CORPORATE LIBRARIES: BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES

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ABSTRACT

The world of librarianship is changing and facing challenges to its existence in corporate sector. Studying the threats there are several opportunities corporate libraries could leverage based on experiences of other libraries around the world. To survive the corporate world libraries and librarians need to change and be heard. Mindset change that aligned to the business with a clear value propositions. One of the best opportunities that can elevate corporate libraries to a higher value chain is Knowledge Management.

INTRODUCTION

The world of librarianship has been under the threats of existence posed by the challenges introduced by new development in thinking, management and technology. Like any other professions, librarians and libraries need to constantly change as the threats are effecting the whole structure of the library world. The competency of librarians, collections, structure of the management, services and also the physical state of the library.

THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Threats to the world of librarianship have been studied quiet extensively by researchers. The threat is very real and even to academic libraries with captive customer base as discussed by Hawkins (1998). The academic libraries need to contain their respective costs to the very minimum that eventually open up opportunities for innovation.
The first threat is the threat post by new technologies and opportunities they represent for other entities to create a much better user experience. Elmborg (2011) commenting on the opinion of various authors describes this scenario,

‘The Internet, coffee shops, restaurants and even homes are all invading the territory once exclusive to libraries. Bookstores are consciously attempting to recreate the library atmosphere, encouraging customers to linger. . . . ‘

Slowly users are leaving libraries and being comfortable and to some extent be able to be themselves in different environment and places. The place Oldenburg (1989) defines as the third place.

Fernandez (2009) did a SWOT analysis on social media for libraries that significantly argued the threats presented by social media. So much so libraries have to be adaptive to include social media as part of the main strategy.

In 2010 OCLC Research published a risk assessment research conducted among research libraries in the United States (Michalko et al, 2010). The top two general observations of the assessments are;

- The plurality of risks is associated with concerns about an uncertain library value proposition.
- The second largest class, and second priority in terms of medium to high risks, is related to staffing and human resources.

The changes in the world library is operating in also means libraries value proposition keep on changing. This is something libraries also missed and need to be mindful of. Some of the reaction from the respondents interviewed are;

- Alternative service providers in the network are providing a more compelling research environment and support tools.
- Our current value proposition can’t compete with the alternative service provider. Our users have noticed this.
- We’re continuing to rely on the old success metrics. The university has noticed.
- We have not responded (with an aligned strategic plan).
- Our internal competitors for dollars are winning.
We can’t get other funders to help.

The observations on the issue of staffing and human resources are;

- I can’t attract people to support the old (or new) tasks.
- I’m not certain where to find the next generation of leaders, I only know they won’t look like me.
- The current staff isn’t qualified or motivated to support new library functions.

The research further concluded that there is uncertainty on the value of continuing investments in the traditional collections and facilities of research libraries. Also, the technologies that support them.

The threat became a reality in Australia. In 2013 the Australian Library and Information Association conducted a research study to understand the future of corporate libraries in Australia concluded that budgets, staff hours and physical spaces have all been reduced over the last three years. During that period corporate libraries went through reviews by the management and the best review came from the management that understood the value of libraries. Sadly a lot did not. Thus the research strongly urge corporate libraries in Australia to transform for survival.

‘We can’t ignore the need for future transformation in the special library sector, and library staff will need to judge the right moment to engage with senior management. It is vital that library and information professionals help develop the next iteration of their service rather than having a solution imposed.’

The one thing corporate libraries in Australia need to really understand is their value propositions and the ability to articulate these value propositions from the point of view of the companies’ ‘financial bottom line, to client care, to innovative design, to competitive advantage and to minimising risk.’ Value propositions that are aligned to the strategic direction of the companies. Ard (2014) concluded the same for corporate libraries in general. In fact she suggested to move up the value chain to look at this from the perspective of knowledge management. American Association of Law Libraries (2015) went further to conclude,  

‘Briefly put, the overall takeaway from the study is: “It's not about the library. It's about the relationship the librarian has with those who do or could benefit from the library.”'
Similarly in New Zealand where research conducted by the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA, 2014). Budgets for academic library services by New Zealand universities has fallen 23% from $117 million to $90 million in 2013. Expenditure for public libraries also remained static since 2010. In parallel to this is the gradual decline in employment in the sector.

