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SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS IN KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of skills and competencies of LIS professional in knowledge management. It also throws light on how and where LIS professional can contribute in various organizational setup. It also gives overview of the skill shortage which needs to be upgraded by the LIS professional to be successful in the field of KM. It also gives overview how India is becoming hub of knowledge management professionals and why the US and European countries are outsourcing their KM jobs to India.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Information professionals need to recognize the role of knowledge in every area of the organisation. Understanding organisations is as useful to the information professional as understanding information and knowledge (Southon and Todd, 2001). It is "a major challenge to information professionals to engage with issues that have not generally been regarded as their task, either by themselves, or by those for whom they work. It is obvious that the phenomenon implies a broader and more organisationally directed assessment on the part of information professionals if they are to take on successfully in this area" (Southon and Todd, 2001). Also, information professionals at library schools should accept this in mind when developing a knowledge management oriented curriculum. They would only then be capable to train and educate current and future practising information professionals to create knowledge links between organisational policies, resources, activities and outcomes and consequently contribute to and enhance organisational performance, image, visibility and competitive urge (Jain, Priti, 2009).

The Information Advisor (1997) believes that KM skills will include the ability to understand organizations as a whole and how the parts work together, the ability to comprehend and elaborate on information and knowledge needs, the ability to identify inefficient and improper uses of information, and the ability to add value to information

products by evaluating, filtering, abstracting, and providing a broader organizational/industry or national context.

5.1.1 KM skills and Attributes in LIS

One of the most comprehensive and influential analyses of KM skills and attributes to be undertaken in the LIS sector, the TPFL study in the UK, found, among other things, 'significant overlap between recognized management competencies and those required for successful knowledge practitioners' and drew attention to those skills and attributes 'most often associated with change and project management', the 'ability to influence attitudes, to work in complex organisations, cross boundaries, and navigate political waters' and 'team-building skills, consensus development, and community understanding' (Abell 2000, p.35). A set of 'sample job descriptions' published a few years ago by Standards Australia includes key 'knowledge-enabling' tasks such as knowledge strategies, knowledge auditing, 'information literacy' training programs, facilitation of group dynamics and coaching programs for improved communication skills, designing systems and procedures, and managing changes in organizational behaviour (Bishop 2002, p.12).

It is also worth drawing attention to the skills and attributes implicit in Standards Australia's KM Standard (2005). One of the two major parts of the Standard is the list of 'enablers'—the 'tools, techniques and activities' that support KM interventions through the Mapping, Building and' Operationalising' development phases outlined in the main section of the Standard.

Almost half of the thirty-four enablers listed are drawn from the field of management, which supports Abell's findings, with most of the others coming from the fields of either information systems and technologies or IM. The latter includes content management, document management, environmental scanning, information auditing, leveraging information repositories, and taxonomies and thesauri, some of which are familiar to the LIS profession.

As discussed by (Ferguson, S., Hider, P., & Lloyd, A. 2008) in the educational field, the Department of Information Science at Loughborough University conducted surveys of job advertisements and of employers and recruitment agencies, and identified areas of experience and skills required, including relevant industrial experience, interpersonal skills, highly developed oral/written communication skills, project management skills, team work, change management and analytical skills (Morris 2004, p.120). Edith Cowan University's School of Computer and Information Science went through a similar process of market research and consultation, and concluded there was strong support for what it called 'Knowledge Computing', such as Internet Technologies, Groupware and Workflow; KM Foundations, such as Knowledge Taxonomies; and management orientated subjects, such as Organisational Behaviour and Change Management. (Brogan, Hingston & Wilson 2001).

According to Karen Bishop (2001) 'Information professionals have the "core" information management skills required to manage knowledge once it becomes "explicit" (i.e. to identify, Catalogue and maximise the visibility and availability of the products in which knowledge is stored)'. She suggests that 'the great challenge' is to manage the 'tacit' (2002, p.13). Charlotte Breen et al., however, claim that LIS professionals do have the required knowledge and skills, based on surveys they conducted in Britain and Ireland (2002, p.127).

Despite their optimistic conclusions, there was a suggestion when Breen et al. were writing that the KM domain was not yet ready for the LIS professional. There is no evidence in the literature that the situation has changed significantly. Indeed, several barriers to LIS involvement in KM are noted, such as concern with external information resources rather than internal organizational knowledge assets; lack of business knowledge; content ignorance; image problem; name problem; lack of visibility; personality issues; and lack of the required management skills (Ferguson, Sarrafzadeh & Hazeri 2007).

Based on (Ajiferuke 2003) study conducted in Canada, the respondents identified team working, communication and networking skills as the key organizational skills required by information professionals in order to be able to participate in knowledge management programs. This result validates some of the skills earlier identified by Abell (2000). Team working and communication skills are required for collaboration within an organization while communication and team networking skills are required for the sharing and transfer of knowledge.

