KNOWLEDGE – SHARING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A STUDY OF THE BALME LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON

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Abstract
This paper examines the extent to which the staff of the Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon share knowledge among themselves, so as to enhance efficiency and productivity. A total number of forty-six members of staff of the library were sampled, with forty completing the questionnaire). Interviews were also conducted with the University Librarian, the Deputy Librarian, and Heads of Department. The findings indicate among others that although the staff agreed that sharing knowledge and experience can benefit colleagues of the library, there is no formalized avenue for sharing knowledge in the library. The library also has no policy which demands that knowledge must be shared among staff in the library. The effect of this is the lack of awareness of some activities which are happening within the library. The study recommends among others, the creation of specific knowledge management policies and strategies which would include the publication of library newsletters and the creation of a database of staff publications.

KEYWORDS: KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION, UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, INFORMATION MANAGEMENT, KNOWLEDGE ORGANIZATION.

Introduction
In the present information and knowledge era, knowledge has become a key resource. Faced with competition and increasingly dynamic environments, organizations are beginning to realize that there is a vast and largely untapped asset diffused around in the organization that is knowledge (Gupta, Iyer and Aronson, 2000 as cited by Maponya 2004). This realization not only occurs in business organizations but also in non-profit organizations such as academic libraries, including the Balme Library, University of Ghana. Legon.

White (2004) indicated that Knowledge Management (KM) is a relatively new discipline in the information and library environment which originated in the early 1990's in the private sector to help companies survive in an ever faster–moving and competitive environment. The attention that society gives to information and knowledge is rising and people's demand for information and knowledge is increasing. Knowledge is the only instrument of production that is not subject to diminishing returns (Clarke, 1999 cited by Cortada and Woods, 1999).

Many researchers from different subject domains have stressed the significance of research findings in improving the state of KM and its impact on sustained organizational success in the new era (Stewart, 1997; Delvin, 1999 as cited by Parirokh and Daneshgar, 2007). This situation is responsible for a dramatic shift in the role of university libraries in managing knowledge from a traditional, strictly informal role to an integrative role. This in turn would require much of the librarian's tasks to be performed collaboratively.

The success of academic libraries depends on their ability to utilize information and knowledge of its staff to serve the needs of the academic community better. Cortada and Woods (1999) stated that, IBM consultant Prusak emphasized that, knowledge resided inside people, with their portfolio of know–how, memory of past solutions, understanding of what make things tick, and ability to see patterns and come up with fresh solutions that work. Such people are called "knowledge VIPS" and other employees turn to them for answers to on–the–job problems. Polanyi (2000) also indicates that knowledge is a dynamic and active resource, residing in people's heads.

Lee (2000) pointed out that, the knowledge and experiences of library staff are the intellectual assets of any library and should be valued and shared. Sinotte (2004) quoted in Daneshgar and Parirokh (2008) acknowledges the creation of

knowledge by librarians through various library activities such as content management, organization of knowledge and evaluating and validating the reliability of information obtained from unfamiliar sources. By their nature, library activities are social affairs and therefore during these activities, libraries become involved in constant collaboration and interactions with users, information sources and their colleagues in order to execute various library tasks and processes.

To tap into workers' knowledge, employers must let employees know they value their knowledge by creating environments and systems for sharing knowledge throughout the organization. When knowledge is not shared, it leaks (Martinez, 2000). Such leakage ultimately results in organizational inefficiency such as:

- repeated mistakes;
- depending on a few key individuals;
- duplicated work;
- lack of sharing of good ideas; and
- slow introduction of new products or market solutions.

Martinez (2000) citing Koskiniemi, said that they had Ph.Ds in their laboratories who knew everything about everything. If they do not share their knowledge, they are not valuable. He added that, employee thinking must shift from the concept of individual knowledge is power to the idea that organizational knowledge is power.

