**Relevance of Knowledge Sharing to Knowledge Retention and Growth: An Overview**

**Okite Onyedikachi Maxwell**
**Owali Joseph Orji**
**Adigbo Oluchi Jovita**
**& Olughu Iro Imaga**
Library Department, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana

*Abstract*
*The paper relies on existing literature in knowledge and knowledge management. Knowledge sharing is conceptualized as the distribution, dissemination, transfer and exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas within and among individuals or groups in organizations with the aim of making such knowledge, experience and ideas available for application in finding solutions to specific organizational problems and challenges. Types and characteristics of knowledge are highlighted; mechanisms and tools for knowledge sharing are explained. The paper recommends that knowledge sharing activities should be sponsored and supported by individuals and groups, government agencies and governments at all levels for knowledge retention, knowledge growth and knowledge expansion, for the overall social and economic well-being of the society at large.*
*Keywords: knowledge, knowledge sharing, knowledge retention, knowledge growth*

**Introduction**

Universally, it is an accepted truth and a recognized fact that knowledge is power and acts as a very useful and indispensible tool in the hands of mankind, whether it is for personal life, professional life, social or corporate life (Mruthyunjaya, 2011). The above statement draws support from the holy Bible at the book of Hosea, chapter four verse six (Hosea 4:6), where it states that "my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge". In other words, knowledge is the driving force in all human activities in every society, and any society that lacks knowledge is bound to be backward or literally dead. The foregoing supports the statement that "knowledge is power."

Tiamiyu and Aina (2008) assert that knowledge acts as the main engine for economic growth, hence, researchers coined the term "knowledge economy". Also according to the World Bank (1999) cited in Tiamiyu and Aina (2008) poor countries and poor people are left behind by rich ones not because they have less capital but because they have less knowledge.

**The Concept of knowledge**

The Oxford Advanced Learners (English Dictionary) defined knowledge as information, understanding and skills that one gains through education or experience. It further states that knowledge is that state of knowing about a particular fact or situation. From this perspective, it simply means that knowledge is to know about what, how, where and when regarding a particular thing or concept. Alegbeleye (2010) conceptualized knowledge as comprehended information that is capable of supporting action, while action is the application of knowledge. Agudu and Aguolu (2002) cited in Eze, Ugwuanyi and Anaeme (2010) define knowledge as information that has been interpreted and processed according to a point of view, preparing the receiver for appropriate actions. Tiamiyu and Aina (2008) see knowledge as an organized accumulation of information at a specific point in a network of communication, where a point could be a human being, a document or a database. Leonard and Sensper (1998) cited in Mutula and Mooko (2008) view knowledge as information that is relevant, actionable and based at least on particular experience. Knowledge is also viewed by Turban and Frenzo (1992) cited in Ogundipe (2009) as organized information capable of solving problems. Arua and Ede (2016) refer to knowledge as information that is contextualized, relevant and actionable. They explained that having knowledge implies that it could be exercised to solve a particular problem where as having information does not carry the same connotation. This means that information does not become knowledge until it is exercised by human mind to solve a problem.

From the above definitions so far it could be observed that information is a recurring concept in the definition of knowledge. That is to say that information is a common denominator to the build up to knowledge; or put in another way, information is a precursor to knowledge. Information itself is made up of data that has been organized. A build up to knowledge can be illustrated thus: data- information-knowledge. A diagrammatic illustration of the build-up to knowledge is shown in the pyramid below

**The Concepts of Data, Information, and Knowledge and Their Relationships**

**Data**

Data as mentioned above is made up of bits of observed phenomenon, figures, news items and so on. According to Ogundipe (2009: 338) it is made up of discrete objective facts about

events and things which merely lists but does not provide the value to do with the facts. They are un-manipulated facts in their raw forms. He stated that for data to become information, data must be sorted, grouped, analyzed, summarized and cleaned for a specific purpose. Data therefore are regarded as raw materials or as input from which information is produced (O'Brien cited in Mutula & Mooko: 2008)

## Information

When data is meaningfully aggregated in a context, it becomes information. Put the other way, information is made up of bits and pieces of data items (figures, words, symbols, observation etc.) that have been contextually organized by the human mind to arrive at a meaning and is communicated. According to Igwe, Nnadozie and Unagha (2015) information is data with relevance and purpose, having undergone some degree of processing (contextualization, calculation, interpretation and condensation). Information therefore is a derivative of data. It conveys social, political, economic, scientific and technological trends and individuals seek information to have answers to their questions of what? Who? Where? And when? of their various problems.

