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Merging of Library and Information Services: The Bank of Uganda Experience

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Abstract:

Many corporate bodies are making organizational changes to reflect the changing roles of libraries and information centers. One increasingly common response to the changes is to reorganize the the departments involved in library services so that they are part of a corporate information services department. Most organizations have got a corporate library as well as a department that offers services relating to public information dissemination, officially mandated to propagate official information of the organization. Integration of the library with the public information services department gives opportunities as well as challenges for the library. According to Oden (2001), full integration of disparate sources of information requires merging the library and corporate information services and in most cases, this merging develops greater information variety both in structure and focus.

This paper examines the opportunities and challenges of this merging by taking Bank of Uganda as the case where the corporate Knowledge Management Centre was recently merged with the public information services division of the bank. With the coming to the scene of real time information platforms, majorly social media, the library has found itself in a position where it has to adapt to these new technologies. By the same token, the public information services department has found these real time information platforms to be very handy in as far as information dissemination is concerned. This technological transformation has meant an increasing overlap between library services and public information services, making and integrated approach more sensible. The major source of data will be by literature review as well as by participant observation.

Key words: *Corporate library, Knowledge Management Centre, Information services, Bank of Uganda*

Introduction & Background

Corporate Information Services relate to those functions and activities aimed at achieving the objectives and goals of a corporate organisation through dissemination and transmission of information, publicity as well as public relations .This is always achieved by utilizing multi-media systems for effective information dissemination and publicity, while performing a signal service in acting as a bridge between the organisation and its stakeholders. The main aim of corporate information services department therefore is to create awareness about the organisation's policies, activities, plans and programmes intended for public consumption among all stakeholders. The information services of a corporate organisation must therefore be designed in a way so as to meet the information and communication needs of an organisation. From the subject of Information Science, we can look at Information services as the representation, storage, supply as well as retrieval of relevant information and knowledge (Stock & stock, 2013). Information services in a corporate organisation incorporates the specialised platforms with a wide spectrum from business and press information to Internet applications and company intranets, all dedicated to information dissemination.

Several corporate institutions have merged their libraries and information centres/ units to form a merged information services organization. It is believed that with the rise of Information Technology, a natural convergence of these units is taking place and integrated organizations will best provide support in these areas. As information services and libraries represent critical support areas of organizations, it is important to understand how merged units are proceeding and the effectiveness of merged information services in organizations. Also corporate bodies evolve and change with times dictated by circumstances of the day and of the times, thus driving further the urge to have some units of the organisation to get merged and maximise the synergy. In our most recent case at Bank of Uganda, the Knowledge Management Centre (the Corporate Library of Bank of Uganda) has been moved from the Economic Research Department to Communications department. The Communications Department at Bank of Uganda handles the corporate information services and the public relations roles of the Bank, including the official dissemination of all information about Bank of Uganda.

About Bank of Uganda

The Bank of Uganda (BOU) is the Central Bank of the Republic of Uganda established in 1966, by Act of Parliament. BOU is 100% owned by the Government of Uganda. The Board of Directors of the Bank of Uganda is the supreme policy making body of the Bank. It is chaired by the Governor and deputised by the Deputy Governor. In the process of fulfilling the Bank's mission" *To foster price stability and a sound financial system"* and vision "*To be a centre of excellence in upholding macroeconomic stability*", the bank among others, carries out the following functions: Issue Uganda's national currency/legal tender, the Uganda Shilling (UGX), act as banker to the Government of Uganda, supervise and regulate financial institutions in Uganda, manage the country's external/foreign reserves as well as, the country's external debt.

The Bank has got different departments and functions which act as Communities of Practice, all aiming at contributing to the vision and mission of Bank of Uganda. The Knowledge Management Centre (KMC) at Bank evolved from a Research Library in the Economic Research department, whose primary role was to provide research support to the department. With the professional and technological changes over time, the KMC was transformed into "a central reference point for enterprise-wide information and strategic learning needs and open to all Bank staff as well as the public." This therefore meant that the KMC was mandated with among others, to be an Information Services section in the organisation.

