



## Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer among Librarians at Kampala International University (KIU) Uganda

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### Abstract

The way knowledge is transferred determined the rate in which an institution achieve its objectives. Few studies have been done on tacit knowledge transfer in higher institutions in Uganda. Scholars are concern that there is no clear knowledge transfer procedures in universities. It was in this context the researchers were interested to study Kampala International University library. The study aims at identifying professional tacit transfer practices at Kampala International University Library and their benefits to the library. The study employed an online self-administered questionnaire on 34 librarians and registered (25) 76% response. Content analysis and observation techniques were also used. The results are: mentorship, workshops, seminars, meetings, job rotation, consortia engagements are the professional tacit knowledge transfer practices exploited by librarians at KIU. Among the practices 76% of the respondents ranked workshops, seminars and meetings as the best professional tacit knowledge transfer practices. Meanwhile motivation was a very important aspect that influenced librarians to participate in professional tacit knowledge transfer practices. Majority of librarians (68%) said tacit knowledge transfer practices benefited the library by improving performance and maintaining the library competitiveness. Lack of adequate tacit knowledge transfer infrastructure was among the challenges mentioned. The paper provides a broad overview of professional tacit knowledge transfer in the university library especially Kampala International University (KIU). The study conclude that universities have clear knowledge transfer practices though not documented and widely studied. This study is a veritable resource to any university library that is still struggling with knowledge management and transfer.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Management, Knowledge Sharing, Tacit knowledge, Professional Practice, KIU University Libraries

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### 1. Introduction

A university is known for its knowledge generation and sharing efforts through research, teaching and learning (Mothe, Gertler, Landry, Niosi & Wolfe, 2000). Community and industry look at a university for personnel with sufficient knowledge to propel them to achieve desired goals. Today's demand for better products and services have made organizations to work closely with universities and other research bodies to get new ideas and remain competitive(Israel, 2011;Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2017; Raza & Shah, 2018). Knowledge management (KM) has since the 1990s become a discipline that is taught in a number of universities and practiced in community and industry (Pun &Yiu, 2017).

A university library operates within a university setting to support university efforts of knowledge generation and transfer. For a university library to be able to fulfill its mandate it should also manage its own knowledge transfer processes effectively. Iddi Basajjabalaba Memorial library (IBML), Kampala International University (KIU), Uganda started in 2003 with a mandate of supporting teaching, learning, research and community outreach mission of the university. This library generates, preserves and transfers explicit and tacit knowledge throughout its various professional practices. For the personnel of the library to perform their duties effectively and efficiently and equally be relevant in this constant.

### 1.1 Research Questions

- a) What are the professional tacit knowledge practices implemented at the IBM library?
- b) Which are the best tacit knowledge transfer practices implemented at the IBM library?
- c) What are the benefits of the professional tacit transfer practices at the IBM library?
- d) What are the challenges hindering the professional tacit transfer practices at the IBM library?
- e) What are your suggestion for improvement of the professional tacit knowledge practices in the library?

## 1. 2 Review of related literature

### 1.2.1 Knowledge

Knowledge is the expertise that is obtained after thorough use of information or through practicing a certain idea. It is an insight or know-how that someone or an institution acquires and always uses to implement certain tasks. There are basically two categories of knowledge operative in every organisation: explicit and tacit. Institution's knowledge is equated with its economic worth in the knowledge economy (Powell & Snellman, 2004). Explicit knowledge is a kind of knowledge that someone gains and can be able to formally document it in form of a procedure, policy, formula or an explanation. This kind of knowledge can be easily shared and stored in a system for future use. Explicit knowledge is also known as coded knowledge (Ali & Khan, 2017). Tacit knowledge is personal knowledge that is in individual's mind. It is very hard to document such knowledge and share it without the individual's willingness.

Busch (2008) defines tacit knowledge as those ideas that cannot easily located in records, is inferred in nature and very personal stored in the mind. This implies that tacit knowledge include peoples personal skills, experiences, insights and judgments. Tacit knowledge is very practical in a specific context. Tacit knowledge is so personal and difficult to formalize and communicate. However, Daghfous, Belkhodja & Angell (2013) believed that tacit knowledge should be sought after, preserved and shared within an organisation through the process of knowledge transfer.