**ARE LIBRARIANS MANAGING THESE THREATS?**

The threats facing libraries today can be countered if we look at them as opportunities for the development of future libraries. The suggested areas that libraries and librarians could do to manage the threats they are facing.

- **Mindset Change**

The biggest opportunity it is time for mindset change for library processionals to look at library and library services from strategic point of view. Thinking and acting like a business entity. Develop and execute a strategic plan that is aligned to the strategic direction of the organisation. This would include developing and providing a clear value proposition that are easy to communicate and understand.

- **A Seat at the Top Table**

Most of the time, structurally corporate library is placed well below the radar of the top management making it difficult to be heard. Whether it is performance reporting, explaining value proposition and making a case for new projects or services. Corporate librarian need to find ways to be more involved in management decision making process and strategic planning (Australian Library and Information Association, 2013).

- **Information Scanning and Analysis**

Information overload is very real in any organisation and the situation is made worse with the perception that Google search can give users the answers they need. To change this perception a clear value proposition and services to provide customised and timely information must be articulated and executed strategically. Corporate libraries in Malaysia have been providing information scanning and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services and it is about
time to reevaluate and enhance this service to the need of the customers. Not only the information provided need to be customised but it has to be decision-ready as well. Which means providing a little bit of information analysis rather than just a list of bibliography of information.

• **Big Data**

Big data is as much as an IT issue as well as information analysis and management. Huge opportunity for information professionals to take up the challenge and provide content management structure to the unstructured information. Helping organisations not only to manage their data and information properly but giving structure for them to make sense of their data and information.

• **Library Space**

In responding to the threats post by other third places like cafes and bookstores the Denver Public Library transformed to be a “destination library.” Behaving like a business entity the library transformed itself like a bookstore with comfortable seating giving a cafe like environment. Relevant books surrounding the area. Aesthetically pleasing to various generation of users (Talve, 2011).

The idea of the third place was enhanced with the introduction of the concept of information common (MacWhinnie, 2003).

In the advent of new technologies and digitisation it was predicted in mid 1990’s that libraries as a physical place is doomed in Australia (Talve, 2011). In their scenario planning to predict the future, the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia in 1995 produced four scenarios presenting alternative futures for library in the year 2010. One of these scenarios was reinterpretation and revitalisation of “library as place”. In 2010 Talve (2011) led a study to discover whether this scenario materialised and her finding was the emergence of a hybrid of digital and physical spaces. Library as a psychical place is popular and thriving.

*Libraries as a learning place*

In parallel with the advent in technologies the users are becoming more digital savvy demanding more and better access to information. This in turn created demands for library space that are less collection-centre to information delivery and learning. Thus the birth of learning commons at University of Queensland and University of New South Wales. New library space were redesign and design in collaboration with architects to interpret the required new spaces.
**Libraries as community spaces**

Learning is a social process and culturally human being learn through hearing stories or narratives from others (Fisher, 2013, Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011, Berg and Seung, 2008). In Australia there are convergence of public libraries with museum and gallery at New South Wales regional city of Albury and Millennium Library at the State Library Queensland. Both are culturally rich places that the community could relate to for them to be comfortable to use (Talve, 2011). Another good example of this is the Seattle Public Library in the State of Washington, USA. The conceptualisation of the Seattle Public Library as a place includes the participation of the community (Fisher et al, 2007). The best example of a public library in Malaysia is the Perpustakaan Tun Uda Shah Alam.

