collaborative environment across the seven libraries.

3.4 Research population

The research population used in this research were 30 staff from all the seven libraries as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution details sample of questionnaire

Library	No. Questionnaires distributed	No. Questionnaire answered	No. Questionnaire not answered
Main Library	18	18	0
Medical Library	3	3	0
Library of College of Economics & Political Science	3	3	0
Omani Studies Center Library	2	2	0
College of Art & Social Science Library	2	2	0
College of Education Library	1	1	0
Mosque Library	1	1	0
Total	30	30	0

The initial study was conducted on staff in the university libraries after obtaining due consent from the management and staff.

4. Initial Assessment Findings and discussion

4.1 Questionnaire Analysis

This part gives the overview of results and primary findings on the questionnaire distributed to 30 participants. Table 3 below shows the response on the different questions from the participants.

As we can observe from the results in Table 3 that about 70% of the surveyed staff had more than ten years of experience, and about 13% of the surveyed staff had experience of less than two years. So, the fact that the majority of the surveyed staff had experience of more than ten years is a very important indicator of expertise found and also in terms of facilitating the processes of knowledge application and sharing in the framework of different courses and workshops. This data is also essential when selecting the knowledge sharing action plan.

It was seen that 7% of the respondents do not have any idea about the knowledge management. However, the majority of staff (93%) is familiar with the concept of “knowledge management. They possess both knowledge and awareness of this concept and realize the importance of the knowledge sharing. This indicates that the libraries should focus on this group of individuals and must give them priority to initiate and develop knowledge management strategies. Also seen in Table 2 is that 63% of staff are motivated to share knowledge and information with their colleagues and have the desire to gain the knowledge, even if they are doing this unofficially and informally. According to them, this can lead to the creation of knowledge. The absence of knowledge management systems lead to deficiencies in the application process.

In order to identify the flexibility of sharing resources from the libraries, it was asked of the staff members if any member of one library of SQU could access resources from another library. A majority answered in the positive. The university libraries are included into a unified database. This allows using all resources without any restrictions for all members. In order to understand what type of services the librarians want to share, they were asked about their preferred type. The preferred type is public services i.e. 50% as shown in Table 2 that are considered to be very important. Therefore, the administration should put more pressure of work to deliver quality services.

The results also indicate that 93% of the respondents, most library administrations encourage and facilitate the sharing knowledge as shown in Table 2. The administration of the libraries tries to put forward some strategies and build new skills. However, use of appropriate technology for sharing knowledge is still a weakness.

Table 3: Participants attitude towards knowledge sharing

Survey Questions	Number of Participants (%)
How many years of experience do you have?	
Less than 2 years	17.5%
Between 2 and 10 years	15%
Above 10 years	60%
Do you know the term knowledge management?	
Yes	87.5%
No	5%
How often do the librarians meet with each other?	
Occasionally	57.5%
Rarely	32.5%
Never	2.5%
Can a member of one library of SQU access resource from another library?	
Yes	87.5%
No	2.5%
What type of services that is possible to share between libraries?	
Public services	40%
Technical services	17.5%
Workshops	32.5%
Conferences	2.5%
Does the management require sharing of ideas and knowledge?	
Yes	80%
No	7.5%
Do you recommend the use of mobile apps for library management?	
Yes	72.5%
No	17.5%
Do you think cooperation will improve the quality of services?	
Yes	90%
No	0%
Do you use any social media?	
Yes	92.5%
No	0%
Do you think SQU libraries can lead external libraries in Oman?	
Yes	87.5%
No	5%
How do you consider sharing knowledge between SQU libraries?	
Very important	72.5%
Important	20%
Not important	0%

The research showed that 80% of the staff recommended the use of mobile applications for library management. Smart phones have become the first online tool, which witnessed a growing interest and demand because they provide content deals with daily transactions for users through the permanent connection to the internet. This technological reality has imposed great challenges to the library profession and information sector. Bringing mobile phone today contains techniques of digital photography and audio recording, and wireless networks, as well as that it equips users with programs and applications that enable the conservation and documentation. It also allows for browsing the information and transmitting it among mobile phones. These properties as well as the others encourage applications for different purposes, such as: current awareness; circulation; media services for the library; reference services; inter library loans; digital library catalogues; digital reference books. Social networks like Facebook play a major role in activating social communication between individuals and groups by removing barriers and distances.