Transfer is a process of moving ideas/ practice from one person to another or from one unit to another with the aim of improvement and maintaining competitiveness of the receiver. The only way this knowledge can be managed and shared is by encouraging or motivating the individual to share it informally or formally. Organization's knowledge should not only be known through an electronic system but also in the organization's daily endeavors, activities, programmes, transactions and ways of

doing things (Pun & Yiu, 2017). The research findings of Ritesh, Santos & Srimannarayana (2015) reveals tacit knowledge can be shared and transferred by developing a mentoring programme, motivating free will involvement in tacit knowledge sharing efforts, recognizing employees for participating in tacit knowledge transfer and encourage teams work, among staff. Adding to this, Nonaka (1994) postulated that tacit knowledge among others can be transferred through the processes of socialization and externalization. According to the author, in socialization knowledge is created when tacit knowledge is converted into new forms of tacit knowledge through social interactions like face to face interactions, observation, guidance, discussion and practice, while externalization refers to the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge in the forms of training manuals, policies and procedures, databases and so on.

However, there are some barriers to sharing and transfer of tacit knowledge in institutions. These include staff believe that retention of knowledge provides them with benefits and status (Willman et al. 2000), self actualisation and stable job positions and fear of revealing their personal abilities (Newell et al. 2006; Renzl 2008 in Chugh, Wibowo & Grandhi (2015).

### 1.2.3 Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is a multidisciplinary effort of ensuring organizational insights, expertise, experiences and know-how ideas are well captured, organized, stored and shared so as to achieve organizational goals. The efforts are to ensure that the organization is using the internal and external knowledge to remain competitive, improve performance and become innovative. Proper knowledge management requires a systematic examination of the organization's transactions, procedures and outcomes. Sufficient facilities are required in an organization to support organizational knowledge efforts for effectiveness and efficiency, which include a computerized system (Pun & Yiu, 2017).

Management functions such as planning, organizing, directing, and staffing, budgeting are implemented on knowledge processes to achieve desired goals. Ensuring access to the knowledge management is implemented before a transaction, during a transaction and after a transaction. Processing tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge sharing on one to one while recording the knowledge and preserving it for the future use in a repository. Ad hoc expertise request from external experts to provide insights on specific activities in a specific organization unit directly captured as organization knowledge. Benchmarking

as a strategy for knowledge management has been so effective for competitiveness.

### 1.2.2. Practice theoretical perspective

A practice is an organized collection of doings where humans acquires diligence, knowledge and skills in a certain perspective (Schatzki, 2005). The skills are developed because of observing rules or principles, an understanding, way of life and challenges that occur in aspects of human life. There is one definition of practice therefore a practice is understood according to its nature of existence or usage. While practice theory is rarely used in Library and Information Science background, it is one of the very important theories which should be embraced in the field because it reflects on human activity or human interactions. Library and Information Science is a field which is embedded on human interactions with information or facts for knowledge and social-economic development (Schatzki, 2001, p. 1).

Reich & Hager(2014) posit that practice theory in a professional perspective is a human understanding of professional principles and knowledge. Therefore professional practice fits to explain Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practices in university library. A university library is a professional body and tacit knowledge transfer practice in a professional body equals to a Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practice. Practice theory proposed by Schatzki (2001) highlight a practice in six perspectives which are explained in relation to Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practices in a university library in Uganda.

- a) **Knowing-in-Practice Perspective**  
Professional Tacit Knowledge transfer involves learning a skill and storing it in the mind which is tacit knowledge. Then the transfer practice is where university libraries collaboratively in workshops, seminars, job-rotations, internship, and community of practice interact on one to one to share the skill among the librarians to generate innovations and improve performance.
- b) **Socio-materiality Perspective**  
Practice and tacit knowledge transfer include facilities which are related. Humans with the tacit knowledge in the mind, the guidelines of transfer, ICTs for documenting the knowledge and the motivation to transfer the knowledge.
- c) **Embodiment Perspective**  
Tacit Knowledge transfer is so close to cognitive functions because the knowledge is stored in an individual mind and can be seen when practiced
- d) **Relationality Perspective**  
Tacit knowledge transfer practice require a good public relation and reciprocal environment between the groups. That is the reason why tacit knowledge transfer require personal motivation.

- e) **Historical and social shaping of practices Perspective**

Tacit knowledge transfer practices require a good culture which is historic in nature to shape the future practices. This means if the organization has a history of senior staff members transferring professional knowledge through mentorship, the history can easily get maintained.

- f) **Emergent nature of practices Perspective**  
Tacit knowledge transfer practices change with time, environment and individuals, therefore organization should be able to embrace changes which are taking place due to science and technology by adopting new practices technologies like online community of practice, online meetings and webinars.

