Knowledge Management (KM) and Museums

Kamani Perera
Librarian
Regional Centre for Strategic Studies
Sri Lanka
k_vithana@yahoo.com
+94775965252 (M)

Dinesh Chandra
Section Officer
Ministry of Defence
Government of India
New Delhi
India
chandradines@gmail.com
dinesh.conf@gmail.com
+919811023332 (M)

Introduction

Knowledge management (KM) in museums can be briefly defined as a conscious strategy of acquiring right knowledge to the right people at the right time and supporting people to share and place information into action in ways that make effort to improve museum performance. It is people to people contact as well as people with information and helps to manage the information.

Success of KM practices in museums depends on application of technology, budget, workflow management, sharing and communication of knowledge. In this electronic era KM helps museums to widely spread their resources in the globe for access, navigation and contribution while sharing knowledge among museum professionals. But museum professionals/workers encounter many challenges and problems when they are practicing KM in museums. Development of KM tools, standards and technology are being used to meet these challenges.

Objectives

With the advent of World Wide Web (WWW), the role of museums have changed and expanded their services beyond the traditional boundaries. Using knowledge management tools, museum professionals can provide effective services to their users. In the past, museums have defended for the entertainment of visitors and now they have become establishment for learning and enjoyment. Knowledge management helps museums to get a clear idea of their target audiences. There are visitors who make general visits as well as special visits. Therefore, research needs to concentrate visitor type, their motivation, why they visit, visitor needs etc. This type of research helps to organize special events to attract more audiences to the museums. In addition, most of the time visitors attend permanent collections. Hence, permanent collections should keep under care and preservation for future generations. Museums conduct programs to educate younger generation on the value of rare collections and to prevent conservation. Various projects are being carried out globally for the restoration and conservation of world heritage.

The changing of museum environment is inevitable in this electronic era. Museums are knowledge archives which store huge amount of information. Knowledge management in museums is defined as to focus on creating a bridge from guided web exhibits to unguided knowledge discovery through the construction of information systems that hold cultural heritage content (Museum and the Web, 1997). According to the definition it is clear that knowledge management is bridging the gap of guided to unguided knowledge discovery. And it helps to maintain links with people, places, events, movements and associations by way of documenting and maintaining those links. Therefore, knowledge management is playing a major role in museums for collection management. KM facilitates museums to find and manage information more effectively and to achieve viable solutions.

Swartz (2003), described KM as –
- Leading cultural change
- Fostering collaboration
- Creating virtual organizations Building databases
- Measuring intellectual capital
- Establishing corporate libraries
- Building Intranets
- Installing groupware
- Sharing best practices
- Leading training programs

Ignjatovic (2004), shares the other functions and technologies of KM as –
- Technical writing
- Document management
- Relational databases
- Object databases
- Full text and search retrieval
- Support systems

Swartz and Ignjatovic are giving evidence that KM is the driving force of any museum. Museums will be able to provide very effective service to their audience by applying KM tools as described above. KM has become turning point of the personal knowledge into corporate knowledge that can be widely used in the globe without any geographical barrier. It creates virtual organizations. It acts as the life line of the museums. It bridges the digital divide.

Application of Knowledge Management in Museums
Knowledge is divided into two factors such as explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be documented or archived, easily accessible and searchable. In brief explicit knowledge can be easily disseminated to others. Eg – Reports, databases, search engines, automated catalogs. Tacit knowledge can be described as experiences, skills/attitudes. Museums are able to create, access and reuse knowledge by capturing explicit and tacit knowledge to achieve its goals.

International Council of Museums (ICOM) defined that museum as a non-profit making, permanent institutions in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment ICOM, 2001). ICOM has clearly indicated the museums role in the society and how it connects with people's day to day activities.

In this context, it is clear that KM plays an important role in the field of museology. Koenig (2005), examines that KM is important because of its long term impact and it is not a fad unlike most management techniques. It is not going away. Further Koenig described that KM is moving into a stage of recognizing the importance of and incorporating information and knowledge external to the parent organization. According to Koenig it is clear that museums can serve the community very effectively beyond their walls with the help of KM techniques. KM techniques help to museums to survive in an ever faster-moving and competitive environment. In this electronic era, KM has become an important tool which provides dynamic and effective service to the museum audiences.

Huber, in his article, described that in the millennium, museums have to dynamically adapt to their environment on account of their normative mission. Especially in times of global knowledge explosion, museums ought to fulfill the task of education of society. This can be achieved by serving as a discussion platform for the information society. According to Huber it is clear that museums are playing a major role in the society by serving as an educational institute. In this context, museums act as knowledge centre. Museum professionals such as curators, conservators, researchers and administrators are knowledge carriers. Huber further described that in this knowledge system in museums, knowledge carriers create

knowledge products and services by processing knowledge objects and sources. Knowledge objects and sources are object, field research, literature, documentation units and knowledge products and services are exhibitions, discussions, presentation, visitor guidance, workshops, conferences etc.