**Libraries as a knowledge space**

Libraries as a place where information resources are acquired, organised, stored and circulated for research space have always been a place where knowledge are created and shared. There is a need for a paradigm shift from a mindset of place that circulated books to a place that is circulating information and knowledge to create and share knowledge. It is also a place where people come to collaborate with each other on projects, assignments or just community events they are organising. The more we are spending time in our virtual space the more we are in need of a physical space to recharge (Talve, 2011). The development in this area in Malaysia is quiet encouraging beginning with the Knowledge Management Centre of Bank Negara Malaysia, UM Library that had just renovated one of the floors to be more knowledge centric, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Perpustakaan Tun Uda Shah Alam and MII Library.

- **Knowledge Management**

The field of librarianship has developed so much since the days when it was first introduced. The development was pushed forward by the professionals in the field that see the need to advance further comparatively to the need of the stakeholders. At the same time advancement of technologies also brought forth new opportunities and capabilities in handling information and knowledge. The rate of these developments was so rapid that the subject matters became intertwined and interrelated with a lot of other disciplines introducing further complexity. New concepts or at least old concepts, but seen in a different light, are inevitable. One of them that is closely related to the field of information studies is Knowledge Management (KM).
In KM the core subject matter that is being managed is knowledge that comprises of tacit and explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka, 1991) or what the industry experts also term as intellectual capital, intangible assets or knowledge assets (Sveiby, 1997; Stewart, 1997). The concept evolved around the creation, use and management of these assets. Not trying to be simplistic if we study the KM process as shown in Figure 1 and 2 below it is something that the library processonals would be very familiar with and the learning curve to understand and implement KM for them would be shorter.

![Figure 1: KPMG Knowledge Management Process (Alavi, 1997)](image1)

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![Figure 2: Organisational KM Model (Arthur Andersen & APQC, 1996)](image2)

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The traditional roles of librarians could be expanded if not transformed, with librarians familiarising themselves with the concept of KM. Instead of just managing information for the organisation now they could extend the value proposition to manage knowledge of the organisation. Using the knowledge creation value chain from the creation to the preservation of the knowledge. In library science language from acquisition to archiving the knowledge.
This includes among others sharing and capturing tacit knowledge, managing potential knowledge loss and introducing KM tools. These knowledge management activities can help transform and elevating the value of the library to the organisation (Martin, 2006)

CASE STUDY OF ORGANISATION X’S KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT CENTRE (KMC)

Organisation X is a premier organisation in Malaysia with a strength of approximately 2500 employees. Majority of its workforce are knowledge workers with job profile that they are experts in and creating new knowledge in their own specific technical areas. The expert areas consist of economics; banking; insurance and takaful; regulatory and policy development; market supervision; risk management; reserve and currency management; human capital management and development; and facility management. When it embarked on its Knowledge-based Organisation (KBO) journey in 2000 the basic premise was to be a better and strategic KBO. It is the only organisation in Malaysia that implemented KM in big way lead by its top management. Since then, it has been benchmarked by other organisations in Malaysia and seen by many as successful in certain aspect of their implementation. Their implementation also seems to be holistic covering all aspects of knowledge management enablers and processes. It should have a lot of experiences for others to learn from.

Knowledge Management Centre (KMC)

Historically the Library has always been providing an effective library an information services to Organisation X. When Organisation X embarked on its KBO journey the library was strategically chosen to be one of the main players in the journey.

‘In addition, plans have been approved to promote and equip the library to become a focal point in the practice of knowledge management among staff. The library is also being positioned to play an important knowledge management role among knowledge repositories located in other central banks and selected financial institutions in the region.’ (Annual Report 2002).

To further emphasise the important role of the Library in 2004 it was transformed into a Knowledge Management Centre (KMC).

