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Knowledge Management in an academic library based on the case study “KM within OULS”.

Tatiana White

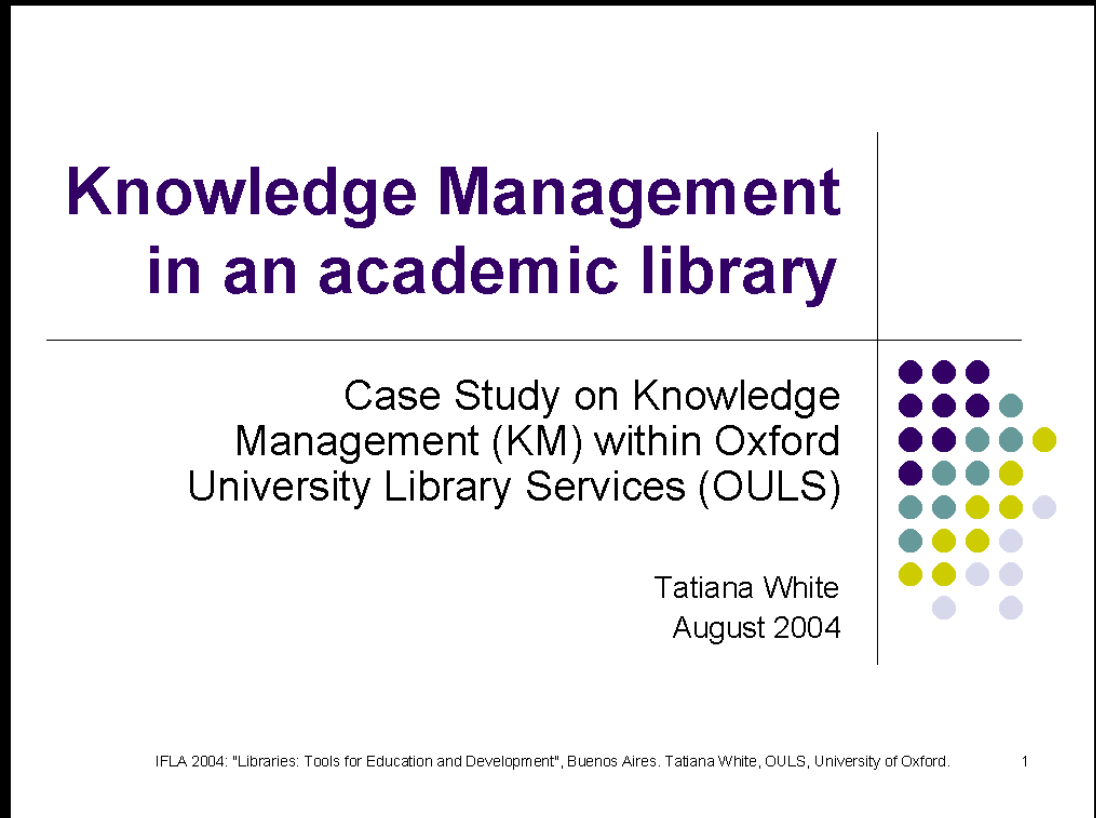
Vere Harmsworth Library (American Studies)
Bodleian Library
Oxford University Library Services (OULS)
University of Oxford
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ABSTRACT

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 advent of the so-called “e-revolution”, through the growth of global networks has accelerated the use of KM in many organisations, including those in the library and information environment. In the 21st century KM is increasingly becoming a crucial tool in providing a dynamic and effective service to library users.

My paper, which focuses on the KM elements in the academic environment, attempts to distinguish information from knowledge and outlines the need to include KM in library strategy to retain ‘Know-How’ for the benefits of its staff and users.

Key words: Knowledge Management, Learning Organisation, Knowledge-Sharing.



Knowledge Management in an academic library

Case Study on Knowledge
Management (KM) within Oxford
University Library Services (OULS)

Tatiana White
August 2004

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Hello everybody!

On behalf of the Knowledge Management Section as its first Secretary, I am very pleased to present my paper on 'Knowledge Management in an academic library'. This has been based on my Masters Degree case study of: 'KM within Oxford University Library Services' (OULS) combined with 7 years experience of working in the Bodleian Library and OULS.