They are also very important for information institutions such as libraries, for example, Facebook pages can be created to increase interaction and participation of the users of the library and make it possible for the librarians to note the developing trend.

It is clear from the study that the university libraries most commonly used social networks, where the rate reaches 90%. When asked if SQU libraries can lead external libraries and provide unification in Oman, the respondents of the survey surprisingly gave a positive response, and the rate was 97%.

At the point when the librarians were asked to rate the significance of sharing knowledge between SQU libraries, 77% rated it as important and 23 % rated it as very important. This implied certain desire from staff to implement the collaboration culture in the university libraries.

One of the main issues the university faced was a standardized policy for all the libraries which could ensure consistency. Furthermore, there was a lack on the usage level from students and researchers. There should be more planned implementation of training programs for students and researchers to use the library resources information systems more effectively. It is necessary to encourage the creation of a bank of knowledge, involving the most prominent knowledge management strategies, and by the methods of work. In addition, the information on the activities of the library should be disseminated to all individuals. This could be through the intranet or internet. Knowledge management was the key and coordinating the efforts of the acquisition of knowledge using social media and other technology tools will support the libraries. Having a repository of best practices in work performance and inputs from the community of librarians should boost the library's performance.

4.2 Interview analysis

As part of the initial assessment interviews were conducted with four directors of the SQU libraries (Main library, medical library, libraries of the College of Commerce and College of Arts and Social Sciences). The findings from the interview was that the management of those libraries were fully aware about knowledge management. However, there were some challenges that are summarized in the following points:

- It was very clear that there were difficulties in the development and training of their employees.
- All managers agreed that there is no formal knowledge management strategy in the libraries.
- The staff also had limited knowledge about how to keep up with modern technology.
- The top management agreed that they had a great environment for knowledge sharing but without clear strategy, structure and system.
- There is no connection and linking between the libraries to share knowledge.
- The manager motivated their employees to acquire knowledge from internet.
- Due to deferring of implementation of knowledge management, other external library might take the opportunity to lead SQU libraries and enhancing knowledge sharing.
- The librarians spoke either only Arabic or English. Librarians need to acquire more communication and linguistic skills.
- The library did not have any special facilities for special needs patrons or aging patrons, which prevents those people from accessing and benefiting from library services.
- The library administration had not identified any process or solution to transfer tacit knowledge from the expatriate staff to Omani staff. The online resources that are needed to be downloaded might be an issue in libraries because of the weakness of the network.
- Independent current policies related to circulating in libraries and their disadvantages should be discussed more.

4.3 Post Assessment Focus Group Discussion and Findings:

Following the positive response from the library administration on the results of the initial assessment study, after few months, a focus group discussion was undertaken to investigate measures or plans developed to foster collaborative work and environment to support knowledge sharing. In order to get a better understanding of the respondents opinion, two staff from each of the 7 libraries were selected i.e. a total of 14 candidates were invited to be a part of focused group discussion to clarify the roadmap of those libraries in terms of knowledge sharing.

It became clear to the management that one of the important challenges facing libraries managers at the present time was how to take advantage of the available human capital and motivate them towards creativity and innovation. They

were aware that this will lead to the creation of a knowledge environment which will bring libraries renewal and continued growth.

In order to apply the knowledge sharing between seven libraries within SQU, three different plans or initiatives were discussed as preliminary steps; Standardisation of circulation policies, Information awareness program and establish joint workshops and training between libraries.