‘A significant new achievement in 2004 is the transformation of the Organisation X’s library into a Knowledge Management Centre (KMC). This centre greatly enhances existing knowledge management processes and promotes a more reliable and effective means for the [Organisation X] to manage its knowledge assets.’ (Annual Report, 2004).
The KMC is envisioned to be a continuous thoughts leader, place, process and structure to complete the transformation of Organisation X into a KBO. Guided by the vision of creating and enhancing value by the explicit and systematic management of knowledge assets the KMC enhanced the knowledge management framework, thoughts leadership, direction, processes, guides and structure to ensure strategic internal and external information and knowledge assets are properly collected, analysed, repackaged, represented, leveraged and reused within the organisation. The KMC is expected to be the state-of-the-art regional referral centre for information and knowledge in core area of Central Banking, and Islamic Finance and Takaful. Providing the latest collection of materials, databases and services for the organisation, its entities and the financial industry as a whole. The KMC is also, together with the learning centre, the best place for learning and knowledge creation to take place as it blends the concept of learning organisation and knowledge sharing into the physical layout and design of the place. This creates an environment where library is everywhere to enhance resource-based learning activities and learning in general. These accomplishments together with the Organisation X’s vast experience in developing itself into a KBO put the KMC in a position to be a referral centre in knowledge management for the industry. In this capacity the KMC provides thoughts leadership, guidance, consultancy, and sharing of best practices to enhance the knowledge-based organisation initiatives within the industry. (Anumshafeera, 2009; Sakinah, 2011; Muhamad, 2012)

The missions of the KMC are;

1. To support and establish Organisation X as a KBO by facilitating knowledge and value creation through the managing and leveraging of both internal and external information, knowledge and expertise

2. To establish Organisation X’s as regional referral centre by supporting and providing information and knowledge needs of the stakeholders

The biggest challenge of the transformation process is the paradigm shift that the staff of the KMC had to take to ensure successful mindset change. As a library the unit has been very successful serving their stakeholders. Historically, apart from acquiring and making available variety of information resources, the KMC has been providing an effective in-house research services. Given the new challenge the library need to broaden their scope to cover KM and own the KM process in Organisation X. Thus, certain understanding about KM and how things should be as a KMC are required. It means not only the staff need to embrace KM but also to operate with the mindset of a knowledge centric library. A knowledge centric library means a library that use and act on the
knowledge of all aspects of the library operations and services. To be successful in this endeavour KMC staff need to recognise and embed knowledge process as part of the work culture.

Apart from easy access to the latest internal content another channel and source of information and knowledge is the library portal that was made available in 2000 (Annual Report, 2000). The portal enables the staff to easily navigate through the digital collections available not only at the KMC but within the organisation. The collections are developed based on the information need profiles of the staff or stakeholders. To ensure access, continuous awareness campaign was organised to create further visibility to the services provided. At the same time to inculcate knowledge seeking behaviour in Organisation X. During this period the KMC started to recruit new talents to help manage the KMC and meeting knowledge demands (Annual Report, 2003; Annual Report, 2004; Anumshafeera, 2009; Sakinah, 2011; Muhamad Nurifirdaus, 2012).

The transformation of KMC was not only conceptual and physical but was also structural. The structural transformation is necessary to cater for the needs of the organisation. Headed by a Senior Manager, the KMC were divided into five (5) types of roles as shown in Figure 3 below.

Collectively, the objectives of the five roles are to provide an eco-system for effective access to knowledge, maximising the reusability of knowledge, provide facilities and tools for continuous learning, creating and providing knowledge based on the business needs of the organisation, and proving a knowledge space for knowledge sharing and collaborative works.
Knowledge Management

Firstly, the scope of this role are to develop, maintain and operationalise the KM framework and strategic plan. This includes reviewing existing policies in view of realigning them to the current need of the stakeholders and KM concept. Secondly, staff in this role also act as KM Advisor providing advisory service on anything related to KM. The scope of implementation would be organisational wide involving thinking, brainstorming as well as collaborating with KMC staff, KMOs, Taxonomy Working Committee, Expert Panel and relevant stakeholders. Thirdly, as part of the strategy development the role is responsible for KM systems and tools implementation. Fourthly, in monitoring the performance of KM in the organisation it is responsible to develop measurement strategy and to monitor the performance using it. It also manages the development of the Communities of Practices (CoPs) in the Bank.

