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**LEARNING MANAGEMENT'S IMPORTANCE
TO LIBRARY AND INFORMATION
SCIENCE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH**

Learning Management's Importance to Library and Information Science: An Interdisciplinary Approach

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Abstract – Learning management (LM) is now widely recognised as a key factor in organisational success and as such is of importance to libraries. LM is relevant to and has considerable importance with library and information professions. However the wider ramifications of the relationship between knowledge management and LIS as yet remain unclear. This will in all likelihood be a dynamic and multi-faceted relationship. This paper introduces key aspects of this relationship and in particular potential synergies and conflicts as reflected in the literature. The paper also introduces a research project at RMIT University that aims to investigate in detail these synergies and their context.

The study aims at exploring the relevancy of knowledge management (LM) to library and information science (LIS). Besides the review of relevant literature, the study has conducted an online survey of LM education programs offered by different schools of the world. An interdisciplinary approach of LM education is analysed to find its link with LIS.

After a random search of LM education programs, 30 graduate programs are investigated to identify leading academic and professional disciplines contributing to the promotion of LM education and research, and also to examine the extent and scope of LM education with special reference to LIS schools.

The survey finds that the highest number of LM graduate programs originated from LIS/Information Management (IM) followed by computing/engineering and business and management. The convergent course titles and wide range of LM skills and competencies clearly indicate its interdisciplinary nature. Finally, the paper explores some areas where both LIS and LM can contribute to each other and encourages LM implication in LIS education and library practices.

INTRODUCTION

Learning management (LM) is relatively a new area of investigation which integrates a wide range of concepts, theories and practices from different disciplines. The emergence of learning has led to the transformation of post-industrial information society into learningbased society. Since the mid-1990s, LM has attracted much attention (Ponzi and Koenig, 2002; Chowdhury, 2004; Schlögl, 2005) from many scholars and practitioners from different fields associated with business, management, library and information science, computer science, and so on. Many authorities describe LM as an emerging interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary field and explore Library and Information Science (LIS) as one of its major concerns (Reardon, 1998; Koenig, 1999; Davenport and Cronin, 2000; Ponzi and Koenig, 2002; Loon and Al-Hawamdeh, 2002; Al-Hawamdeh, 2003).

Simply speaking, LM is concerned with managing both recorded (explicit) and tacit learning (Chowdhury, 2004).

Library and information science (LIS), on the other hand, is generally concerned with recorded learning. According to Corral (1998), librarianship is often used to describe as the organisation of recorded learning, and some people view LM as just an up-market label for information management. Although LM is of recent origin, Sarrafzadeh (2005) finds its older roots in the LIS literature, when Hawkins (2000) claims that for many in the academic world, it is an old concept, a function historically performed by librarians. Davenport and Cronin (2000) cite Rowley (1999) and Schwarzwald (1999) that "within LIS community, LM is simply a case of new wine in old bottles". But Broadbent (1998) describes LM as not about managing or organising books or journals,

searching the Internet for clients or arranging for the circulation of materials. However, she considers these activities as parts of LM spectrum and processes in some way, and she virtually remarks that LM is not owned by any one group in an organisation nor by any one profession or industry. Koenig (1999) also finds no one ideal place for LM, because education for LM is likely to emerge in various places. Wen (2005) describes its emergence first in the business sector, then in higher education, and now in library management. Regardless of the fact, LM has been incorporated into formal LIS education and practice, hence the present study has been conducted in the context of LM's interdisciplinary nature, LM programs offered by a number of LIS schools, and LM initiatives taken by some libraries.

Within the last three decades, the library and information sectors have experienced massive discontinuous changes. Technological advances have changed the face of librarianship and have posed serious questions for libraries and the LIS professions. The forces shaping the profession of librarianship and the design of libraries are not solely technological. There are massive cultural, social, psychological and philosophical forces at work (Brophy, 2001).