Objectives of the study
This study focuses on knowledge – sharing practices of staff of the Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon. The main objectives of this study are:

- to identify the level of participation of the staff in knowledge sharing;
- to identify how management of the Balme Library promote knowledge – sharing;
- to identify measures in place at the Balme Library to facilitate knowledge–sharing;
- to identify barriers to knowledge–sharing in the Balme Library;
- to create awareness of knowledge – sharing among the staff of the library;
- to seek the views of the library staff on the strategies to encourage knowledge – sharing; and

- to make recommendations on improving the culture of knowledge - sharing within the library.

Theoretical Framework
The world has seen the emergence of a number of knowledge management gurus such as Nonaka, Daneshgar, Parirokh, Fattahi, Davenport, Prusak, Cummings, Shannon and Weaver, just to mention a few. Their theories, models and tools have led to pioneering change in knowledge management practices.

Nonaka (1994) introduces his well-known knowledge conversion framework that has been used by many as a framework for organizational learning (Jashapara, 2004).

Figure 1

	Increasing or creating tacit knowledge by socialisation	Increasing or creation of explicit knowledge	
Tacit to tacit knowledge	Socialisation artefacts Regular meetings, problem solving sessions or forums, and discussion group	Externalisation artefacts Database of lessons learned or of the best practice of a particular staff in reference desk; guidelines and checklists for instructional programs; List of job specification of RL	*Crystallisation of tacit knowledge or organisational memory*
Tacit/explicit to tacit knowledge	Internalisation artefacts Conferences, discussion sessions, meetings, professional publications, databases	Combination artefacts FAQ database in reference section, subject guides, reference sources, experts' databases; list of books which have used most frequently, the fields of study whose students are the most frequent users of the libraries	*Explicit to explicit knowlwdge*

Source: Nonaka, I (1994) "A dynamic theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation

Each of the four transformations in Figure 1 results in some kind of learning or creation of new knowledge. The extent to which a learner can benefit from each of these learning processes might vary in different domains.

Nonaka's first knowledge conversion mode is called "Socialization". A successful programme should normally be in consultation with reference librarians, subject librarians, collection development librarians, or other instructional librarians and even with the teaching staff. Through discussions, they can share their ideas (a tacit-to-tacit conversion). According to Daneshgar and Parirokh (2007), adoption of such an approach will enable all the above people to expand their personal knowledge bases.

Nonaka's second knowledge conversion mode in Figure 1 is called "Externalization" and is based on the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. In this process, tacit knowledge is codified, sorted, categorized and held in a database or document in order to be reused by others. This, according to Nonaka (1994) is "crystallized" tacit knowledge.

Nonaka's third knowledge combination mode is called "Combination" and refers to the conversion of explicit to explicit knowledge. For example, computer files such as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and databases created by reference staff need to be revised constantly.

The fourth mode is "Internalization" which is the conversion of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. In this case, the learner combines the acquired (explicit) information with his or her personal knowledge base.

Benefits of Knowledge Sharing
According to Martinez (2000), when knowledge sharing programmes are implemented, these are the benefits that come out of it:
- allow the star performers to rise to the top;
- place greater importance on expertise;
- improved measures of performance;
- an opportunity to see oneself not just as service oriented but value oriented;
- a greater understanding of organizational goals;
- better return on investment;
- discourage information hoarding;
- contribute to increased competitiveness;
- avoid wasting time, "reinventing the wheel";
- encourage employees who are not natural, net workers to engage in conversation and knowledge sharing; and
- garner support among colleagues because they value the knowledge and help them give and receive.

Methodology
Forty-six copies of a questionnaire were given out by one of the researchers making use of the purposive sampling technique. This is a non-probability method where the sample units for a study are chosen through the intuition of the researchers to achieve a specified purpose. The questionnaire was administered in May, 2009 to staff of the Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon. The Balme Library also serves as the Main Library of the University.

The contents of the questionnaire included the background of the respondents; current status of knowledge sharing in the Balme Library; organizational procedures for knowledge – sharing; types of knowledge – sharing activities; and barriers to knowledge – sharing. In all, forty completed copies of the questionnaire were returned, representing a response rate of 87%. (Table 1 shows the representation of respondents and their Departments).