The following figure, Huber explained that knowledge carriers create knowledge products and services by processing knowledge objects and services. Further he described that knowledge sources are the object, field research relevant literature etc. and knowledge carriers are museum staff namely heads of departments, researchers, curators, conservators. Huber clearly stated that knowledge products and services are exhibitions, discussions, presentations, visitor guidance and knowledge users are various kinds of visitors, individuals, tourists, researchers etc. At this juncture, external knowledge carriers and services are other museums, universities, libraries, archives, exhibition designers, museum consultants and these places and people become knowledge providers. He indicated that the aid get from the government and various sponsors for knowledge promotion in museums. All these facts are providing concrete evidence how KM system function in museum environment to provide efficient service to its community.
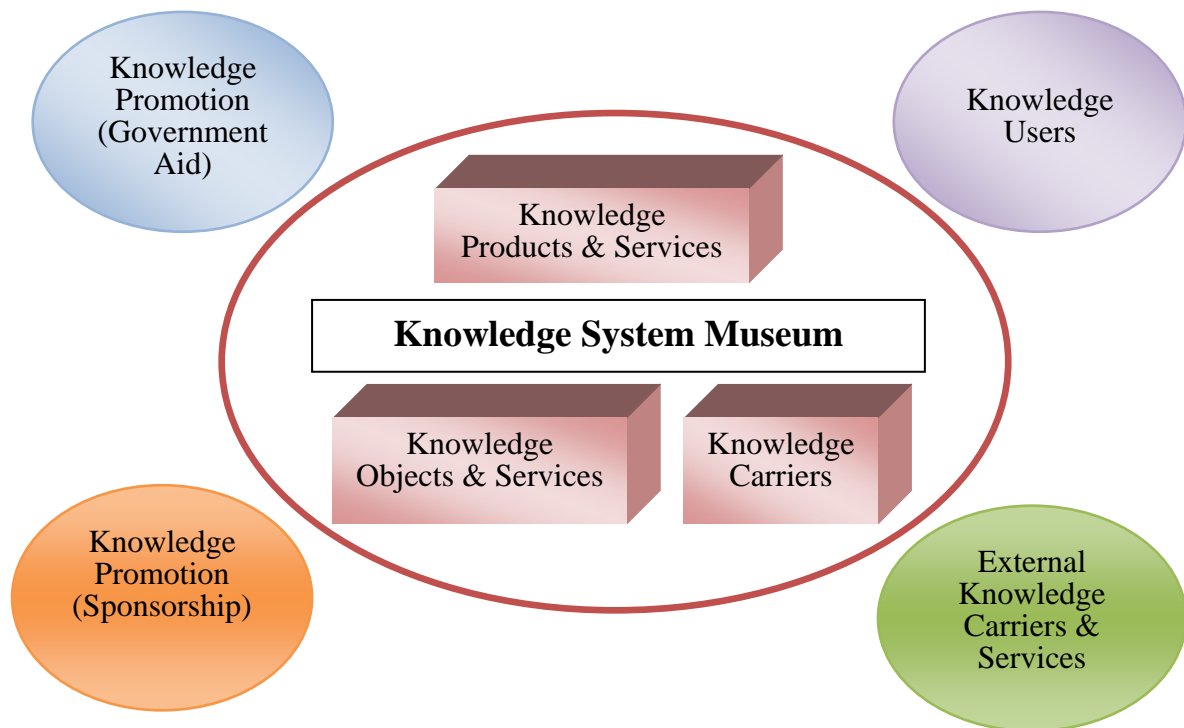

Figure. Knowledge Environments (Huber)

Success factors of Knowledge Management
White (2004) has defined KM as a process of creating, storing, sharing and reusing organizational knowledge (know-how) to enable an organization to achieve its goals and objectives. According to White's definition KM helps for creating knowledge, storing, sharing and re-using. In this process it helps to achieve organizational goals and objectives. White pointed out that knowledge sharing is the most important part of the KM. With the emergence of information technology (IT), there are numbers of way to share human knowledge via e-mail, internet, and knowledge bases. Further White described that people and culture are the keys of successful knowledge sharing activity. Further he pointed out that retaining and recording knowledge can add value to organizational services and save on staff re-training costs.

KM- Success factors (White, 2004)
- Communication
- Trust
- Collaboration
- Networking

- Support from top management
- Security/knowledge protection

The victory of any organization depends on the way they adopt the above success factors of KM. There is no assurance of future in museums without applying KM tools. Therefore, it is essential to apply KM techniques in museums to provide widely shared timely service.