Today's library users have higher expectations. Learning management emerging from similar changes has influenced the library and information professions with both opportunities and challenges. There are numerous definitions of LM. According to Gartner Group, learning management is 'A discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving and sharing of an enterprise's information assets' (Gartner Group 1997, p.n.p.). This definition reveals overlaps between LIS and LM. Furthermore, in recent years, LM has become visible on the radar screens of libraries (Gandhi, 2004). A body of literature has emerged that explicitly addresses learning management from the perspective of library and information professionals (Marouf, 2004). LM now has formal status as the 47th section of the activities of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to support the implementation of Learning Management culture in the libraries and information environment. A growing number of LIS schools now offer Master's degrees in learning management (eg Dominican, Emporia, Oklahoma, Loughborough, London Metropolitan University, etc) or feature the subject as a component of either Master's or undergraduate degrees (eg RMIT and other Australian universities).

Although it was from the late 90's that LM became popular in the literature, the mission of learning management has older roots in the LIS literature. Larry Prusak and Tom Davenport – the most cited learning management authors – in their paper in 1993 (T. H. Davenport & Prusak, 1993) call the LIS professionals to get out of the warehouse custodians concept or even as providers of centralised expertise and integrate their activities and goals with the whole

business of their organisations. In that paper, although they haven't used the learning management term, their focus on people as the most valuable information asset and the emphasis on the usage of information rather than controlling them, direct LIS professionals to the LM domain.

ROLE OF LIS PROFESSIONALS IN LEARNING MANAGEMENT

Learning management has been seen 'as a vehicle for enhancing the professional image and role of the information professional' (Southon & Todd, 2001, p.n.p.). The multidisciplinary nature of learning management has resulted in input from people in different fields.

However, there have been competing 'ownership claims' for primacy in the field as well as competition between disciplines (human resources managers, economists, IT and LIS professionals) for high level positions of learning management. The differences between learning management and information management is another element within the literature.

Most authors believe that learning management is wider than information management, due to its emphasis on such human aspects as learning creation and sharing (E. Davenport, 2004). Further survey evidence suggests that learning management is beginning to take over from information management in terms of publication output and citations (Gu, 2004). Thus, LIS professionals should expand their roles, learning and skills in order to take advantage of the new opportunities arising from learning management.

However, it seems that LIS professionals have been slow to go further and save opportunities arising from LM. There is a general criticism of LIS professionals that they are not ambitious and have no high expectations. Hence, they fail to seize opportunities that are available to engage in LM. Abell and Oxbrow blame information professionals for the lack of expectations: 'how many information professionals are ready to look for opportunities to extend their experience and influence? How many expect that they could and should succeed at senior management level?' (Abell and Oxbrow, 2001, p.166). Ferguson claims that despite the similarities between learning management and information management, not all LIS professionals have the ambition necessary to gain access to more senior learning management roles (Ferguson, 2004). Some commentators believe that this problem stems from their personal behaviour and criticise LIS professionals, and some point to inappropriate types of education.

Learning 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 learning management practice they will risk becoming irrelevant to their organisations, and will probably lose out in competition for employment to people from other industries.

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

The results of an empirical study from Canada shows that many information professionals involved in LM programs are playing key roles, such as the design of the information architecture, the development of taxonomies, or content management for the organisation's Intranet. Others are playing more familiar roles, such as providing information for the Intranet, gathering information for competitive intelligence or providing research services as requested by the learning management team (Ajiferuke, 2003). Elsewhere, research suggests that senior legal librarians (SLLs) are increasing in importance at their firms, as the new learning management technologies they govern become more crucial to delivering top-quality legal services (Valera, 2004). Comparing these results with the results of a similar research by Broady-Preston (2000) in the UK, reveals the growth of LIS professionals' involvement in the LM domain.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

The ultimate purpose of LM is to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of organisations. Although the origin of LM was in the business field, its practice has spread to the non-profit sector. Teng & Hawamdeh saw different benefits of LM for not for profit organisations such as improving communication among staff and between top management and also to promote a sharing culture (Teng & Hawamdeh, 2002). According to Wen, LIS survival in the face of competition from emerging groups, budget shortfall, and higher user expectations are driving forces for adoption of LM in LIS (Wen, 2005).

Shanhong suggests that LM injects new blood into the library culture which results in a sharing and learning

culture (Shanhong, 2000). According to Mphidi & Snyman (2004), converting personal learning into corporate learning for sharing purposes is the ultimate application of learning management (Mphidi & Snyman, 2004). Furthermore, White (2004) argues that in the 21st century, LM is increasingly becoming a crucial tool in helping to provide a dynamic and effective service to library users. Other potential benefits from the application of learning management in libraries would include the promotion of relationships in and between libraries, between libraries and users, and the strengthening of learning Internet working, and increasing the pace of learning flows (Shanhong, 2000).