Knowledge Identification and Creation

The staff in this role will perform knowledge audit, and an information and stakeholder profiles and need analysis. They also perform in-depth research and analysis on any particular subject based on requests or to fulfil the identified information and knowledge gaps of the organisation. This is done through researching and packaging both internal and external information resources. They would work collaboratively to create and manage several information repositories. Finally, the role is also responsible to conduct a continuous audit on the knowledge domain of the Bank among others to identify strategic knowledge assets, flow, usage and gaps.

Knowledge Acquisition and Capture

Primarily this role is tasked to acquire and process all the materials for the centre. Firstly, based on the information need profiles the role will source out internal as well as external materials to be acquired. Key to the acquisition is the capturing of internal knowledge assets in Organisation X within identified activities, learning events, systems and processes. Proper process and procedure is put in place to ensure this is properly executed. The role is also responsible to help to do in-depth research upon request. In order for the KMC to manage the complete information value chain for Organisation X this role is also responsible for the policy and management of Organisation X’s archive.

Knowledge Analysis, Repackaging and Organisation
Relying on stakeholder profiles and need analysis the role will perform environmental scanning utilising electronic databases, the Internet as well as internal resources in the organisation. Now effectively utilises social media tools and networks in dealing with stakeholders request. Following that the group will analyse the gathered information and repackage them into other meaningful information assets if required. Responsible for the implementation of content management policy where the main role also to identify or develop relevant repositories required by Organisation X.

**Knowledge Dissemination and Reuse**

The role would provide and produces current awareness services like news and article alerts to inform the stakeholders of the availability of new and latest information or materials. Equal balance of individual and group works that rely on technology most of the time. There is a need to deal with vendors and stakeholders. The role requires capability to anticipate the need of the stakeholders and develop a creative programmes to market KMC’s products and services. It is responsible to make KMC a more exciting and interesting place to be. This is achieved by having programmes and activities like exhibition, talks, knowledge sharing sessions and knowledge fair. It is an event and visitors’ management, and public relation role.

In recognition of the synergies between KM and Learning, the Knowledge Management Centre and the Learning Group of Organisation X were merged in August 2006. The merger reflected the seamless and integrated processes of KM and learning in providing a rich environment for engaged learners in Organisation X to improve their performance. From learning point of view the learning professionals based their strategy on whatever competency model that the organisation has and try to meet the learning gap by introducing learning intervention like customised learning program, providing the right tools and environment. To KM practitioners it is about managing the knowledge assets or intellectual capital of the organisation. Intellectual capital means human capital, structural capital and stakeholder or customer capital. First and foremost there is the need to identify what are the knowledge assets exist and in what form within the organisation. Once identified, strategy to make the knowledge works for the organisation has to be developed. That means aligning the management of these assets with the overall strategy of the organisation. This could mean, from the point of view managing human capital, introducing learning intervention to encourage knowledge sharing, acquisition and creation.

During the year in 2006, through its various initiatives, Organisation X continue to give emphasis on continuous learning by building an improved enabling, internally and externally and learning architecture. This learning architecture comprises of new learning institutions, a wide array of just-
in-time learning solutions, knowledge repositories, communities, knowledge tools and performance support.

As a testimony to the transformation and new role the KMC was recognised as an award winner for excellence and innovation by the Librarian Association of Malaysia in 2006 (Annual report, 2006)

**KMC as a Knowledge Space**

In 2004 KMC took another step into projecting another level of KM practice when it was presented with the opportunity to redesign and reorganise its physical space. A research was conducted and a concept of knowledge space was developed based on KM and learning theories. The early concept of space by Duffy and Hannay (1992), concept of knowledge creation by Nonaka (1991), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), and Dave Snowden’s (2002) concept of complexity theory were used to understand and develop suitable and practical knowledge spaces to create and environment to encourage knowledge creation, sharing and collaboration. The concept of knowledge zone was conceptualise and implemented in the design of the spaces (Anumshafeera, 2009; Sakinah, 2011; Muhamad, 2012).