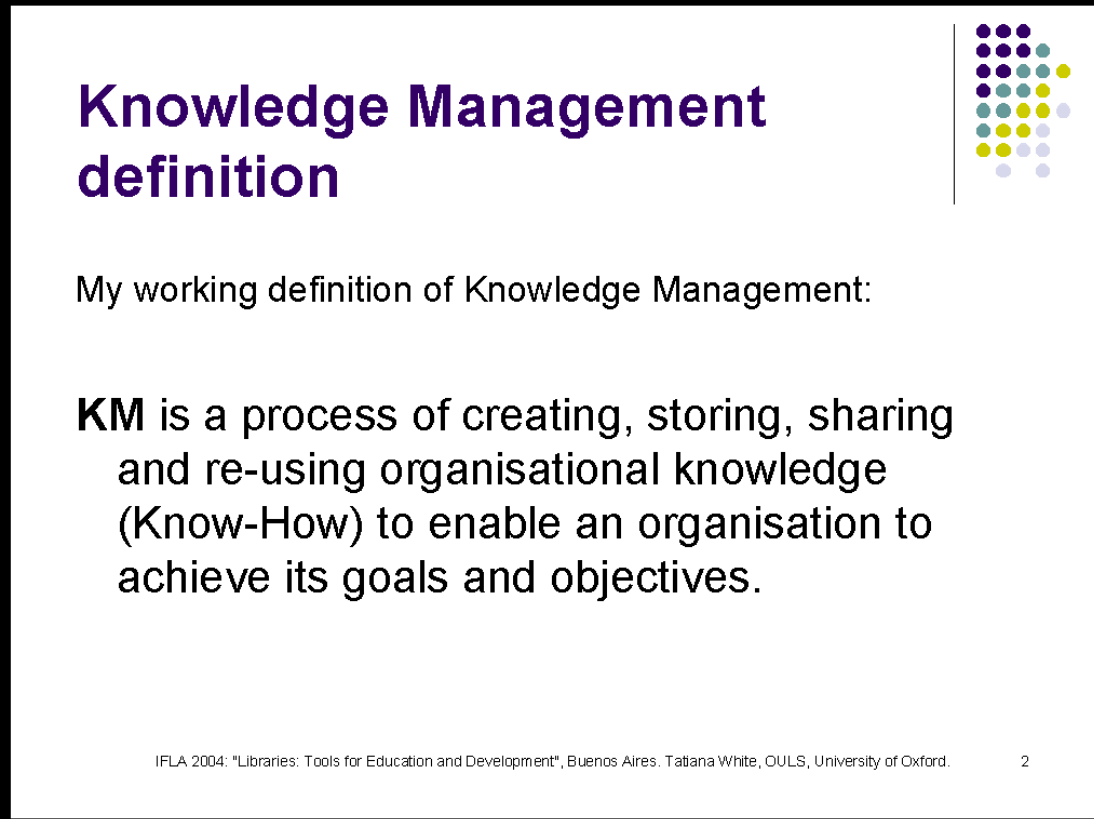
Knowledge Management (KM) is a relatively new discipline in the information and library environment, which originated in the early 1990's in the private sector to help companies survive in an ever faster-moving and competitive environment.

The advent of the so-called "e-revolution", through the growth of global networks has accelerated the use of KM in many organisations, including those in the library and information environment. In the 21st century KM is increasingly becoming a crucial tool in providing a dynamic and effective service to library users.

Knowledge Management has already been successfully incorporated, among others, into government and health care information sectors. During my work in an academic and research library, I have developed an interest in the topic of KM. This has been especially pertinent at OULS, which is in the process of becoming an integrated library.

First and foremost, I think it is appropriate to dedicate a slide to what people understand the term knowledge management to mean. When referring to literary sources it is clear that a number of KM definitions have been drawn up. It is also generally accepted that there is no single, agreed definition for knowledge management. At the start of my case study, therefore, I have drawn up a working KM definition, which I consider to be the following (Slide2) The justification for this definition can also be understood in the context of the OULS case in subsequent slides of this presentation

Slide 2



Knowledge Management definition

My working definition of Knowledge Management:

KM is a process of creating, storing, sharing and re-using organisational knowledge (Know-How) to enable an organisation to achieve its goals and objectives.

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The recent history of the library structure at Oxford University has seen a co-existence of separately administered academic libraries.

In the late 90's various committees of eminent academics sat to discuss how the University could improve its service to readers into the 21st Century. The conclusion of these discussions was to bring the independent library services together to form an integrated OULS under centralised administration.