## Knowledge

When information about a particular problem or challenge is aggregated at a particular point (human mind) and synthesized and analyzed by the human mind, an insight , clue or idea is gained; and, when action is taken based on the idea, insight or clue to solve such a problem, it becomes knowledge (know-what, know-how, know-when, know-why and know-where). Knowledge is a derivative of information. Knowledge is actionable information. Igwe, Nnadozie and Unagha (2015) posit that knowledge comprises strategy, practice, methods and approach. It is closely linked to doing a thing and implies know-how and understanding. This means to have knowledge is to know how to do a thing.

### Characteristics of knowledge

Knowledge has various characteristics. Nwokocha, Unagha, Igwe and Ewa-Otu (2015) listed some of the characteristics to include that:

- ❖ Knowledge can be used over and over without being consumed by the user
- ❖ It can be used by many individuals at the same time

❖ It can be used in many different locations simultaneously

❖ Knowledge is non-subtractive and independent of space. Their use by one person does not exclude their use by another, that is, another person obtaining and using knowledge does not diminish another person's ability from doing the same.

❖ Knowledge is unlimited and renewable

❖ The cost of knowledge is unaffected by how many people who eventually use it

❖ Knowledge is time dependent and ever-changing; it makes itself obsolete quickly

**Types of knowledge**

There are two major types of knowledge. Other classifications of knowledge fall within these two major types; they are tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge.

**Tacit knowledge**

Tacit knowledge is knowledge that resides in people's minds. It involves some intangible factors such as one's belief and values. It is difficult to extract or codify from the minds of individuals and write down. They are personal knowledge used by members of organizations to performs their works and make sense of their duties. Tacit knowledge is learned through extended period of experiencing and doing a task (Choo 2000; cited in Stephen,Mutula and Mooko, 2008). Polany (1996) cited in Nnadozie, Nwosu, Ononogbo and Nnadozie (2015) see tacit knowledge as knowledge ingrained in a person's belief, intentions, values, skills, ideas, experience, expertise and conceptual understanding. Furthermore, it can be described as the cumulative store of understanding experience, insight and know-how. It is an intangible and more complex form of knowledge which cannot be easily codified, recorded or documented. It essentially exists in the mind or brain of the individual. Similarly Ogundipe (2009) posits that tacit knowledge essentially is hidden knowledge buried in the memories of employers and other connected people. It includes what is learned from doing, observing informal information and even gossip. It is more difficult to recognize, collect, codify, store and disseminate.

**Explicit knowledge**

Unlike tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge is formally expressed using language, signs or symbols. It is the type of knowledge that has been captured, codified and expressed in any physical form viz; diagrams, pictures, tables and texts. Explicit knowledge is easily stored, communicated and presented as rules, policies, specifications, procedures, routines, patents, standards, processes or formulae (Alvan & Leidner cited in Nnadozie, Nwosu, Ononogbo & Nnadozie, 2015). Explicit knowledge may be recorded in repots, books, technical papers, memos, minutes of meetings, data bases, photos, videos, sound recordings and other media. (Klobas as cited in Ogundipe, 2009: 340). This means that explicit knowledge is presented in different formats and media. It is knowledge that is articulated, recorded or documented in a way that makes it possible for transferring, dissemination and sharing of knowledge.

**Knowledge Sharing**

Knowledge sharing also referred to as knowledge dissemination, knowledge transfer, knowledge distribution and knowledge exchange, has drawn the attention of many scholars in the field of knowledge management. Igwe, Ewa-otu & Adedeji (2016) conceptualize knowledge sharing as the exchange of knowledge between and among individuals and within and among teams and organizational units that apply the same knowledge to solve specific tasks better, faster and in cost effective manner. Cheng, Ho and Lau (2009 cited in Igwe, Ewa-otu and Adedeji, 2016) see knowledge sharing as communicating knowledge within a group of people, the group may consist of members or workers engaged in formal institution or informal friends and the interaction may occur between a minimum of two individuals. Ubogu and Njoku (2017) cited Hadi (2015) who defined knowledge sharing as the process of transferring knowledge and ideas and experiences by an individual to another in an organization. It is also a process whereby members are encouraged to donate, contribute and share knowledge, ideas and experience in a pool so that it would be available for members to use in finding solutions to organizational problems and as well as knowledge retention and growth.

**Mechanisms for Knowledge Sharing**

Some of the mechanisms for knowledge sharing are: brainstorming, informal discussions, storytelling, and communities of practice, mentoring and coaching. Others are forums and meetings, workshops, training and seminars (Mutula & Mooko, 2008; Igwebuike Onyekweodiri & Agbo, 2015). Some of these mechanisms are briefly discussed below:

**Brainstorming:**

This involves the generation of ideas by talented and experienced people in a group discussions. When ideas are generated, they are used for problem solving in the organization. Brainstorming helps the group to collectively identify and come up with solutions to solve the problem in the organization.