Some reasons for merging Library and Information services at Bank of Uganda

The major objective of the merging of the Knowledge Management Centre and the Information services at Bank of Uganda was to bring together the functions of the two smaller sections of different departments in the Bank to achieve a more aligned organisational structure. The Communications Department being the official unit in charge of information dissemination for Bank of Uganda, manages all publications produced by the Bank. According to Argenti (2013), there is needed to recognise that the business environment is constantly changing and also the public's expectations of corporations are quite different from what they were decades back. This therefore calls for the need to strategically align different functions of the organisation, to develop a cohesive communication plan within the organisation while emphasizing the critical link between corporate information services and the overall organisational strategy.

The Bank through Business Process Re-engineering, merged the Knowledge Management Centre (hitherto known as The Library) with the Information Resource Centre of Communications Department, a move which brought under one roof several services including; information & knowledge management, coordination of production of all Bank publications, oversight of the Money Museum, control of the Bank website and coordination of the use of social media. The merger also brought together related skills and knowledge.

Bringing scattered yet related Information services activities under one management in order to maximise synergies was the major objective of merging the Knowledge Management Centre (Library) and Information Services division and here below are the major activities that were cutting across the two separate units, now merged.

- ***Information literacy programs – Financial Information***

The Communications Department also champions the Financial Literacy program within the Bank, which is majorly aimed at providing as relevant financial information to the stakeholders, in a bid to create a populace that makes informed financial decisions. In order to have a successful Financial Literacy campaign the Bank formulated a Financial Literacy Information Sharing Group (FLISG) whose core mandate is to provide a forum to share information and ideas between the broad community of stakeholders and partners about developments and potential developments in the financial sector. With this in consideration, the KMC also runs programs aimed at promoting Information Literacy among the body of users.

- ***Knowledge Sharing sessions***

The Information Resources Division carries out knowledge sharing sessions across the bank. The sessions maybe either general and therefore bankwide or group specific, to meet the unique needs of the group so as to promote a culture of continuous learning and development. The presentations are disseminated to any other interested staff who might have missed out and the practice helps to advance the development of knowledge networks/communities of practice.

- ***Information Dissemination Through Public Awareness Programs***

The merger strengthened the communication effectiveness through the creation of a solid team that can now sustain dedicated Public Education programs and effective engagement with stakeholders. Since there was an increase in staff strength, it improved direct interaction with stakeholders, which is important for immediate feedback and unadulterated communication. In addition, there is increased engagement with professional bodies and associations through town hall meetings, radio quizzes, exhibitions, public lectures and debates, use of the museum for public awareness, as well as working with currency centers and branches for communication purposes.

- ***Social Media and Website Management.***

Librarians are known to be versatile in the use of technology and therefore it is demanded of them to adapt quickly to the changing technologies in order to engage their users. The Bank's stake holders include Government bodies such as the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and Parliament, Financial market players such as supervised financial institutions, The business community, Investors including off-shore investors, Development partners such as IMF and the World Bank, Strategic partners such as MEFMI and the East African central banks and other central banks in the world. Others include; The general public, The internal audience, which comprise staff, contractors and consultants in the Bank, print and electronic media and Members of academia, researchers and think-tanks like the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), whom the Bank works with to carry out economic analysis that helps advance the role of the Bank. This mix of stakeholders prefer varying channels through which they access information therefore amalgamating skills than can handle numerous information dissemination channels effectively improved the Bank's communication agenda. The team uses Social Media especially among the youth through platforms such as Facebook to communicate information such as the Central Bank Rate (CBR). It also disseminates important videos like excerpts from the Governor issuing the monthly Monetary Policy Statement through YouTube. The Bank also uses Twitter to communicate in real time at specific BoU events such as the Annual Joseph Mubiru Memorial Lectures. Lately, the Human Resources Department is being encouraged to consider recruitment by head hunting through avenues like LinkedIn. Added skills to the department are using the BoU website is the “front office” of the institution and therefore prioritize continuous upgrading so that the website remains a reliable, dynamic and interactive tool to facilitate two-way communication with external stakeholders. To emphasize the gravity of the benefits, the BOU Website was voted the best central bank website in Africa, and Bank of Uganda was recognized as the best central bank in the use of Twitter as a channel for communication.

In conclusion the merging of the Knowledge Management Centre and the Communication department has displayed to us opportunities and challenges as highlighted by Sheffield, Silver and Todorinova, (2013) of how to manage service integration, resource reallocation and planning, and implementing new types of services. All this however is to re-align the focus of the organization for the betterment of streamlining operations towards the mission and vision of the organization.

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