Table 1   Distribution of Respondents by Departments

Department	Frequency	Percent
Administration	1	2.5
Cataloguing	11	27.5
Acquisitions	1	2.5
Reference Hall	5	12.5
Circulation	2	5.0
Periodicals	1	2.5
U. N. Library	2	5.0
Periodicals Hall	1	2.5
Arabic Section	1	2.5
Student Reference Section	4	10.0
Africana Section	2	5.0
Development Information Centre	2	5.0
Braille Library	3	7.5
Electronic Support Unit	2	5.0
Computer Laboratory	2	5.0
Total	40	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

From the table above, it was revealed that the respondents are from the various sections of the Balme Library which means there was a fair representation. The responses would be a fair generalization of the entire population of the Library, which was 109 at the time of the study.

Apart from the questionnaire, interviews were also held with the University Librarian, Deputy Librarian and Heads of various Departments of the Balme Library, by one of the researchers.

Findings
Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age		Frequency	Percent
Valid	20 - 30	4	10.0
	31 - 40	11	27.5
	41 - 50	12	30.0
	51 and above	12	30.0
No response		1	2.5
Total		40	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 2 shows that only 4 of the respondents (10.0%) are thirty years and below. Most of the respondents (35 representing 87.5%) are above thirty years. It assumed the respondents are matured enough to make logical decisions and give accurate responses.

Distribution of Respondents by Rank
The representation of the various professional and para–professionals in the sample is shown in Table 3. Balme Library is managed by the University Librarian and his Deputy, who represent 5% of the respondents. The Senior Assistant Librarians represent 7.5% of the respondents whereas the Assistant Librarians and the Library Assistants each had modal representations of 27.5% of the respondents. The Principal Library Assistants and the Senior Library Assistants represent 10% and 22.5% respectively.

Table 3: Position/Rank of Respondents

Position/Rank of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
University Librarian	1	2.5
Deputy University Librarian	1	2.5
Senior Assistant Librarian	3	7.5
Assistant Librarian	11	27.5
Principal Library Assistant	4	10.0
Senior Library Assistant	9	22.5
Library Assistant	11	27.5
Total	40	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

The rank of University Librarian to Assistant Librarian represents 16 (40%) of the respondents. The University Librarian implements the decisions of the Library Board, of which he/she is a member. Below the Deputy Librarian are Senior Assistant Librarians who are heads of various sections/departments of the libraries. There are also Assistant Librarians. All these people are classified as senior members. They are mostly professional staff with Post-Graduate degrees at various levels and by virtue of their positions are familiar with the library environment. The researchers believe therefore, that their responses can be reliable. The Senior Staff (Principal Library Assistants, Senior Library Assistants and Library Assistants) on the other hand, constitute 24 (60%) of the respondents. They also have education in Librarianship (from Certificate to Bachelor's degree). It is again assumed that they also know much about the Balme Library and its operations.

Length of Service of Respondents
The minimum number of years a respondent had spent in the library was 2 years whereas the maximum number of years recorded was 35 years. The arithmetic mean of the length of service of the sample is 14.14 years with a standard deviation of 9.06.

Table 4: Length of Service in the Library

Working Experience	Respondents	Percentage %
1-5 years	7	17.5
6-10 years	10	25.0
11-15 years	8	20.0
16-20 years	5	12.5
21-25 years	6	15.0
26-30 years	1	2.5
31-35 years	3	7.5
Total	40	100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Examining the distribution in Table 4 carefully, it can be seen that almost all the respondents (82.5% or 33 out of 40) have had more than five years to acquaint themselves with the operations, values and traditions of the Balme Library, enough time for any professional or para-professional to know what happens in the organization in which he or she works and to respond to any question relating to its basic operations. This, to some degree, increases the credibility of their responses.