**Story Telling**

Story telling is an ancient and traditional method of conveying messages, ideas and promoting values and good morals. It is a good method of changing behaviors. This is because people are receptive during storytelling especially when they are surprising and humorous. It is a good method of capturing tacit knowledge.

**Communities of Practice**

Communities of practice refer to self-organized group of experts with common interest, who meet informally to build each other's capabilities and exchange knowledge in their areas of expertise. The primary objectives of communities of practice are to share knowledge and promote learning in an area of interest. Membership of 'cop' is voluntary; meetings can be face to face or via electronic means of communication.

**Forums and Meetings**

Forums and meetings involve the meeting of small groups and or large forums which provide opportunity for sharing knowledge, ideas and experience. Such groups have to be organized with the intention of learning from one another. Conferences, congresses and round table discussions groups provide opportunities for knowledge sharing.

**Workshops, Training and Seminars**

These are veritable methods of knowledge sharing usually; experts are invited to do presentations in specific areas of knowledge. Often, it involves practical training (i.e. hands on training) which provides opportunities for participants to capture new ideas and experience which they take home to improves on their performances for improved organizational performance and productivity.`

**Mentoring**

This is a learning situation between two employees- a more experienced staff known as the mentor and a less experienced staff known as the mentee. The more experienced staff (mentor) shares his/her knowledge, experience and ideas with the less experienced one (mentee). Mentoring is learning relationship in which the mentors impart knowledge, skills and ideas to prepare the mentees for the future demands and roles of their careers.

## Coaching

Coaching or to coach means to teach skills, especially to teach someone or a group of persons some skills in preparatory for events like competition. Coaching as a mechanism for knowledge sharing is especially aimed at developing new qualifications and skills of an employee to improve his or her job performances. Coaching focuses mainly on the employees predefined needs as they relate to his or her job, and it aims at developing abilities to meet targeted goals in a given work situation (CIDA, 2003 cited in Igwebuike, Onyekwodiri & Agbo, 2015: 141).

## Technologies for Knowledge Sharing

There are several technologies for knowledge sharing. These technologies include but are not limited to:

a. **E-mail:**

Electronic mail is one of the most commonly used communication tools for collaborative activities. It is useful for collaborative and project based activities as well as offers students the ability to reach outside the classroom walls (Mutula & Mooko, 2008) E-mail as a means of communication exists in several variant formats. List serve for example is one to many mailing lists where a group interested in a particular topic shares messages relevant to the topic of discussion.

b. **Facebook:**

This is the most subscribed media platform. A Facebook page is usually created and focuses on one small community's internal communication. The specific information is shared only within members when it focuses on the wider audience; the page is accessible to all the members and the consumer public.

c. **On-line conference tools:**

On-line conference tools enhance and promote instant communication and knowledge and information sharing between the community members for increasing the sense of community (Igwebuike, Onyekweodiri & Agbo, 2015). One of the members sets up the meeting, shares the link with others and people join with their own devices to the On-line meeting. Some on-line conference tools are: flash meeting, Go To meeting, Skype etc. Others include: Google Docs, Google drive, Intranet, LinkedIn and Meet-up.

**Knowledge Sharing As a Tool for Knowledge Retention and Growth**

The word retention is derived from the word retain which means to keep, to continue to have or hold or to keep in place. Growth means development or increase (*Oxford Advanced Learners English Dictionary*). Growth as used in this context also means expansion. So, knowledge retention means to keep knowledge in a place or to keep it and hold and prevent it from departing from a place. Knowledge growth means to increase or expand knowledge.

Knowledge sharing through coaching and mentoring promotes knowledge retention in an organization. Coaching and mentoring involves the process of transferring knowledge (Know-how) from a more experienced personnel to a less experienced one in an organization. The more experience personnel maybe a staff who has worked long enough and is about to retire and leave the organization. He may also have found a better job and decides to leave the organization. Either way, if the experienced staff leaves the organization without imparting knowledge and skills to other personnel in the organization, the organization loses the knowledge. So coaching and mentoring ensures that knowledge is retained in the organization. Coaching and mentoring as mechanisms for knowledge sharing promotes knowledge retention in organizations. Tacit knowledge is the type of knowledge that is especially shared through the mechanisms of coaching and mentoring.

Brainstorming, as a mechanism for knowledge sharing supports knowledge growth. Brainstorming involves open discussion by a group either face to face or electronically over an issue of common interest. The issue may be finding solution to specific organizational or professional problem or challenge or even new ways of solving a problem. Members of the group freely contribute their ideas and experiences during brainstorming sessions. The cross breading of ideas experiences and knowledge (robbing of minds and iron sharpens iron) in a

brainstorming session often results to new ideas and knowledge being generated, thus, knowledge growth and knowledge expansion.