Table 4 below shows the discussion details:

Question	Answer
Do you have a large amount of data and information written and documented in readable form or audible or visual?	90 % of respondents stated that SQU libraries didn't have any documented while 10 % didn't know.
What percentage of employees who have good skills and experience share knowledge?	80 % of respondents seem to believe there is a skilled staff within the libraries that have the ability to exchange knowledge, while 20 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree.
Does the information awareness program help in knowledge sharing?	100% stated that the information awareness program helped in knowledge sharing and also in capturing from employees leaving the organisation.
What are the issues encountered in knowledge sharing process?	The respondents provided the following feedback: The staff culture at the libraries are not in the same level. The absence of any specialized unit for the management and exchange of knowledge in the university as a whole. Lack of financial compensation for knowledge contribution
Do expat employees leaving the organisation share their knowledge? Any new procedures established for the same?	80 % of respondents stated that, expats leave their job because of absence of laws that protect their ownership of this knowledge, while 20 % stated they leave because there is no compensation. The administration believe they need to or should reward their expats. Also they felt the need to have formal procedures in place for knowledge transfer from expats leaving their job.

4.3.1 Standardisation of Circulation policies

The cost of operations in academic libraries increases at a high rate. Additional cost is encountered due to the presence of developments in the library environment, including cooperation between the libraries growth (especially the exchange of inter-library loan), expansion in the area of services and the growth of data with high usage level of information technology. Therefore it is critically important to build uniform standards and policies concerned with the following: library notices, patron barcodes, loan periods, , renewing and returning library materials and recalls and requests. In addition, it is key to standardize fees and fines and lost item replacement charges. The Circulation department of the library is considered as more efficient departments because of its association with the direct beneficiaries. It is responsible for building bridges of trust between the beneficiaries and other departments within libraries. In general, this department is responsible for the charge out of books to the beneficiaries in accordance with specific regulations for each library. In addition, these sections organize the book return process and control the stores. Figure 1 shows the functions of Circulation Department.

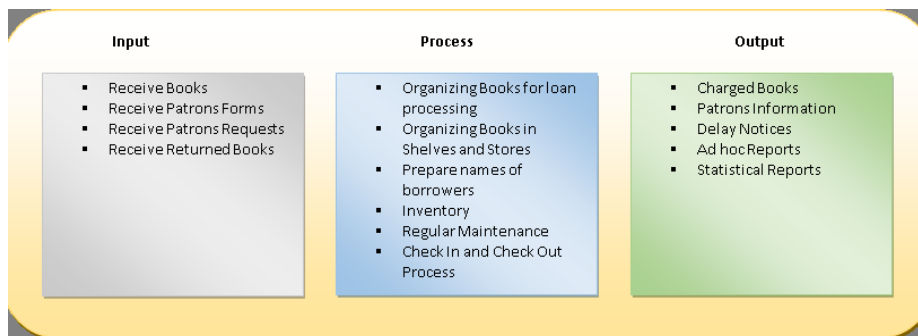


Figure 1: Functions of Circulation Department

There is no standard policy for circulation in the different libraries, this should not be of a surprise since the concept of knowledge sharing is new. Therefore, it was essential to start with the circulation department and standardize its processes. In order to begin such initiative, it is important to develop unified SQU libraries circulation policy template. This template will comprise and classify information provided based on six criteria.

The six criteria are:

- Borrower type: This can be defined as the entity who borrows books from library. It is classified into 8 categories; Undergraduate, postgraduate, faculty, staff, government staff who does not belong to SQU (Non-SQU-GOV), faculty who does not belong to SQU (Non-SQU-Faculty), patrons who does not belong to SQU (Non-SQU-Libraries) and library staff.
- Item Type: This is defined as the type and count of items that can be circulated for each borrower type.
- Loan Period: This is a specific days for all items checked out and should be returned before end of the period.
- Renew which controls how many times a patron can renew a particular item.
- Minimum Fine which is the minimum amount per day that almost all patrons are entitled to by regulations.
- Maximum Fine is the maximum to pay per specific period.

In addition, it is worth noting that the following constraints will apply:

“All SQU patrons are allowed to borrow from any library.
Thesis , Reference , periodicals and special collections are not charged out.”

Since there are multiple types of information stored in different media such as book, videos, etc. It is necessary to develop guidelines for each of the different types of media used such as books, videos. etc. One example of such a guideline is shown in table 5 below. Such type of similar details can be designed for other media like videos, CDs , maps etc.