Corporate (special) libraries have been involved in learning management from its beginning and have provided the leadership for corporate efforts in LM. Corporate librarians, such as Trish Foy, Laurence Prusak, and Paul Vassallo, for example, have assumed leadership roles (Townley, 2001). Ryske and Sebastian report that LM has shifted the Technology InfoCenter from cost centre to value-added centre, from offering a service to meeting the needs of customers and from information provider to learning partner. (Ryske & Sebastian, 2000). Marouf (2004) investigated the role and contribution of library and information centres towards LM initiatives in some USA corporations. The results suggest that there was widespread application in the development of learning repositories and databases of best practices and lessons learned. Also, use of Intranets, portals and sharing technologies were pervasive. However, quite a number of LM initiatives identified went little beyond traditional information management activities (Marouf, 2004).

In recent years, academic libraries have also taken LM seriously. Librarians in some academic libraries are the leaders of LM projects.¹ An overall assessment of the progress of LM projects in libraries would indicate that learning capture and sharing is the largest area of activity, which is hardly surprising given their core competencies in such fields. Most of following case studies are from academic libraries which have sometimes been called the 'heart of the university' because of the centrality of learning to the university's goals. So, they should be the heart of learning management for the same reason. White's case study (2004) on LM elements within Oxford University Library Services (OULS) focuses on perceptions of library staff on LM and their willingness on learning sharing. Both Jantz (2001) and Stover (2004) report on the introduction of new learning management systems to capture the tacit learning of reference librarians. Jantz (2001) has described the introduction of a new tool that has been developed by a team of reference librarians within the New Brunswick (NB) Campus Libraries of Rutgers University to capture and reuse the tacit and informal

learning of reference librarians. Similarly, Branin (2003) describes a learning bank at Ohio State University as a learning management system. This learning bank is a digital institution repository to capture all the intellectual assets of the university in a range of formats, including those that are unpublished, unstructured and unique.

There is a gap in both the LM literature and library practice as to how LM works in helping to capitalise on the intellectual assets of library workers. (White, 2004). Jantz claims that in many library settings, there is no systematic approach to organising the learning of the enterprise. (Jantz, 2001). He also argues that significant process and cultural issues must be solved before capturing the benefits of learning management. According to Gandhi (2004), most LM applications for reference services revolve around creating learning repositories, improving access, and enhancing the learning environment. Very few of these projects focus on managing learning as an asset that can add value or produce a return on investment (Gandhi, 2004). Most LM initiatives in libraries have not followed a systematic and logical approach/process to identify, organise, or share internal learning or best practices to improve the operational effectiveness of the library (Jantz, 2001).

The relationship of LM to reference work has been discussed in several papers. Two full papers (Gandhi, 2004) and (Stover, 2004) have been allocated to this issue. The importance of LM for reference services lies in capturing the tacit learning of reference librarians.

According to Perez (1999) learning management has long been the business of reference librarians. Gandhi (2004) describes this from the early efforts of reference librarians in capturing tacit learning through old information tools like card-files of frequently asked questions.

According to the literature, therefore, LM initiatives in libraries have a long way to go and have tremendous potential for improvement (Gandhi, 2004). It is clear that several steps must be undertaken for libraries to apply learning management.

Despite widespread agreements on the benefits of applying learning management in libraries, few studies have explained how to improve library operations through learning management. As has been mentioned above there is a wide variation in the types of learning management projects within libraries, and in various library sectors, including variations in definitions (Ajiferuke, 2003). There is no detailed protocol of standards and rules to follow and the reasons behind such variation should be explored (Cox, Patrick, & Abdullah, 2003). Clearly there is a need for more research in these areas.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. It falls largely within an interpretivist paradigm in that it seeks not to identify or test variables but rather to draw meaning from social contexts, in this case from the perceptions of the LIS professionals faced with major changes consequent on the emergence of learning management. The methodology employed includes literature review and document analysis, followed by webbased surveys of LIS professionals and in-depth case studies, including successful cases of libraries involving learning management. This latter includes instances where either library have had to broaden the scope of their activities to include LM, or LM cases in which libraries played an important part involving librarians. The survey has already been conducted and the data are currently being analysed.