Storytelling sessions (e.g. moonlight tales) are platforms for dissemination and sharing of ideas, knowledge and good morals from older generations to younger generations in African traditional societies. These stories are ingrained and retained in the minds of the younger ones. As they grow up, they often fall back on their memories (retained knowledge) for such stories to guide them make good decisions and take actions for better living in the society. Story telling is not only a means of knowledge retention, it is also a mechanism for transferring knowledge and ideas from one generation to another.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Knowledge is power. Lack of knowledge constitutes an impediment to the development of an individual, organization and the society at large. Poor and underdeveloped societies and countries are so because they lack knowledge to exploit their human and natural resources for the development of their countries and societies. On other hand, rich and developed countries acquire, retain and grow knowledge in every discipline and human endeavor, which they use to exploit both human and natural resources for social and economic well-being of the society, as well as scientific and technological development of the country. Business organizations also need knowledge to maximize their productive capacities for profit making. Knowledge retention ensures that already acquired knowledge is not lost, while, knowledge growth results to emergence and expansion of new knowledge.

Knowledge retention and growth are achieved through knowledge sharing. Mechanisms for knowledge sharing include brainstorming, storytelling, mentoring and coaching etc. as explained earlier. Information and communication technology (ICT) tools enhance knowledge sharing.

It is therefore recommended that knowledge sharing activities be encouraged, sponsored and supported by individuals, organizations, professionals bodies, governments at all levels and their agencies for knowledge retention and growth, and, for the overall economic, and social well-being of the society and, as well as for the scientific and technological advancement of the country.

# References

Alegbeleye, B (2010). Old wine in new bottle: A critical analysis of the relationship between knowledge management and library and information science. Paper presented at the 48th National Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian Library Association with the theme: knowledge Management for National Development held at Abuja International Conference Centre, 18-24 July.

Arua, G. N. & Ede, C. E. (2016). Information Professionals and the Implementation of knowledge management programmes in Nigerian libraries. *Ebonyi Journal of Library and Information Science*.Vol. 3. (1). 100-113.

Eze, M. E., Ugwuanyi, A. E. & Anaeme, F. D. (2010). Public Libraries driving access to knowledge in the 21st century. Paper Presented at the 48[th]National Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian Library Association, held at Abuja, International Conference Centre. 18-24 July, 2010.

Igwe, K.N, Ewa-Otu, B. E. & Adediji, A. F. (2016). Knowledge sharing behaviours and practices in organizations in Nigeria. *Ebonyi Journal of Library and Information Science*. Vol. 3. (19). 40-54.

Igwebuike, E. U., Onyekweodiri, N. E. & Agbo, A. D (2015). knowledge sharing behaviours and patterns in organizations. In Igwe, K. N., Nnadozie, C. O, Uzuegwu, .P. &Naga, M. M. (Ds.) *Fundamentals Of Knowledge Management*. 140-146 Lagos: Zeh Communications Nigeria.

Mruthyunjaya, H. C. (2011). *Knowledge Management.* New Delhi: PHI, Learning private limited.

Mutula, S. M. & Mooko, N. P. (2008). Knowledge management in Aina, L. O., Mutula, S. M. & Tiamiyu, M .A (Eds). *Information and Knowledge Management In The Digital Age: Concepts, Technologies and African Perspectives* (Pp 269-299) Ibadan: Third World Information Services.

Nnadozie, C. O, Nwosu, C. C, Ononogbo, R. U, & Nnadozie, C. C. (2015). Typology of knowledge and conceptualization of knowledge management In Igwe, K. N., Nnadozie, C. O, Uzuegbu, C.P. & Naga, M. M. (Eds.). *Fundamentals of knowledge management for the knowledge* (pp. 19-31) Lagos: Zeh Communications Nigeria.

Nwokocha, U., Unagha, A. O., Igwe, K. N. & Ewa-Otu, E. (2015). Exploring the knowledge economy and development of knowledge management In Igwe, K. N., Nnadozie, C. O, Unagha, A. O., Uzuegbu, C.P. & Naga, M. M. (Eds.). *Fundamentals of knowledge management for the knowledge Economy* (pp. 52-57) Lagos: Zeh Communications Nigeria.

Ogundipe, O. O. (2009). *Modern library management for information professionals in developing countries*. Benin City: Ambi Press.

Tiamiju, M. A. & Aina, L. O. (2008). *Information and knowledge management in the digital society. An African perspective*: In Aina, L. O., Mutula, S. M. & Tiamuju, M. A (Eds). Information and Knowledge Management; concepts, technologies and African perspectives. Ibadan: Third World Information Services.