Knowledge Sharing: A Technique for Increasing the Library's Effectiveness
People have expertise in various things, and much of this kind of knowledge is tacit rather than explicit which makes it difficult to be shared. However, it is important for organizations to educate their staff to know the numerous benefits of knowledge sharing. According to Jain, Sandhu and Sidhu (2007), efforts must be made and awareness created to ensure that people understand the benefits of knowledge sharing. With this in mind, the views of the staff at the Balme Library were sought on whether they thought knowledge sharing could increase the Library's effectiveness. All the respondents answered in the affirmative, suggesting that every respondent believes, in principle, that sharing knowledge is an essential technique in increasing the effectiveness of the library. This suggests that with the right corporate environment, the staff would be willing to share their knowledge and experiences. According to Maponya (2004), the basic goal of knowledge management within libraries is to leverage the available knowledge that may help academic librarians to carry out their tasks more efficiently and effectively.

Benefits of Knowledge Sharing
After agreeing that knowledge sharing is a tool for increasing effectiveness, the respondents were further probed on the benefits of knowledge sharing. Respondents were given a list of answers to select from. A summary of the responses generated in relation to the benefits of knowledge sharing is shown in Table 5, and the responses overlap.

Table 5: Benefits of Knowledge Sharing

Benefits	Yes (%)	No (%)
Knowledge sharing is a viable means in which academic libraries could improve on their services	35 *87.5%*	5 *12.5%*
Knowledge sharing will enhance greater understanding of organizational goals	34 *85 %*	6 *15 %*
Knowledge sharing results in saving time as libraries will avoid duplication of work	34 *85 %*	6 *15 %*
Knowledge sharing gives library staff an opportunity to see members of staff not just as service-oriented	29 *72.5%*	11 *27.5%*
Knowledge of long-serving staff is retained within the organization to be used in the future	22 *55 %*	18 *45 %*
Knowledge sharing encourages employees who are not sociable to engage in conversation	20 *50 %*	20 *50 %*

Source; Field Survey, 2009

Majority of the respondents (87.5%) indicated that, among many benefits, knowledge-sharing is a viable means through which academic libraries could improve their services. This corroborates Bhatt's (2002) assertion that knowledge sharing in academic libraries leads to improved services. However, five (12.5%) of the respondents disagreed. It means that these people are not aware of this important benefit of knowledge sharing. Awareness must therefore be created so that the other people no matter how negligible they may be, are aware of this important benefit of knowledge sharing. Eighty-five percent (85%) agreed that not only does knowledge sharing enhance greater understanding of organizational goals; it also saves time since it has the potential to prevent duplication of work and form the basis for problem solving and decision making. Six (15%) on the contrary, disagreed. It means those who

disagreed do not believe that knowledge sharing would enhance greater understanding of organizational goals. These staff may not be aware of the library's goals and objectives. This knowledge is important as the staff reflect their personal development through organizational goals.

Twenty nine (72.5%) respondents also indicated that knowledge sharing gives library staff the opportunity to see each other not just as service oriented but value oriented (White, 2004). Fifty-five percent (55 %) of the respondents said that knowledge of long serving staff is retained within the organization to be used in the future though a significant number (45 %) disagreed. Looking at the figures, the number that disagreed with the statement is quite large. It implies that most long serving staff leave the service with their knowledge. According to Probst, Raub and Romhardt (2000), an organization suffers permanent loss of valuable experts through dismissal, redundancy, retirement and death. This can lead to the loss of organizational memory. Interestingly, whereas half of the respondents asserted that knowledge sharing may give anti-social colleagues the opportunity to relate with the others, the others believe that the contrary is the case. Studies on social network issues (Argote et al, 1990; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) highlighted a clear correlation between employees' social networks, their personal contacts within and outside a company, their personalities (introverts vs. extroverts), and their ability to interact with others.

Participation of Respondents in Knowledge Sharing
Organizations face innumerable challenges in nurturing and managing knowledge. The challenges occur because only part of knowledge is internalized by the organization. The other is internalized by individuals (Bhatt, 2002). A few questions were asked if the staff were aware they had knowledge that could be shared to the benefit of their colleagues and the Balme Library as a whole; if they were willing to share information and other resources with their colleagues; and whether their colleagues were also willing to do the same.

