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Beyond Knowledge Silos: Preserving and Sharing Institutional Knowledge in Academic Libraries

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Introduction

- *Knowledge* has “always been embedded in the activities of organizations [and] this includes the knowledge generated within libraries.”

(Agarwal and Islam, 2015, p. 150)

Definition

- ***Institutional knowledge*** ranges from tacit knowledge (*i.e.* expertise), implicit knowledge, explicit knowledge, to procedural knowledge.

(IFLA, KM Section, 2015)

Retaining and Sharing Knowledge

Challenges:

- ↗ Staff turnover
- ↗ Transfer of knowledge to new employees
- ↗ No planning or processes in place
- ↗ Library practices do not facilitate/support knowledge sharing

(Agarwal and Islam, 2015)

Background

- Many academic environments tend to store information in “*knowledge silos*” (Robson *et al.*, 2003, p. 1).
- More research is needed to understand existing practices in academic libraries related to retaining and sharing knowledge.

Objectives

- ↗ To explore *existing* examples of initiatives undertaken at one large academic library system in an effort to retain and transfer institutional knowledge.
- ↗ To identify any *new knowledge initiatives* needed in academic libraries.

Case Study: Knowledge Initiatives at One Library System

- ↗ New Librarians Roundtable
- ↗ Videos (“Talks with Richard”)
- ↗ GitHub for Managing Digital Infrastructure

Example 1: New Librarians Roundtable

"Onboarding" of new hires:

- Provide a support network for librarians
- Library visits, documentation, "cohort" induction for new librarians
- LibGuide for New Academic Staff
<http://guides.lib.wayne.edu/c.php?g=174856&p=1151910>

Example 2: Videos

- Videos: “Talks with Richard”
- Librarian with longest seniority offers advice about organizational “culture” to new/incoming librarians
- Sample Video: Importance of Annual Review

<https://youtu.be/etwfWNbcX3I>

Example 3: GitHub

- Documentation for code often overlooked (Brian, 2003)
- Already using GitHub for code
- Co-locates documentation processes and output
- e.g. [Digital Collections documentation](#)



Next Step: Knowledge Sharing Survey

- Survey of librarians at a large urban University in the Midwest, United States
- Focus on “knowledge sharing”
- Survey questions adapted from Agarwal and Islam (2015) and Liebowitz (2006)

Sample Survey Questions

- To what extent does your library retain the knowledge of people who leave or resign from the library?
- What are the constraints you face in being able to share knowledge in your department?
- What knowledge is at crucial risk of being lost in your department? For what reasons is it at risk?

Key Findings from the Survey (N=28)

Survey question: “In your opinion, to what extent does your library retain the knowledge of people who leave or resign from the library?”

Responses (n=22)

- ↗ To a great extent (0%, n=0)
- ↗ Somewhat (31.82%, n=7)
- ↗ **Very little (45.45%, n=10)**
- ↗ Not at all (22.73%, n=5)

Knowledge Sharing Constraints

What *constraints*, if any, do you face in being able to share knowledge in your department?

- ↗ “Everyone is pressed for time and already overworked”
- ↗ “There's a lack of a knowledge sharing culture”
- ↗ “Lack of reliable central storage, lack of systematic titling or metadata applied to info or resources”
- ↗ “Culture is very territorial. Knowledge should only be shared/distributed by coordinators”

Knowledge at Risk

What knowledge is at crucial risk of being lost in your department?

- ↗ “Procedures”
- ↗ “Past decision making”
- ↗ “Financials, negotiated contracts, vendor information”
- ↗ “Liaison librarians don't seem to record information about how they handle their liaison schools, colleges, and departments”

Discussion

- Insight from the survey suggests that the following next steps may be helpful:
 - ↗ Share survey results with library administration (*i.e.* reaffirm support for growing a “knowledge sharing” culture)
 - ↗ Promote GitHub as potential documentation tool for digital initiatives
 - ↗ Engage in conversations with Liaison Librarians to collectively identify possible actions
- Implications for Schools of LIS

Future Research

- Research that continues to examine if there are any *differences* in KM needs across library administrators, librarians, or staff would be useful.
- It would also be helpful to *evaluate* the usefulness of KM activities in academic libraries on an ongoing basis (implement, test, and evaluate).

Selected References

- Agarwal, N. and Islam, M. (2015) Knowledge retention and transfer: How libraries manage employees leaving and joining. in *VINE*, 45(2): 150-171.
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- Robson *et al.* (2003). Share and share alike: The e-knowledge transformation comes to campus. *EDUCAUSE Review*, p. 1-7.

Thank you

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