### 1.2.4. Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practice (PTKTP)

Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practice is the process of sharing experiences, insights and best practices in a professional organization so as to achieve organization goals and maintain competitiveness. It aims at ensuring that the internal knowledge is implemented in units and departments. Knowledge transfer is known to be victorious through the performance of the recipient unit or individuals. The process of knowledge transfer involves learning people, their culture, behavior and work processes. This is because it has been proved that organization's personnel are the most important assets to organizations victories not the technology, machines, and other assets.

Israel (2011); Mubaraka, Jirgi, & Mamman,(2013); Sunlai & Beyerlein (2015) argue that Universities have for a long time been detached from industry. Students are given knowledge which is very different from the reality or the problems required to be solved at the industry and the community. No clear relationship between a new university starting and the industry knowledge gap. Additionally, Bolling and Eriksson (2016) brings the case of Sweden higher education act compelling collaboration engagement between newly established universities with industries and the society. No clear understanding of the concept of knowledge transfer in institutions of higher education as it is reported by Sunclai &Beyerlein (2015) and Ramjeawon & Rowley (2017). The importance of knowledge transfer cannot be ignored in the knowledge economy. Scholars like Israel (2011), Jain and Joseph (2013) and Sunlai &Beyerlein, (2015,) encourage universities and other institutions of higher education to embrace a culture of knowledge transfer through its leadership, infrastructure and technology.

Meanwhile, Magara, Bukirwa & Kayiki (2011); Raza & Shah (2018) add that knowledge transfer between universities and industries through internship, consultancy and sharing of innovation patents and

intellectual property rights sharpens employees' skills and improve relationships between universities and industries. However Jain &, Joseph (2013) Ramjeawon & Rowley (2017) and Muqadas, Rehman, Aslam, & Rahman (2017) report that lack of institutional culture, expertise, administrative support and turn over hinders knowledge transfer in universities in developing countries.

#### 1.2.4.1 Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practice process

- a) Scouting for the professional tacit knowledge holder within or without the organization. This is the process of identifying the source of the knowledge which will be transferred.
- b) Encourage or motivate the personnel with the professional tacit knowledge to transfer it within the unit or a person that is in need directly or prepare a plan to facilitate the professional tacit knowledge group transfer such as a seminar, workshop, meeting and so forth where the individuals will share the knowledge and those in need receive and implement the knowledge.
- c) Evaluate and monitor the way the professional tacit knowledge is being transferred to ensure it is done rightly or sought for areas of improvement.

## 2.0 Method

The empirical study examined the professional tacit knowledge transfer practices at KIU library. The study was carried out at KIU Library from November 2018 to March 2019 using an online questionnaire, content analysis and observation. Thirty four (34) staff members' constituted the population and the sample using census sampling method. The study registered 74% responses (25 respondents). Content analysis and observation were used to get themes for the questionnaire and relevant literature for the study.

## 3.0 Results

### 3.1 The Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

From the 25 respondent in the online questionnaire study 12 (46%) were females and 13 (54%) were males and this shown diagrammatically in figure 1

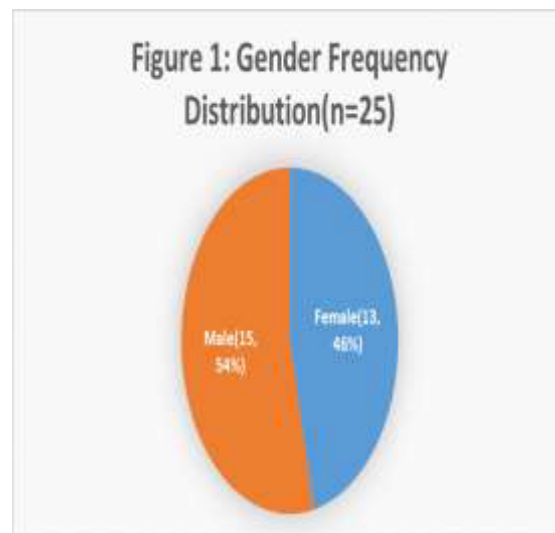


Figure 1: Gender Frequency Distribution

From data collected, more than half (64%) of the library personnel are between 25 to 35 years old. The library has senior staff with age 75 and above who mentors the younger staff and this is shown in figure 2.