**Idea, Creative and Inspirational Zone is a place where ideas take shape**

This is a zone where ideas will take shape and thinking could flourish. When a user walks in into this area he or she would be inspired to be creative. The environment able to induce users to easily develop new ideas. The most, this area is effective for a maximum group of five (5) people. The area is supplemented with light readings and latest materials to aid the users with idea generation. The environment should be multi-sensory in ambience and experience. Pipe-in baroque and classical (or relevant music) music build into the library’s infrastructure. The place should be furnished with comfortable, suitable seats and tables. The materials are arranged like in a bookstore.

**Internalisation Zone is an incubation area for reflection**

This is an incubation area for reflection. The area is an open space with multi-faceted reading and discussion areas. Mixture of discussion areas, research rooms and quiet reading areas. The environment is multi-sensory in ambience and experience. Most of the time reflection are done individually but there will be occasions where a group, of three or five, reflection. Relevant materials are located nearby. It is also a high tech, high touch environment with relevant and suitable music.

**Externalisation Zone is a place for discussion to develop ideas**
‘Noisy’ areas where open and impromptu discussions happen. The place is flexible and open for ‘war stories’ and other ‘story telling’ sessions. This is a place where we have the highest probability for knowledge accident to happen. The place would comprise of reading and discussion areas with graffiti board/wall, AV presentation, and ‘Café’. It is also a high tech, high touch environment with relevant and suitable music.

**Visualisation Zone is a place for visualisation of ideas**

This is a place for the visualisation of ideas. Visualisation here means a group of people could come together to develop (eg presentation materials, strategy map, charts) multimedia materials to visualise their ideas and thoughts. It would include reading and discussion areas; ‘mediatech’ and imaging station; screening and presentation rooms/areas; and graffiti board/wall. The environment should be multi-sensory in ambience and experience. The place is furnished with comfortable/suitable seats and tables. It is also a high tech, high touch environment with relevant and suitable music.

**Socialisation Zone is a place where people read, meet, relax and exchange ideas**

A Cyber Café Concept area complete with coffee bar and vending machines. Pipe-in music built into the library’s infrastructure to create a multi-censoring experience during learning and knowledge sharing activities and program that encourage audience participation. Installation of music-post where user can read and listen to music. Each post is furnished with comfortable seats and headsets. Eco-friendly architecture and design to the appreciation of nature and environment. This can encourage generation ideas and place for relaxation.

All the areas mentioned above should have basic capability to:

1. Capture the knowledge created within that space
2. Access our knowledge repositories
3. Share or transmit knowledge
4. Have a shared space for emerging relationships – physical, virtual, mental or any combination – for knowledge creation
5. Create a personalise space
Within the concept of knowledge space the concept of ‘noise is good’ and ‘knowledge accident’ were also adopted. The success of the spaces was indicated by the increase of 44.8% walk-in users in 2006 (16,126 in 2005 to 23,360 in 2006) (Annual Report 2006).

In essence KMC is about managing the knowledge ecology for Organisation X that include social networks, culture, resources, environment and systems. It is not just a place to learn and do research but also a knowledge space to collaborate, meet, discuss, think, socialise, create and share knowledge. The use of technology is prevalent as an important enabler. To make it work the staff of the KMC has to adopt the paradigm of stakeholder relationship management in providing customised and personalised services. The staff of KMC slowly evolving to be knowledge professionals.

CONCLUSION

Libraries in corporate environment have been facing the threat to their existence due to economic reasons since late 90’s. It was made worse with the advent of information and communication technologies, right or wrong, fuelling perceptions that businesses and organisations do not need library as the perceived relevant services are available at minimal cost through other means. Those that survive went through changes and transformation exercise with clear value proposition that are aligned to the strategic direction on the organisation. Also, being creative and innovative in doing so in the process. Researches have proven that libraries have their place in the corporate world if librarians willing to continuously persevere and willing to take up new challenges. Mindset change, thinking like a business, and new innovative value propositions that are aligned to the business. Opportunities emerged and one of them is to take up the challenge of owning the process value chain and managing the knowledge assets of organisation. After all the competencies required to manage library and information services are the building blocks to manage knowledge in organisation. The learning curve to learn and apply the whole concept of KM is shorter and achievable by librarians.

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