

**KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT CULTURE AMONG THE LIBRARY STAFF
OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract: *The emergence of knowledge management (KM) has led university libraries to realize the importance of its application for effectiveness and returns from its knowledge assets. Library as a treasure-house of human knowledge, participates in knowledge acquisition and organization, and becomes an important link in the knowledge innovation chain. However, changes towards KM require innovation in knowledge culture among the staff because culture is a popular concept that explains the intangible and soft issues in organizations. The theory of organizational culture includes many aspects of culture, some of them invisible, like attitudes, beliefs, behavioral norms, basic assumptions and values, some of them visible, like systems and institutions, artifacts and products, rituals and behaviors. This paper reports the results of a case study of motivation and barriers to*

employees' participation in knowledge management culture and knowledge sharing at Limkokwing University of Technology and Creative Library. This study also investigates the staff awareness and their perceptions towards knowledge management culture. Apart from that, this paper attempts to look at the role of the staff in the development of knowledge culture within their departments and suggests a pragmatic approach to the implementation of knowledge management culture for academic libraries.

Keywords: *Knowledge management culture, knowledge barriers, Limkokwing University Library, academic libraries.*

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the current information and knowledge era, increasing number of organizations, including academic libraries in Malaysia recognized the need to implement knowledge management. Economic growth and wealth creation is no long bound by land, labor and capital, but more recently been replaced by knowledge, technology and innovation. The findings of a study by Chong (2006) revealed that all knowledge management (KM) efforts must be centered around people in an organization where all sharing take place. KM is concerned with cultural change, focusing on behavioral changes towards creating a working environment. Current environment sees that knowledge becomes a common factor and workers in the organization are encouraged to be involved in knowledge activities as their core responsibilities. This has been agreed by Abell and Oxbrow who described that in order to successfully implement successful knowledge sharing there must be changes in the corporate culture. Organizational culture helps shape various employees with different background and ethnicity. Therefore, there is a need to act upon cultural dimension which was introduced by Hofstede (1983).

Libraries need to reposition or enhance themselves to act as KM centres for small businesses, providing both KM and competitive intelligence (CI) services. An increasing number of corporate libraries are managing their knowledge by archiving information in document form, maintaining dynamic databases and data warehouses of corporate knowledge, and mapping human knowledge within the organization. (Raja Abdullah, Adnan , Jusoff, 2010). This is because, libraries of all sizes and types are embracing digital collections, although most libraries will continue to offer both print and digital collections for many years to come. (Tenopir, 2003). Sarrafzadeh quoted that KM has given library a new lease of life. Library is not going to be closed but has come up with a new vision and quite quickly becomes very much appreciated and it is a leading player in the KM field. LIS community exhibits a positive attitude towards introducing KM to libraries, and not only because this could bring libraries closer to their parent organization, but also because it might help them to survive in an increasingly challenging environment. (Sarrafzadeh, Martin and Hazeri, 2010)

It is not about limiting the frontiers of knowledge, but more importantly effective use and exploitation of all types of knowledge to fulfill the business and economic activities. In the educational sector, the library management and services have increasingly applied ICT and utilized the electronic information resources to complement the conventional

materials. Librarians have played key roles in the collecting, storing, organizing and disseminating of knowledge to society. Although the advent of internet has brought predictions of the demise of the libraries, it has proven that libraries are, not only crucial but librarians' role as knowledge providers has become even more significant. In universities, for example the head librarians continue to become important partner in decision-makings while administrators, professors, and students see the library as the nerve of the campus. Libraries have indeed changed radically from their custodial role and emerged as dynamic partners in KM programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge management can be defined as the process of transforming information and intellectual assets into enduring value. People use knowledge in the course of conducting action. Du Pleiss (2003) defined KM as a planned, structured approach to manage the creation, sharing, harvesting and leveraging of knowledge as an organizational asset, to enhance the company's ability, speed and effectiveness in delivering products or services. In organizations, managing knowledge is considered key to achieving breakthrough in competitive advantage. Implementing a KM system can be complex and dynamic as it involves people and other organizational factors (Bixler, 2002). Key to successful KM implementation is to understand the existing relationship and mechanisms of sharing and then develop ways to empower people to scale up what they are already trying to do (Gilbert, 2002).