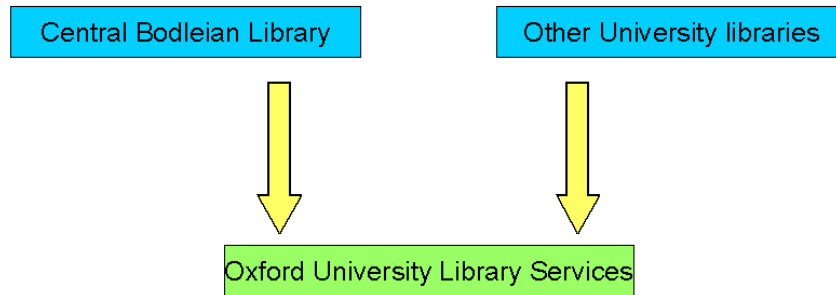
It was clear from the beginning that integration presented staff with a significant challenge, as by its nature, Oxford University has a high number of libraries offering very diverse services.

Given these significant changes in the running of library services, the intention with my case study was to provide an additional tool in assessing staff's perception of change, knowledge creation and sharing at OULS. *Slide 3.*

Relevance of KM in the context of OULS



- Before Spring 2000: Multiple library services co-exist



- Spring 2000 onwards: OULS Integration

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The research was conducted in Spring 2003 and my thanks are due to the Bodley's and OULS' Director, Reg Carr, who has provided invaluable support in encouraging a high response rate from all staff levels, which overall averaged 70%

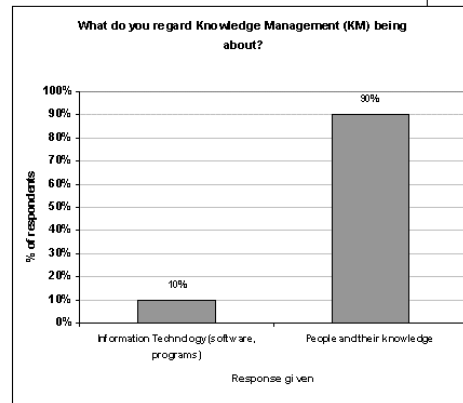
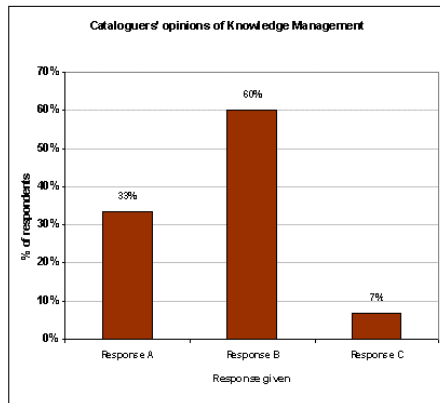
By way of example, I would like to draw on some of the more crucial extracts from my surveys.

One of the aims in my questionnaires was to gain feedback from cataloguers on what their perception of Knowledge Management is.

- (in referring to the left graph)The majority, i.e. 60% of respondents, deemed KM to fall in the category of being the management process, which enables the organisation to use and re-use its staff's knowledge. This would also give credence to the working KM definition mentioned previously.
- In the graph on the right, under the question, "What do you regard Knowledge Management being about?", 90% of those surveyed considered KM to be about people and their knowledge, whereas 10% attributed KM to IT and software programs.

Slide 4.

What is Knowledge Management? Cataloguers' perception



Response A) - *A fashionable expression, nothing more than that*

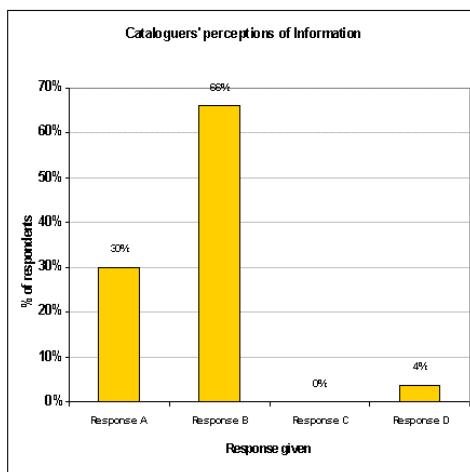
Response B) - *The management process which enables the organisation to use and re-use its staff's knowledge;* Response C) - *Other(s)*

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Another area of focus was how cataloguers responded to questions on what they perceive knowledge and information to be. (Show responses from both slides 5,6).