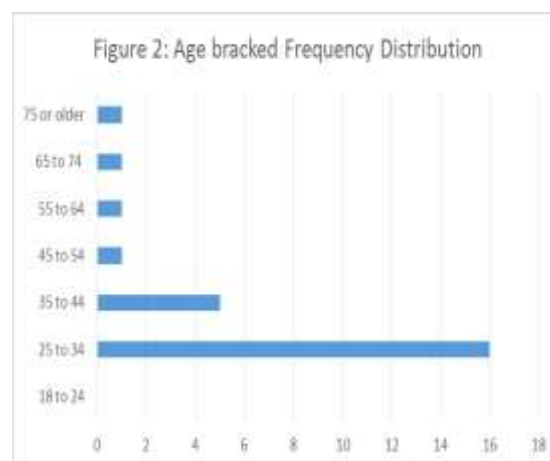
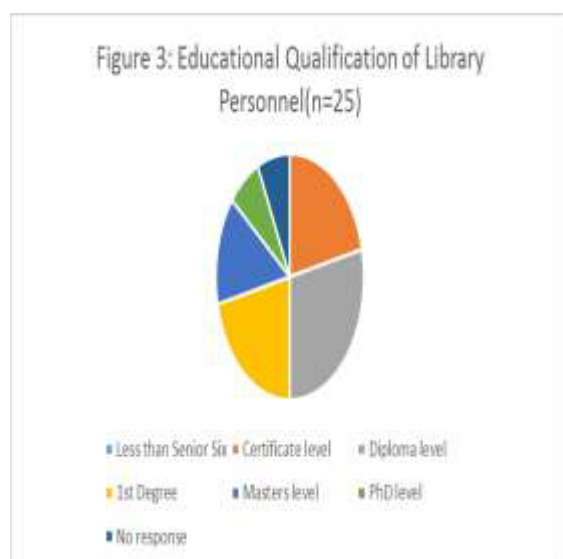


Figure 2: Age Bracket Frequency Distribution

The level of education of the staff members was examined and results are indicated in figure 3 above. The result above showed that half of the main stream of staff were holders of certificates and diploma qualifications.



**Figure 3: Educational Qualification of Library Personnel**

Table 1 reveals the respondents work experiences and the result shows that 41.67% of the staff have experience of 5 to 10 years and majority have less than 5 years. Meanwhile 20.83% have experience of over 10 years.

**Table1: Work experiences**

Experience	Responses	%
Less than 1 year	1	4%
1 year to 3 years	5	20%
3 year to 5 years	4	16%
5 years to 10 years	10	40%
10 years and above	5	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.1 What are the professional tacit knowledge practices implemented at the library?

Result tabulated in Table 2 reveals that participants rated workshops, seminars and meetings practice highest with 96% as the best practice compared to the rest of the practices carried out at KIU Library

**Table 2: Professional Knowledge Transfer Practices**

Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practices	Responses	%
Workshop/Seminar/Meetings	24	96%
Mentorship from senior staff	12	48%
Job rotation	11	44%
Internship	10	40%

Consortia Engagement	6	24%
Ad hoc expertise strategy	5	20%
Bench marking	4	16%
No response	1	4%

### 3.2 Which are the best tacit knowledge transfer practices implemented at the IBM library?

In table 3 above, respondents rated workshops, seminars and meetings as the best professional tacit knowledge transfer practices with 76%, followed by mentorships 40%. Meanwhile ad hoc external expertise (4%) was not an effective professional tacit knowledge transfer practice at Kampala International University library.

**Table 3: Best Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practices**

Best Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practices	Responses	%
Workshop/Seminar/Meetings	19	76%
Mentorship from Seniors	10	40%
Job rotation from one Section to another	7	28%
Collaboration/Consortia engagement	5	20%
Internship	2	8%
Bench-marking	2	8%

### 3.4 What are the challenges hindering the professional tacit transfer practices at the IBM library?

Table 5 shows that professional tacit knowledge transfer practices at KIU library is challenged by lack of motivation to staff to share (64%)

**Table 5: Challenges Hindering Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practices**

Knowledge Transfer Challenges	Responses	%
Lack of staff members motivation to share	16	64%
Lack of tacit knowledge transfer policy	10	40%
Lack of tacit knowledge transfer infrastructure	10	40%
Lack of top management support toward knowledge sharing and transfer	10	40%
Unclear understanding of Tacit knowledge	5	20%

Staff members turn over	3	12%
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### 3.5 What are your Suggestions for improvement of professional tacit knowledge practices in the library?

Table 6 indicate the suggestions that were given by the respondents as a way to improve tacit knowledge transfer among librarians at KIU. Motivation and sufficient time for implementing professional practice were the factors suggested by the majority of the responses (92%).