In a knowledge culture, all the information is linked together and integrated into models that increase the profitability, improve processes, products, and customer relations. Workers are aware of those links, and KM goes beyond infrastructure to touch almost every aspect of a business. Knowledge culture is dominated by a knowledge pull — a grassroots desire among employees to tap into their organization's intellectual resources. In such a culture employees happily use knowledge generated by other departments. Factors that were found to be crucial area are leadership, organizational structure, evangelization, communities of practices, rewards systems, time allocation, business processes, recruitment infrastructure and physical attributes. These factors need to be well managed so that effective knowledge culture can be fostered. However, the factor found to be the most significant was the organizational and cultural issues associated with users' motivation in sharing and using knowledge (Alavi and Leider, 1999). It was found that promoting a culture of knowledge sharing in organizations, rewarding employees for sharing and creating a 'best practices' repository influence KM processes. (Barna, 2003). Oliver and Kandadi (2006) reiterated that organizational culture plays an important role in developing knowledge culture. KM has rapidly moved beyond the stage of a trend and has established itself as a key part of many libraries' knowledge strategy (Kumar, 2010).

Webb (1998) realised that KM is not only a key function of business organizations in the k-economy era, but also relevant and applicable to many other types of organizations. This includes academic institutions which are the custodians of the organizations' wealth in knowledge. Educational institutions also face similar challenge as of other non-profit organizations in sharing information and knowledge among the workers within the

organizations. Faced with competition and increasingly dynamic environments, organizations are beginning to realize that there is a vast and largely untapped assets diffused around in the organization – knowledge (Gupta, Iyer and Aronson, 2000). This realization does not only occur in business organizations but also in non-profit organizations, such as academic libraries. The conventional functions of academic libraries are to collect, process, disseminate, store and utilize information to provide service to the university community. However, the environment in which academic libraries operate today is changing. Academic libraries are part of the university and its organizational culture. Whatever affects universities also affects academic libraries. The role of academic libraries is changing to provide the competitive advantage for the parent bodies – a factor that is crucial to both staff and students (Foo, et al., 2002). In 1996, Souffle and Veldorf, reflecting on the future of academic libraries, emphasized the need for change in library professionals' behavior: they “...*must begin studying processes and using process improvement tools ...must begin to collect data and use them as the basis for decision-making rather than rely on subjective impressions.*”

Although many organizations have embarked on the KM program, many of their personnel are still not aware of its existence and this may partly be attributed to the lack of knowledge culture within their organizations. The visible parts of culture are “practices” – behavior and rituals, artifacts and products, the heroes and the symbols, the systems and institutions of a culture. These are influenced by the invisible elements that are the basic values and assumptions, behavioral norms and conventions, beliefs and attitudes. Visible and invisible elements are shared by a group of people. Invisible elements may especially influence the behavior of the members of this group. The elements also build a framework for members of the group to interpret the meaning of other people's behavior.

Organizational culture as a concept is considered to be a key element in managing organizational change (Pettigrew, 1990). Researchers argued that culture is a complex system of norms and values that is shaped over time and affects the types and variance of organizational processes and behaviors (Barney, 1986). Thus, culture is a sort of glue that bonds the social structure of an organization together. In the knowledge economy era, the library will become a treasure-house of human knowledge, participate in knowledge innovation, and become an important link in the knowledge innovation chain. In the 21st century, the library will inevitably face the new subject of KM. As pointed out by Huseman and Goodman (1999) there are times when an organization does not possess certain knowledge internally and does not have the skills to find it. As a result, academic libraries find themselves unable to develop the know-how that they need. Extra knowledge must therefore be acquired somehow if it is felt it will be useful to the goals of the academic library. The academic library as an organization may want to change its culture in looking outside its own boundaries to outsource or acquire new knowledge. From the point of view of KM, outsourcing may be described as substituting external know-how for internal know-how (Probst, Raub & Romhardt, 2000).

The Limkokwing University of Creative and Technology (LUCT) was established in 1991 and has over 30,000 students from more than 150 countries, studying in Malaysia and it's 11 other campuses in Botswana, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lesotho, Swaziland and

the United Kingdom. The Limkokwing Library is equipped with professional facilities that include staff, an eLibrary with thousand of books and journals, periodicals and articles (Limkokwing Creativity Library, 2011). It has been sensitive to market demands in producing graduates who are able to fit and adapt smoothly from classroom to workplace. It is the function of the library to provide knowledge and an insight into the power of creativity and the outcome of innovation. It would be interesting to investigate how the library manages its knowledge in line with changes towards KM. A case study on the library personnel was conducted at the LUCT library, with the goal of knowing the exact situation that have been faced by the library personnel in the implementation of KM and helping the organization to improve their knowledge culture. The main objective of the study is to investigate how the staffs develop knowledge management culture and their awareness of the knowledge management.