Table 5: Item Type: Books

Borrower type	Item type	Loan period	Renew	Min. Fine	Max. Fine
Undergraduate	5	21 day	3 time	0.200	3.000
Postgraduate	8	21 days	3 times	0.200	3.000
Faculty	10	60 days	3 times	0.500	30.000
Staff	5	30 days	3 times	0.500	30.000
Non-squ gov	5	21 days	3 times	0.500	30.000
Non-squ faculty	5	21 days	3 times	0.500	30.000
Non-squ libraries	5	21 days	3 times	0.500	30.000
Library staff	5	60 days	3 times	0.500	30.000

Once this standard is implemented across the seven libraries, a unified circulation for all SQU libraries can be brought under one standard policy. The unified circulation policy should provide the following objectives:

- Develop standard working methods to evaluate performance of employees easily
- Ensure optimal use of employees and technology tools.
- Ease of integration of libraries in the future under one umbrella which is Deanship of Libraries
- Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of departments to carry out their loan with ease
- Improve service to patrons
- Address the issue of similarity in terms of the number of circulated items and fines in each library
- Eliminate inconsistencies and duplications while conducting their functions and processes
- Standardise the operations of all libraries
- Have a mechanism to control provisions workflow

4.3.2 Information Awareness Program

SQU libraries face major challenges to meet the needs and aspirations of the beneficiaries. Challenges from intense competition and the spread of modern communications and resources from the Internet and digital libraries technologies have resulted in decrease in demand for the use of libraries as a physical place where knowledge is provided.

Following the initial assessment study result sharing with the management, SQU libraries commenced the information awareness program. This was undertaken mainly because libraries success depends on their ability to benefit from and take advantage of information and knowledge sharing. Under this program, library staff will be recognised as an asset and of intellectual value to the library, which must be viewed with some interest and appreciation. The survival of the libraries in front of lack of financial resources can be attributed to the adoption of a knowledge sharing methodology.

The information awareness is defined as the ability of the individual to discover his or her need for information, and being able to access them, use them creatively and also reuse. The experience of the university libraries to support information awareness is in the following points:

- Creating links between the Library system and the Learning Management System.
- Providing links to the library site and the integration of the set of library services in the Distance learning portal.
- Provide vocational integration and partnership between the library and beneficiaries
- Promote the training of librarians
- Develop avenues to encourage transfer of tacit knowledge from the expatriates to Omani staff
- Provide the necessary electronic resources in information awareness program
- Use of social networks to allow students and librarians to exchange experiences and to respond to Questions. In addition, they can help students of how to access electronic resources.

4.3.3 Proposed Training and joint workshop Program

The vision of the proposed training program, its mission, perceptions and their justifications are explored. In addition, the general and procedural goals and the plan of implementation of the program and its content will be presented. It is important to note that, this training program is aimed at capturing knowledge from experienced staff who holds high qualifications within SQU libraries. In addition, it is focused on knowledge sharing and the challenges faced. This program will be one of the ingredients towards the vision of having a model for integrated knowledge-based society within SQU libraries and the university as whole.

Why the need for a training program?

According to the survey response, the reasons behind shifting organisation to knowledge management are:

- The increasing role of knowledge in the organisation's success
- The rapid change in the trends of the beneficiaries of the libraries
- Reduce the amount of effort of SQU libraries to work together and be able to deal with the knowledge under one umbrella which is deanship of libraries.
- Increase of competition, creativity and innovation in knowledge management between the different libraries.

- Create knowledge workers and communities

4.4 Purpose of training program

This proposed training program is designed to provide knowledge to library staff members towards the implementation of knowledge management processes, and sharing of experiences that will help them practice knowledge management processes according to scientific methodology. This methodology will lead to facilitate knowledge generation and storage of it. After completing the implementation of the training program, library staff will be able to:

- Explain knowledge management, knowledge sharing and their applications.
- Identify the objectives of knowledge management.
- Differentiate between tacit and explicit knowledge.
- To choose the appropriate method of generating knowledge
- Store and organise tacit and explicit knowledge.
- Identify the various requirement to share knowledge.
- Illustrate the challenges that might be faced while knowledge sharing within SQU libraries and how to overcome them.
- Use the appropriate ways to apply the knowledge at SQU libraries
- Acquire the ability to apply knowledge management.