What is information?



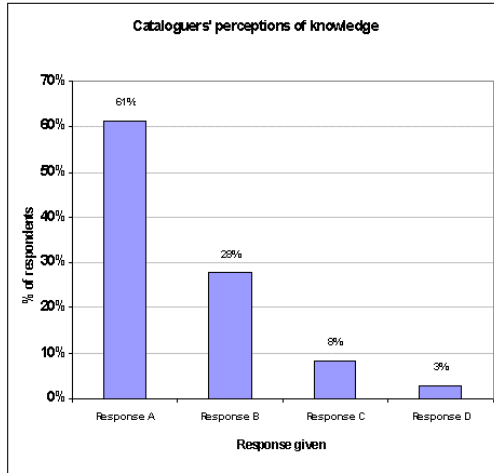
- Response A) - *Is meant to change the way the receiver perceives something, to have an impact on his/her judgement and behaviour*
- Response B) - *Must inform the receiver*
- Response C) - *Is the same as data*
- Response D) - *Other(s)*

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What is knowledge?



- Response A) - **Awareness or familiarity gained by experience**
- Response B) - **The sum of data and information**
- Response C) - **The proof of what I know**
- Response D) - **Other(s)**

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The responses indicate that information is passive in nature, whereas knowledge is a dynamic and active resource, residing in peoples' heads.
Slide 7. (Next)

Knowledge acquisition - What do we need to know in the near future?



- Work-related knowledge requirements for key staff at OULS in the next 5 years
- Suggested areas of knowledge acquisition for OULS cataloguers
- Customer service training would be beneficial for Stack and Reading Room staff

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Successful KM and organisational development is also about planning knowledge acquisition. This could be achieved through training, attending conferences and communication with peers. My intention was also to learn what the surveyed groups understood their future knowledge level requirements to be, with the following results.

- On the question: “Work-related knowledge required in 5 years” the main responses were as follows: 47% of OULS key workers specified IT skills, 18% - Web development. 13% thought they would need to enhance their knowledge level on HR/Legal matters.
- Most cataloguers i.e. 28% of them would like to gain more knowledge of e-resources, 19% on metadata, and 17% on XML.
- 64% of front line Reading room staff considered it would be beneficial if customer service training was provided for their group.

Knowledge sharing is a core element of Knowledge Management.

IT has provided us with a number of possible solutions for sharing recorded human knowledge via e-mail, intranets and knowledge bases. The human factor drives the process of sharing knowledge, experience, and wisdom. As people and culture are the keys for any successful knowledge-sharing activity, I wanted to see if this culture and understanding of the importance of KM sharing is present at OULS. KM programmes generally fail if there is no knowledge-sharing culture in place. *Slide 8.*

- The surveys outlined OULS staff’s willingness and readiness for knowledge sharing:
85% of OULS cataloguers are ‘happy to share all they know with their colleagues, because they know that is beneficial to the organisation’.
- A knowledge-sharing programme could help the organisation to implement a technological change. Following implementation of the Automated Stack Request (ASR) system at OULS a few years ago, 77% of staff mentioned, that sharing knowledge and experiences is important in an implementation process.
- My research has shown that the majority of OULS staff know the library’s goals and objectives. This knowledge is important, as staff reflect their personal development through organisational goals.

Most OULS staff, up to Director level, consider OULS to be a learning organisation.

- 59% of knowledge workers agreed, that we learn a great deal about the library’s progress from the users. 33% weren’t sure. As the library is a service-oriented organisation, it is important to understand the role users play in planning and organising library operations.

Knowledge sharing or Library 'Know-Why'



- Knowledge sharing is a core element of Knowledge Management
- The surveys show OULS staff's willingness and readiness for knowledge sharing
- Most of OULS staff know the library's goals and mission and consider their organisation to be a 'learning organisation'
- Knowledge retention and prevention of 'lost knowledge'

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In response to the question **Why share knowledge?** 80% of surveyed OULS key workers stated that knowledge is lost when a member of staff leaves the organisation. It was recognised that retaining and recording knowledge can add value to library services and save on staff re-training costs.

When knowledge is very specialised, in areas such as manuscript collection, OULS has adopted a model of re-employing valuable retired staff as advisors on ad hoc projects.