All the respondents (100%) asserted that they were aware they possessed some knowledge that, when shared would be both beneficial to their colleagues and the Balme Library. This confirms McDermott's (1999) claim that the person who shares and distributes knowledge ideally is or should be aware of it, its use and the need or gap of the person receiving it. It is a good thing to find out that the staff of Balme Library are aware that they have knowledge that can be shared to the benefit of the library.

Lee (2002) pointed out that the knowledge and experiences of library staff are the intellectual assets of any library and it should be valued and shared. Majority of the respondents (95%) claimed that they were ready to share their research findings, power point slides, as well as other relevant resource materials with their colleagues and the remaining members of the library staff. Out of the remaining 5%, 2.5% said they would not and the other 2.5% gave no response at all.

Level of Knowledge Sharing
The researchers also wanted to know the level of knowledge sharing in the Balme Library. According to the interview with the University Librarian, he said knowledge sharing in the Balme Library was poor while the Deputy Librarian said it was good. Since the University Librarian is the Head and has more knowledge about the management of the Library than his Deputy, his view would be upheld in this case. It can be said that the library shares knowledge to some extent but it is not institutionalized and the sharing of information has been on an informal basis and usually based on conversation.

This study confirms a study carried out by Maponya (2004) in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa which revealed that there was little systematic sharing of knowledge taking place among academic library staff. More emphasis should be placed on formalizing knowledge sharing activities. Similarly, Parirokh, Daneshgar and Fattahi (2006) in their evaluation of the existing state of practice in knowledge sharing in university libraries through questionnaires sent to Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) members concluded that, knowledge management and knowledge sharing initiatives have not been institutionalized in majority of the libraries that participated in the study. However many writers suggested that knowledge should be shared on an informal basis such as story telling, social interaction among others but the problem with this is that it is difficult to validate.

Knowledge Management/Sharing Policy
Fifty- two percent (52%) of the respondents affirmed that the Balme Library has "no" knowledge management and knowledge sharing policy while 28% believed that there was a policy. The remaining 20% simply had no idea if there was one or not. A follow-up interview with the University Librarian and his Deputy confirmed that there is no knowledge management/sharing policy.

Communication Channels Available in the Balme Library for KS /KM
The medium through which knowledge is transferred has an impact on the attitude towards knowledge sharing. The researchers wanted to know the extent to which various channels were used by the library. Table 6 summarizes the responses.

Table 6: Communication Channels Available in the Balme Library

Communication channels	Yes %	No %	Total %
Intranet	12 30.0	28 70.0	40 100
E-mail	24 60.0	16 40.0	40 100
Library website	18 45.0	22 55.0	
Mailing list	8 20.0	32 80.0	40 100
Face to face communication	37 92.5	3 7.5	40 100
Telephone	36 90.0	4 10.0	40 100

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Evidently, all the various communication channels are available in the Balme Library. However, the results generated indicate that most of the users were not aware of the existence of the channels. For example, though there was an intranet connection in all departments of the library, an overwhelming 70% of the respondents claimed that they did not use it while the remaining 30% said they did.

The results further point out that the most commonly used channels of communication were face–to–face communication and the telephone: a majority, 92.5% and 90% respectively attested to this fact. The results confirm the views of Parirokh, Daneshgar and Fattahi (2006) that the face to face communication method is used widely. Similarly, Chaudhry, (2005) found out that people were willing to spend more time in knowledge sharing through face-to-face media. However, according to Parirokh, Daneshgar and Fattahi (2006) the problem with this method of communication is that it is generally

considered as a less valid source for capturing knowledge about information needs of users. Lots of people use the telephone because it offers convenience and it is very simple and easy to operate. On the contrary, Chaudhry (2005) indicates that the telephone is perceived to be a less effective medium of communication as compared to official correspondence (textual) and email.

The library website appears to be used by just a cross – section of the staff (45% of the respondents) whilst the majority, 55%, were not using it. An interview with a staff in the Electronic Support Unit revealed that people were not using it because information posted on the site was general in nature.

Database of staff publications is a list of the staff who have published their research findings in various journals. According to the findings, 25% of the staff confirmed that there was a database of staff publications, but 75% did not share this view. It can be deduced from this that the Library does not have a database of staff publications. One important essence of knowledge sharing is to be able to identify who has done what and what work has already been done in order to avoid duplication of effort and also know the interest of staff in the various fields of specialization.