4.5 The training program plan

The training or development program has to be clear and responsibility of the organisation. The library staff should be involved in determining the skills, knowledge and abilities to be learned. Table shows the overall program plan with four main sections: the field, contents, goals and proposed training hours.

The Field	The Contents	Objectives	Proposed Training Hours
Introduce the Program	General Framework of the training program and its applications.	Train trainees how the proposed training program works.	
	General purposes of the training program.	How to achieve our goals through the program. Prepare for change to KM.	
	Definition of knowledge management	Clarify the meaning and the importance of knowledge management.	
	The difference between knowledge management and information management	Specify the key elements between knowledge and information management	
	The application of knowledge management at SQU libraries	Answer the following: what , where and how can apply knowledge management within SQU libraries.	
	The requirement needs to apply knowledge management at SQU	Identify SQU libraries problems. Align knowledge management projects with SQU objectives.	
	The difference between tacit and explicit knowledge	Determine what explicit resources currently exist? How to capture tacit knowledge? How to get valuable information's has not documented	
Generating Knowledge	Formation and creation of knowledge	The process of finding the knowledge: External sources Personal training Education Experiences Theoretical and practical research development in the field of library and information Follow the latest developments	

The Field	The Contents	Objectives	Proposed Training Hours
	Organize and store knowledge	Use of information technology. Design the appropriate databases Subscribe in electronic resources or online databases.	
	Transfer and sharing the knowledge	Prepare the appropriate environment for knowledge sharing among library staff. Encouraging library staff to learn from each other and exchange ideas to reach the knowledge society. Open channels of communication between all levels of management.	
	The application of knowledge	Creating the knowledge warehouse where the contents, full text and metadata can be stored. Allow users to submit and maintain valuable knowledge through knowledge management system. Creating skills databases on library staff to update their profiles, experiences and knowledge. Implement knowledge directory software to find library staff with specific knowledge and areas of expertise.	

5. Future work

The researchers feel there is adequate scope to develop a KM framework or model which will uniquely fit the requirements of SQU libraries in terms of an overall knowledge strategy. This frame work should reflect the unification of the seven libraries and also standardise the policies and procedures followed across all of them.

6. Conclusion

The initial assessment research sought to provide an evaluation towards the application of knowledge sharing at Sultan Qaboos University libraries. Based on content analysis of previous studies as well as from the results of interviews and questionnaire, the major finding was that there is adequate infrastructural readiness and interest in SQU libraries to initiate k-sharing activities, but there was lack of standard administrative policies and procedures. To achieve a collaborative atmosphere all the seven libraries will have to operate under a unified umbrella entity. In addition, it was found that there was no identifiable and accessible lists of experts within the seven libraries, and that is a gap. This made the drive to change the situation more difficult since the top down drive was formally not in place. Based on the analysis, there was also a need to capture tacit and convert to explicit knowledge.

The follow-up study provides more insight on the knowledge sharing process and issues at SQU libraries. It was evident from all the above results that SQU libraries need to have a clear management policy for knowledge management and sharing some of the conclusions that could be drawn from the above results are; it is clear that SQU libraries don't have any written or documented processes. Thus, there is definitely a need for having a plan to document all processes and procedures manual and electronic and create knowledge sharing strategy as part of overall strategy for the libraries. Measures like standardisation of circulation policies, information awareness program and joint workshops have been met with positive response from the management and staff. They realized that these initiatives will help in educating and provide enhanced services to patrons who interact with librarians. The training program was considered as competitive advantage to meet and understand the needs of beneficiaries. Finally, how to create a reward system for those staff who participated in knowledge sharing process. Appropriate training of staff and motivating library them to observe, experiment, learn and encourage such activities is needed. Identifying and selecting staff of the year and staff that have ability to give short courses and contribute to knowledge sharing teams is important. Furthermore, there is a need to hold seminars, conferences and facilitate the task of posting from other organisations. These could be implemented using electronic tools too. Sultan Qaboos University libraries need to react to these challenges to provide better services within the academic community.

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