The respondents also identified the ability to analyze business processes, understanding of the knowledge process within the business process, ability to use information technologies, and document management skills as the core competencies required of information professionals in knowledge management programs. The ability to analyze business processes and understanding of the knowledge process within the business process are required for knowledge generation/creation. Even if information professionals do not generate knowledge, it would be essential for them to have these skills so as to be able to act as a team with colleagues on a knowledge management team (Ajiferuke, 2003).

5.2 HUMAN CAPITAL: CAN INDIA BRIDGE THE KNOWLEDGE GAPS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH

The rapid growth in the marketplace for outsourced research services from India predestined for the U.S. and Europe is beginning to expose weak links in the chain. Depending on the type of the research being outsourced, Indian companies are preparing for the next level of growth by bridging gaps in skills across the organization with investments in training and development (KNOWLEDGE@WHARTON, Nov21, 2005).

At one end of the range are effortlessly transferable, cookie-cutter skill sets in data gathering and reporting formats. On the other are high-end research programs that require extremely sensitive and closely guarded insights into corporate business strategies. Softer skills that involve communication, business culture and general professional standards also form part of the equation, separate from concerns about general business hygiene that keeps such work on the right side of business ethics (KNOWLEDGE@WHARTON, Nov 21, 2005).

Although these issues intersect every industry groups, pharmaceutical research is maybe one of the most sensitive and involves apprehensions at every link in the value chain. Using life sciences as the large backdrop, Knowledge Wharton spoke with research organizations, academics and businesses on either side of the outsourced services industry to understand how they are bridging the knowledge gaps by getting their arms around.

The steep figures of India's talent force make a undeniable case for outsourcing R&D to India. India has some 22 million graduates, including 6 million science graduates, 1.2 million

with engineering degrees and 600,000 doctors, according to data compiled by The Economic Times Intelligence Group, the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) and other industry sources. That population is increasing rapidly, with nearly 2.5 million graduates added in 2004 alone, including 25,000 doctors and nearly 600,000 science graduates and post-graduates. By way of comparison, China had more than 2 million students graduating from its universities in 2003. That included 600,000 in engineering, 200,000 in science and 100,000 in medicine (KNOWLEDGE@WHARTON, Nov 21, 2005).

The Wharton School's Aresty Institute of Executive Education is a case for example, which aims to "engage individuals and companies in partnerships that transcend the classroom," and which has become increasingly active in India. It launched its first program in India on June 30, and is planning to ramp up quickly around the country. The Institute has been getting requests for training and orientation programs from private and public sector companies, and state governments that want to position specific cities to compete with business centers such as Shanghai

Ken Johnson, a director of executive programs at Wharton, also picked up positive vibes about India at a series of programs his unit recently organized in China and India with participation from U.S. companies and their suppliers of outsourced services. "There was comfort and recognition that there is a sophisticated set of controls already built into place in India," he says. Sandhya Karpe, an associate director at Wharton Executive Education who works closely with Indian firms, has found a growing willingness to invest in building knowledge and skills. In their conversations with CEOs in India, Wharton have found that they are willing to put large groups of executives through programs to move them forward quickly, as opposed to just sending individuals to our programs. (KNOWLEDGE@WHARTON, Nov 21, 2005).

5.2.1 Bothered by BLOB

Ravi Aron, a professor of operations management at Wharton who has been researching trends in business process outsourcing, makes a distinction between standardized procedural and verification work in pharmaceutical research and that which focuses on drug discovery. "Over the last 18 months or so, a new concern has emerged over what I call BLOB -- or business line objectives," he says. "Concerns about BLOB far outweigh those about the loss of research data. Companies don't want their competitors to know what their business trajectory is" (KNOWLEDGE@WHARTON, Nov21, 2005).

In the final analysis, companies are not dealing with skills in the conventional sense; it has more to do with knowledge, says Peter Cappelli, a professor of management and director of Wharton's Center for Human Resources. "It's about tacit knowledge; it's 'how we do things at our company,'" he says. The loss of tacit knowledge has for long been a concern with companies that restructure and lay off employees pointed out by him. "Outsourcing to India is so much cheaper that companies are tempted to think about doing it without worrying about tacit knowledge," he says. "That could be a real problem" (KNOWLEDGE@WHARTON, Nov 21, 2005).

5.3 COMPETENCIES OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN LIS

Abell & Oxbrow (2001) linked Knowledge management competencies to information management skills, by presenting five specific activities in which the information management expertise of the information professional can add significant value to the creation of the KM environment:

• By identifying and acquiring internal information sources (information audit).
• By structuring the organization's internal information. Like creating subject structures and thesaurus; developing organizational taxonomies and designing records and coding tools.
• By sourcing, acquiring and evaluating external information. For example, they can negotiate advantageous contracts, specify delivery formats and monitor the performance of selected sources.
• By enabling the timely delivery of relevant, usable information, as information professionals possess the expertise and experience to fine-tune information delivery. integrating internal and external information.