Majority of the respondents (90%) confirmed that there is no staff profile at the Balme Library while just a few (10%) said there was. A profile is a short description of a person's life, work or character. Having individuals' profiles at the Library would help determine an individual's experiences, achievements, interests and needs. McDermott (1999) in his work said that the person who shares and distributes knowledge ideally is or should be aware of it, its use and the need of the person receiving it. Without a database of staff profile, it would be difficult to identify people's information needs.

Management Procedures
Good work practice involves management procedures in place to help the employee give off his or her best. This includes promotions when due, recommendations, appraisals and other incentives. From the findings, it could be observed that 52.5% agreed that there were packages on good work practices that enhance knowledge sharing. Comparing the figures on good work practices, it shows that there is something in place but more needs to be done. It has been argued that the provision of appropriate incentives would most likely influence the behaviour of employees in knowledge sharing. About 55% of the respondents also agreed that there were training manuals. On the contrary, as

low as 27.5% said that there was no documentation on lessons learnt. These documentations include meetings, conferences and other gatherings like forums, discussion groups and sessions, seminars and workshops. This can be through physical or electronic channels.

Only 9 respondents (22.5%) confirmed sharing of research, while 31 respondents (77.5%) responded in the negative. This result is very worrying, and a serious indictment since it implies that majority of the staff keep their research findings to themselves. One factor which may be responsible for this may be that although the people are willing to share, the structures are not in place to promote the sharing process. One of the benefits of knowledge sharing is to discourage information hoarding and also to avoid wasting of time. When research work is not shared, then there will be duplication of work and according to Martinez (2000) if people do not share their knowledge they are not "valuable".

Interestingly, the same number (31) (77.5%) of people pointed out that the Library does not have newsletters. Putting newsletters in place will encourage the staff to share their thoughts and experiences. Eighteen people representing 45.5% responded that there are group discussions while 22 respondents (55%) said "No". Group discussions create a platform where people with different expertise meet to exchange ideas. They draw different implications from them and engage in new traits of thoughts (Zeldin, 1998).

It is clearly shown from the findings that people do not document their experiences and they leave with their experiences when they are dismissed, retired or dead. According to White (2004), recording knowledge can add value to library services and save the cost of staff retraining. While 10 respondents (25%) said the Library has publication manuals, 30 respondents (70%) said the Library did not have any. An interview with the Head of the Cataloguing Department confirmed that he personally wrote a manual for his Department on rules and regulations for cataloguing and classification.

Barriers to Knowledge Sharing
It was observed that 25 respondents, representing 61.5% to some extent agreed that lack of a rewards and recognition system is one of the barriers to knowledge sharing. It is a well known fact in Ghana that a well established reward system enhances knowledge sharing. However, it is obvious from the

results that there is no adequate reward and recognition system in the Balme Library to motivate people to share knowledge.

Time restrictions are also reasons why people may hoard knowledge rather than spend time to share with others. Instead, people naturally focus on those tasks that are more beneficial to them (Michailow and Husted, 2003). This study wanted to find out if time is a major barrier to knowledge sharing at the Balme Library. According to the findings, majority of the respondents, 23 (57.3%) to some extent disagreed with the assertion that general lack of time impedes knowledge sharing at the Balme Library, while only 10 respondents (25.0%) confirmed that time is a barrier with seven (7) of the respondents (17.5%) undecided. Contrary to studies conducted by Colomer and SarnoffIt, (n.d); Jain, Shandhu and Sidhu, (2007) time is not a barrier to knowledge sharing at the Balme Library.

Formal and informal mechanisms help provide continuous support to improvement of diverse sharing activities. Lack of these mechanisms becomes a barrier to knowledge sharing. The study wanted to know if there were formal and informal mechanisms in place to facilitate knowledge sharing. Sixteen (40.0%) of the respondents to some extent agreed that lack of formal and informal activities were barriers to knowledge sharing. Fourteen (35%) respondents disagreed and 10 (25.0%) were undecided. The respondents are obviously divided in their opinion on whether lack of formal and informal mechanisms is a barrier since the differences between the figures are not large enough to make a firm statement.