The research is exploratory in nature. It is mostly based on the review of literature published in books, journals, conference proceedings, and in different web sites relevant to LM, LM education, LM education in LIS, graduate LM programs, LM practices in libraries, and LM skills and competencies. The study uses an interdisciplinary approach in LM education, and conducts a survey of English websites of major LM education providers in the world especially in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, UK, and USA. After then 30 graduates LM programs have been identified to investigate the disciplinary participation in the promotion of LM education and research, and to examine the nature and extent of programs specially offered by LIS schools.

Broadly, this study employed informetric approaches to examine the terms that can be used to describe LM in the context of LIS. Specifically, a content analysis of LM literature as indexed in the Library and Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA) was conducted to identify the most commonly used indexing terms to describe LM and the core terms with which LM can be described; all in an attempt to contextualise LM within the broader field/discipline of library and information science/studies. The LISTA database was deemed appropriate for this study owing to its controlled vocabulary and well-constructed thesaurus which allows for high precision and recall when searching for multidisciplinary subjects or topics such as 'learning management'. The database indexes more than 500 core journals, more than 50 priority journals and 125 selective journals in the field of library and information science. As the current study sought to investigate LIS scholars' perceptions of LM, it became necessary to use a subject-specific database. The database also allows searches to be conducted within or using 44 different searchable fields or tags, respectively. To extract relevant data from the database, a search of DE 'Learning Management' was conducted within the subject field, where DE denotes subject descriptor. The searchable tag DE performs an exact search of the subject headings, companies, people and author-supplied key words for

terms describing a document's contents. Data were downloaded in the months of June and July 2008 and the search was limited to the years 1961 to 2007, split into four ten-year and one seven-year periods. The start publication year was dictated by the fact that the earliest published document as indexed in LISTA was published in 1968 while the grouping of years as aforementioned was for purposes of comparing the developments in one decade with another. Only two types of articles, namely magazine and journal articles, were considered.

CONCLUSION

We have observed mixed feelings and an ambivalent attitude about the relationship between LM and LIS. Some support that LM as a field of LIS has been practised by librarians for a long time, while others see its emergence from business or ICT sectors. But both LM and LIS are interdisciplinary, and are concerned with the identification, acquisition, capture, processing, storage, retrieval, and use of learning. While LM deals with tacit as well as explicit learning, LIS focuses mostly on explicit or recorded learning. In this sense, the LIS activities are seen just as a part of LM process. Loughridge (1999) cites Koenig (1996) as "we would of course recognise LM as librarianship or at least as an extension of librarianship—but, unfortunately, the business community does not yet recognise that essential identity". Therefore, to establish our position in LM environment, we still have to embrace more challenges.

Learning management is a wide, interdisciplinary field and it goes beyond individual skills and qualifications to embrace the many aspects of management of a key resource. If LIS professionals are to play more prominent roles in learning management, they will in all likelihood have to promote their expertise more widely, and also aspire to different roles of a more strategic and policy-making nature. For many in the information professions this is likely to entail learning different kinds of skills and opening up to new ways of thinking.

However, this is not a challenge faced by the LIS professions alone, and several traditional areas such as human resources management find themselves faced with the same challenge. Underlying such perspectives in a library context however, is recognition that the practice of learning management has much to offer to the management of libraries and for advancement of the LIS profession. The nature of this contribution is as yet unclear, but librarians would be unwise to dismiss learning management as being just another fad. It is much too well established within the private sector to be dismissed so lightly, and by a group that is much more vulnerable to change than many others. Fortunately, the results of the webbased survey suggest that not only do LIS professionals have

a positive view of learning management, but also that they see it as providing opportunities and benefits for the LIS professions. There is a responsibility for the LIS schools to equip LIS graduates with the LM skills needed. Undoubtedly the current LIS program has already included some core elements of LM, but there is also a need to equip graduates with competencies in management and business. The full results of the survey will be presented at future conferences, in the meantime work is continuing on the selection of case study subjects.

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