Benefits of Knowledge Management in Museums
- Achieve quality presentation and enhancing quality review process
- Excel user's expectation
- Upgrading the cultural heritage community
- Staff development

KM is playing a significant role in museum environment for presentation of information for the development of navigation tools. Users need detailed information of any object, artifact or event. Therefore, it is very important to apply the KM theory in museum management as it stimulates more energetic heritage development environment. It eventually leads to an effective way of universal access.

Knowledge Management @ Work in Museums
   1. *Museums as Learning Centers* –

Modern Internet era, museums have developed their vision to provide more effective service for learning. This is different from college education and it can be learning as a hobby or for entertainment. Learning groups can be individuals, family groups or friendship groups. Learning is open-ended and self-directed. People use heritage repositories for a wide range of purposes. An ocean of information can be accessed through on-line, physical visits or by way of refereeing artifact, books, manuals etc. Learning can be short-term or long-term and for the following purposes –
- To increase knowledge
- Development of new skills
- To learn more to sharpen existing knowledge

Museums professionals should not know the background knowledge of their audiences and therefore it is difficult to make a better judgment what they have learned. But audiences can make their own judgment how far they learned from the heritage institutions. Hence, cultural heritage institutions provide better learning environment and rich, immersive learning experience which will be enjoyable, memorable for its users. Young people get inspirational and motivational experience learning through them, which are not possible to get from the schools. They support the curriculum in very effective manner. Research has shown that significant improvement of students marks in their assignments compared to usual college environment assignments when it is cultural heritage-based.

   2. *Audience Development*

Research is being carried out constantly to develop audiences and modernizing cultural heritage programs to expand more participation. These researches are different from museums to museums according to the way they are carried out it. It may depend on timing of research, type of questions, type of visitors, etc. Research can be carried out various topics such as socio-demographics, comments on displays, prices, facilities, opening hours, support given by the staff, quality of presentations. This helps to increase the audience to a large extent. They should know their audience truly to provide effective service to them. Without knowing their audience, any heritage or conservation institute, museum or archive cannot develop on their own. Therefore, it is very important to apply KM methods to know their audience to attract more people. Creating more meaningful events help to encourage repeated visits of audiences. Museum professionals should be concerned on why people visit to their institutions, what is the purpose of their visits and what they are seeking in the museums, archives or heritage institutions. Staff can interview the visitors and learn from them what exactly they need. These visitor requirements can be varied from visitor to visitor. It improves quality of repository services and be able to provide exactly what their audiences need. This helps to increase more and more people day by day and such museums/archives, conservation institutes get public recognition and will lead to the global recognition too while generating more income.

Conclusion

KM is achieved through complete satisfaction of customers, maximum explanation of internal resources, satisfaction of donors, clients, personnel who supports to operate the museums. KM expresses the best operational practices while promoting a process of evaluation and auto-evaluation of acts planning for its development. KM methods can be applied to any museums, cultural heritage institutions, archives as they provide a set of general criteria and can be applied so many structures. It needs to be personalized and any museum or cultural heritage organization should adapt the contents of the methods to its own culture, nature and community.

It is very important to apply the KM theory in museum management as it stimulates more energetic museum development environment. It eventually leads to an effective way of universal access. Knowledge management helps for a systematic approach that ranges from technology-driven methods of accessing, controlling, and delivering information to the developing society. It is an art of creating value from intangible assets.

References

1. Huber, Leonhard. Application Areas of Knowledge Management Instruments in Museums. http://www.infoprofessional.net/museum-km.pdf

2. Ignjatovic, Diane (2004). Knowledge Management Systems in Museums: The Next Generation for Assimilating Museum Information Resources In an Electronic Environment. MA thesis in Museum Professions. http://domapp01.shu.edu/depts/uc/apps/libraryrepository.nsf/resourceid/BE747D2FA6C085B385256EC50051AFBB/$File/Ignjatovic-Diane_Master.pdf?Open

3. International Council of Museums (ICOM), (2001). Code of Ethics for Museums.

4. Koenig, Michael E. D. (2005). Knowledge Management Moves beyond the Organization: the Opportunity for Librarians. World Library and Information Congress; 7th IFLA General Conference and Council. Aug. 14-18, 2005, Oslo, Norway. http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/papers/123e_koenig.pdf

5. Museums and the Web 2007.http://www.archimuse.com/mw2007/best/index.html

6. Swartz, Nikki (2003). The 'Wonder Years' of Knowledge Management. The Information Management Journal, May/June 2003, p. 53.

7. White, Tatiana (2004). Knowledge Management in an Academic Library: Case Study on knowledge Management (KM) within Oxford University Library Services (OULS). IFLA 2004: Libraries Tools for Education and Development, Buenos Aires.