Also, 21 (52.5%) of the respondents to some extent disagreed that the existing library culture was a barrier to knowledge sharing. In addition, 18 respondents representing 45.5% each respectively disagreed with the assertion that lack of interaction between those who need knowledge and those who can provide knowledge and lack of a system to identify colleagues with whom to share knowledge posed problems to knowledge sharing. Exactly half (50.0%) of the respondents were also of the view that the retention of skilled and experienced staff at the Balme Library was not a barrier to knowledge sharing. However, an interview with a member of staff disproved this assertion. He was of the view that retention of skilled staff is a high priority at the Library. He said that plans are in place to retain those at the IT Department of the Library because of their specialized skills and that if they allow them to go the Library will face problems when the system is down.

On whether the physical work environment and layout of work areas restrict effective knowledge sharing at the Balme Library, it was observed that about 50% of the respondents, to some extent, disagreed with the assertion that work environment and layout of work areas restricted effective knowledge sharing at the Balme Library. However, according to Probst et al, (2000) company floor lay out or spatial arrangement of work areas can be barriers to sharing activities.

Conclusion

As the world moves towards a "knowledge based economy", knowledge is being considered as the driver of various aspects of the economy, including academic libraries. This has made knowledge sharing and management important. However, most organizations tend to over-emphasize systems and tools rather than the core component that is knowledge.

With the advent of information technology, the environment in which academic libraries operate is changing. The success of academic libraries depends on their ability to utilize information and knowledge of its staff to better serve the needs of the academic community. Knowledge sharing ensures that academic library staff are able to realize and develop their potential to the fullest. It is hoped that the findings of this study will benefit other academic libraries in Ghana.

Recommendations

In the light of the above findings, and also in view of some challenges identified during the study, the following recommendations are made:

Awareness must be created to ensure that the staff understand the benefits of knowledge sharing;

If people do not share their knowledge, they are not valuable. As such the staff should be encouraged to share information and other experiences with their colleagues. Managers must try to assure employees that they should not hoard ideas and concepts for fear of intellectual property being stolen;

Since face to face communication is considered less valid, the researchers believe that a formalized procedure for validating of results obtained from face to face communications is needed. This can be in the form of appropriate ICT (Information and Communication Technology) infrastructure, in the form of emails, chart and bulletin boards to support socialization processes that can

enhance effective knowledge sharing process in the library. It may also be appropriate to nourish a culture that values credible information;

The management of the Balme Library should design programmes that will market the communication channels available in the Library. Providing a variety of communication channels for library staff would enhance both efficiency and effectiveness of their communication and subsequent knowledge sharing activities;

Specific knowledge management policies and strategies are currently missing in the Library. Management should therefore formulate policies that will oblige people to share.

Like any other resource, knowledge also needs a custodian for protection. It is suggested that to achieve this, a Knowledge Management Unit or Officer should be appointed as a starting point to overlook all these activities;

The management of the Balme Library should initiate award mechanisms and incentives in the knowledge management sector. These incentives could be financed through local library staff development budget and also via national awards and grants for best professional achievement in the knowledge management sector;

Publications such as journals or newsletters serve as a platform through which information can be shared. As such, the management of the Balme Library should introduce publications in the form of journals or newsletters, where people can share ideas and this should be easily accessible to the library staff;

Knowledge retention and recording is not an easy process. Frequently, specialist knowledge is lost through retirement, redundancy or death, either because it has not been documented or because it is difficult to capture by documentation. This is an issue in knowledge management and from this study, Balme Library is no exception. This problem could be solved by adopting the right mechanism for converting knowledge into information for use. Mentoring and coaching could also assist in knowledge transfer projects;

There should be a database of staff publications where staff would easily identity the kind of research work done by different people in order to avoid duplication, and also to easily identify the people who have particular types of knowledge to be shared.

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