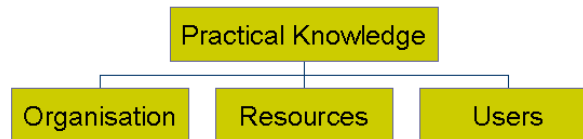
KM consists also of organisational knowledge, or organisational 'Know-How'.

Here is my model of the library's 'Know-How'

Slide 9.

- The practical knowledge of the organisation, its resources and users make a model for library 'Know-How'. Library 'Know-How' resides in the heads of library staff and is embedded in their working practices and culture. Without at least one of the above 3 building blocks, the ability of staff to "know which tasks to carry out and how" is lost.

Library 'Know-How'



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What are the 'Pros' and 'Cons' of KM in academic library?

I have drawn up a list of risk and benefit factors which may be considered before implementing KM in an academic library. *Slide 10*

Amongst **benefits (Pros)** are:

- Better ROI (Return on Investment)
- Improved measures of performance
- A greater understanding of organisational goals
- Lesson learned on organisational change
- Knowledge of long-serving staff is retained within the organisation
- Deeper understanding user's requirements through constant evaluation of the services and its improvements
- An opportunity to see ourselves not just service-oriented, but mostly value-oriented

Risks (Cons):

- Hard to capture knowledge and manage it within a large, diverse organisation, such as an academic library
- Difficulty to embed KM strategy into an organisation's existing strategy
- Fear of staff moving out of their "comfort zone" because of the knowledge they possess is passed on to colleagues
- Financial constraints for knowledge sharing incentives

- Possible fear amongst Library Directors to embark on a new venture of KM, because of its infancy in development.

Why KM in an academic library?



'Pros'

- Better ROI
- Improved measures of performance
- A greater understanding of organisational goals
- Lesson learnt
- Retention of long-serving staff's knowledge
- A deeper understanding of library users' needs
- An opportunity to see ourselves as value-oriented

'Cons'

- Hard to capture knowledge and manage it within a diverse organisation
- Difficulty to embed KM strategy into an organisation's existing strategy
- Fear of losing the comfort zone
- Financial constraints for knowledge sharing incentives
- Fear amongst Library Directors to embark on a KM venture

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Slide 11.

KM - Success factors



- **Communication**
- **Trust**
- **Collaboration**
- **Networking**
- **Support from top management**
- **Security/knowledge protection**


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- Regular and timely communication is a drive factor for a successful KM programme.
- Sharing knowledge can only be possible in the right organisational climate. Trust and knowledge protection can arise as issues in a KM programme.
- Working together is vital, whether it is a cross-functional team, or a subject-related group.
- If knowledge is recorded and exists in electronic form, such as on the intranet, understandably, security is a primary concern for the organisation. Protection of knowledge becomes an issue in a knowledge-sharing environment

Knowledge retention and recording is not an easy process. Frequently specialist knowledge of collection and processes is lost either because it has not been documented or because it is difficult to capture by documentation. This is of course an issue in KM, but could be resolved by adopting the right mechanism for converting knowledge into information for use. *Slide 12.*

KM skills and tools



- **Mentoring**
- **Coaching**
- **Change management skills**
- **Performance measurements**
- **Balance scorecard or intangible asset monitoring**

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Skills:


- Mentoring/Coaching (transferring knowledge from long-serving members to new staff members)

- Change management skills. Do we know how to manage change? Special training on developing adaptive and pro-active skills within an organisation would help to avoid stress during organisational change.

Tools:

- At OULS, performance measurements are applied, such as Staff Development Review and Staff Merit Awards Review. The spectrum of merits could be broadened to commend a sharing culture. These incentives could be addressed not only through local library staff development budget, but also via national and international awards and grants for best professional achievement in the KM sector.
- The use of intangible asset monitoring and/or balanced scorecards would help library staff to measure their intellectual assets. There is also a gap in KM literature and library practice as to how KM works in capitalising the intellectual assets of library workers.

Slide 13.



Case study conclusions

- **An effective knowledge-sharing culture exists at OULS**
- **OULS staff consider their organisation as a learning organisation**
- **KM could accelerate OULS integration and vice-versa**

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Similar conclusions to these could be arrived at in other academic libraries.

Thank you very much for your attention. Any questions?