**Table 6: Suggestions for Improvement of Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer**

Suggestions	Responses	%
Motivate staff who share through a certificate of money	23	92%
Develop a tacit knowledge sharing policy for the library	22	88%
Provide sufficient time for practice	23	92%
Diversify training participants	2	8%
No response	2	8%

## 4 Discussions

### 4.1 Socio-demographic details of Study Participants

The findings reveal that the library has mature librarians with tacit knowledge that can be transferred to the majority (64%) of the younger librarians for the professional development.

### 4.2 Professional tacit knowledge transfer practices at KIU Library

Professional tacit knowledge transfer practices implemented at KIU Library include workshops, seminars, mentorship, job rotation, consortia engagement among others. Among the practices workshops and mentorship were ranked as the best practices 76% and 40% respectively. These findings agree with those in other university libraries in Southern Africa at the University of Fort Hare and University of KwaZulu-Natal (Muchaonyerwa & Mutula, 2017) and in Pakistan (Muqadas, Rehman, Aslam, & Rahman, 2017). Mentorship from senior staff to juniors (48%) came second, followed by job rotation from one department to another (40%).

Although mentor and mentee relationships was rated low (Lozinak, 2016, Ali & Khan, 2017) & (Muchaonyerwa & Mutula, 2017).

### 4.3 Benefits of professional tacit knowledge transfer at KIU Library and challenges

The study results reveal that professional tacit knowledge transfer improve professional performance (68%) and ensure business continuity in the library (13%) and generation of more professional knowledge (3%).

### 4.4 Challenges of Professional tacit knowledge transfer practices

The results indicate that staff motivation (64%), lack of official tacit knowledge transfer policy, (40%), lack of tacit knowledge transfer infrastructure (40%) and lack of top management support toward knowledge sharing and transfer (40%), staff turnover were the challenges associated with professional tacit knowledge transfer practices among librarians. Scholars like Israel (2011), Jain and Joseph (2013) and Sunlai & Beyerlein, (2015,) encourage universities and other institutions of higher education to invest in professional tacit knowledge transfer through its leadership, infrastructure and technology for business competitiveness. Above all the staff motivation seem to carry a bigger weight when it comes to tacit knowledge transfer especially between the Mentors and mentee relationship. Ramjeawon & Rowley (2017) and Muqadas, Rehman, Aslam, & Rahman (2017) advice that nurturing institutional culture, expertise, administrative support toward tacit knowledge transfer will go a long way to ensure a smooth flow of knowledge transfer in universities in developing countries.

### 4.5 Suggestions for improvement from respondents

Respondents (92%) in the study said that personal motivation was the most important factor to be considered in professional tacit knowledge transfer. "The facilitators should be given a certificate and money to be motivated to share their knowledge" A statement from one of the respondents). The above statement suggests the nature of rewards which the mentors should be given to transfer their tacit knowledge to the mentees. Bello & Oyekule (2014) and Rahman, Daud & Hassan (2017) indeed agree that tacit knowledge transfer is dependent on the personnel attitude and motivation to transfer the knowledge because its personnel knowledge stored in his or her mind. Institutional culture and administrative support should also be considered important in knowledge transfer.

## 5. 0 Conclusion

Professional Tacit Knowledge Transfer Practice is embedded in a theory proposed by Schatzki (2001). Effective tacit knowledge management brings success to libraries and many other organizations. Investment

in organizations should not only be emphasized on organizational technology and machinery but also on the human beings that use technology and machinery to achieve organizational goals and missions. In today's knowledge society, organization's knowledge equals its net worth. For business continuity and sustainability of organizational processes, effects of employee turnover should be reduced through proper professional tacit knowledge transfer. Deliberate support from top organizational administration and management toward internal and external knowledge sharing efforts will yield desired results. Practices such as motivating personnel mentorship, workshops, seminars, ad hoc sharing of knowledge and internship in institutions like Kampala International University will go a long way to assist the university library to manage its knowledge. The implication of this study shows that Kampala International University library and any other university libraries that wish to have a clear knowledge transfer practices should accept and promote the following:

- a. Create awareness among the university community on the benefits of professional tacit knowledge transfer.
- b. The top management should support the tacit knowledge transfer efforts in terms of policy, moral and financial.
- c. Establish a clear mechanism that will ensure the entire university community is involved in tacit knowledge transfer practices.
- d. Establish strong workshop and seminar processes that will enable free flow of tacit knowledge
- e. Establish a monitoring and evaluation tool for professional tacit knowledge transfer practices.

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