TEPL recommends that within LIS profession, an understanding had to be developed of knowledge management concepts and strategies, the skills and competencies needed for KM, and the context within which they are applied. Abell and Oxbron (2001) offered the following advice to information professionals: The opportunities for information professionals are expanding, and the need for information skills in key management positions is becoming vital. But the competition for middle and senior management information roles is also increasing rapidly. Enjoying the opportunities and building on them require the ability to cross boundaries-organizational, professional; personal…we are convinced that the only real barrier to crossing boundaries is mindset. Increasing your own career aspirations will go a long way to increasing employer's expectations of information professionals. Understanding the value of information skills and the complementary skills that allow them to be applied in the organizational context is crucial, but getting involved and taking a few risks is probably the key.

What is also pointed out in the literature are a number of potential deficits in the skills of LIS professionals that would inhibit the maximization of the contribution that they could make in KM initiatives. These include a lack of organizational political understanding, unwillingness to address issues of return on investment, insufficient understanding of business practices, and limited access to high-level decision-making (St. Clair 2001; DiMattia and Oder 1997). As suggested by Pearlstein, corporate librarians who wish to pursue this kind of work need to "understand that they do not work in a vacuum, their library's services must be tied directly to the corporate mission"

(DiMattia and Oder 1997). Further emphasizing the need for a more organization-wide outlook are the necessary skills that arise from the Ajiferuke (2003) study. In this case, of those LIS professionals involved with KM programs, more than ninety-five percent cited "understanding of the knowledge process within the business process" and "ability to identify and analyze business processes" as core competencies. For LIS professionals understanding the ways in which their organization evaluates opportunities for their engagement in KM initiatives,

, and making sure that they have channels of communication with those who make the decisions, can mean the difference between successful programs and obsolescence.

The study also outlines a number of other key skills for LIS professionals interested in pursuing work in this field. Respondents in this study agreed that communication, networking and teamwork skills are extremely important.

5.3.1 New Competencies And Skills Of Information Professionals

Clearly, to take on these new roles efficiently library & information professionals need to train themselves with new skills and values.

Personal Competencies are a set of attitudes, skills and values that facilitate practitioners to work effectively and contribute positively to their organizations, clients and profession ranging from strong communication, to demonstrating the value-add of their contributions in the ever-changing environment. Specific jobs and markets might require certain sets of unique competencies at various skill levels (Abels, et al, 2003). Following skills very important for 21st century information professional as revealed by literature in the field:

- Good communication and interpersonal skills;
- Understanding flexible needs of customers and employers and developing creative solutions;
- capability to market the idea of knowledge management and its benefits;
- Negotiation skills, for dealing with suppliers and licensers;
- Creativity and long term vision;
- General management skills: Information management, human resource management, project management, change management, strategic planning, financial management, Liaison and negotiation skills (Halvegar & Tabuchi, n.d.).
- Analytical and lateral thinking ability;
- Cultural adaptability skills.

5.4 BARRIERS FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS

Abell and Oxbrow (2001) state that from the employers' point of view one of the specific obstacles is the lack of understanding of the interplay between information and organizational objectives among LIS professionals (Abell & Oxbrow, 2001, p.167). This problem has been mentioned in some other papers as a barrier for the LIS involvement in KM practice. LIS professionals need to be focused for achieving specific organisational objectives while knowledge, poor team and leadership skills and lack of management skills are other obstacles which LIS professionals must overcome. To successfully engage in knowledge management, LIS professionals must have a holistic view and go beyond the narrow scope of their profession. This will entail an expansion in their roles and responsibilities, including the acquisition of new skills and the ability not only adapt to change, but also prepare for it and shape it. Also, since KM is not owned by any single group, profession or industry, librarians need to understand the multiple perspectives of other players. According to (Broadbent, 1998) Knowledge management represents an opportunity in that it creates new roles and responsibilities for libraries and LIS professionals, but it can also be seen as a threat. This is because if LIS

professionals refuse to gain new skills and involve themselves effectively in knowledge management practice they will risk becoming irrelevant to their organisations, and will probably lose out in competition for employment to people from other industries.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Despite the wealth of literature in the area of knowledge management and the library and information professions, the literature is less voluminous on the higher level contributions that LIS professionals might make to knowledge management. Also, it is still unclear from the literature how in specific ways, the LIS professions might prepare for, engage in and exploit the opportunities presented by knowledge management. It seems that LIS professionals have made slow progress in identifying what KM means to them and more precisely its implications for their expertise, education, training and cultural traits if they are to become serious players in knowledge management. It is certainly not clear from the literature how claims that library and information professionals might be better knowledge managers than people from other fields could be justified. (Ferguson, 2004).

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