METHODOLOGY

A survey method was used and questions that were found to be particularly significant and timely were asked, reflecting the changes in the range of knowledge culture in LUCT library. The questions were closed-ended, and choices were provided that ranged from what were considered basic point of views. This study used the questionnaire as the primary sources of data collecting as this instrument can influence the quality of data collected, while the order of the items in questionnaire can influence the response given (Babbie, 2001). Various questions in the surveys were strategically composed and formatted into three parts that is part A: Demographic profile; part B: Staff awareness; part C: Development of knowledge management culture; part D: Barriers; and the last part E: Staff point of view. In the part D, most of the questions required respondents to rate their opinion, suggestions and level of perceptions towards implementing the knowledge culture in LUCT library. The questionnaires were distributed to all the 13 staff of LUCT library.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study shows the number of male are 9 out of 13 respondents and the percentage are 69 per cent while the female are 4 or 31 per cent. Most of the respondents are from the age of 30-35, 46 per cent, those from the age of 24-29 accounts for 31 per cent. Lastly, 23 per cent of the respondents are from the age of 36 and above. In terms of the level of education of respondents the study revealed that thirty nine per cent, or 5 of the respondents cent hold Bachelor Degree while those with SPM/STPM accounts for is 23 per cent and those diploma and those with no secondary level education account for 2, or 15 per cent respectively. Only one respondent holds a master degree.

The purpose of this study is to identify the level of staff understanding of knowledge culture in the library of LUCT. Besides that, it attempted to investigate the barriers and gaps that may occur in terms of developing the knowledge culture and further to find out the staff interest in developing knowledge culture in their daily work. Questions that are related with the objectives in this research are discussed below.

Table 1: Staff perceptions on KM

Staff awareness on the importance of knowledge management	Frequency	Percentage
Never heard	0	0
Something they are already doing but not under the same name	0	0
It is just a management fad.	0	0
It is a strategic part of their business.	5	40
Something that could be beneficial for the organization.	8	60

Table 1 shows the staff perceptions towards the importance of KM development inside the organization. Most of the respondents, 60 per cent agreed that KM is important and could be beneficial to the organization and this was followed by 40 per cent or 5 respondents who agreed that KM is a strategic part of their business. All the respondents were aware with the importance KM to the organization.

Table 2: Attitude of library staff towards KM culture

Attitude of library staff towards KM in LUCT Library	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sees it as very important and provides full support.	8	62
Sees it as very important but hardly supports it.	2	15
Sees it as a waste and hardly bothers.	1	8
Very supportive in the beginning but later lost interest.	2	15

The data from Table 2 above shows the percentage of the staff attitude towards the KM culture in the LUCT Library. It was found that 62 per cent of the respondents regarded KM culture as a very important and provided their full support to the library. 23 per cent of respondents found that although KM culture was very important to the library, they hardly supported it. An equal number of respondents were very supportive of the KM culture in the beginning but lost interest at the later stage while one respondent found it as a waste. Although they fall under a small number of respondents, the later feedbacks call for concerted effort to address the situation so that the staff realized the goal and importance of developing the knowledge culture.

Table 3: Significant role for achieving effective KM culture

Significant role for achieving effective KM culture	Least	%	Moderate	%	Highly	%
Improving competitive advantage	1	8	8	62	4	30
Improving customer focus	0	0	7	54	6	46
Innovations	0	0	10	77	3	23
Inventory reduction	2	15	8	61	3	24
Employee development	0	0	7	54	6	46
Better decision-making	2	15	4	30	7	55
Faster response to key business issues	2	15	5	39	6	46
Improving quality	1	8	8	62	4	30
Improving knowledge sharing delivery	0	0	6	46	7	54

With regards to the staff attitudes towards the significant roles that they can play to achieve effective KM culture, table 3 indicates that most of them, 62 per cent or 8 respondents found that KM culture can help moderately improve competitive advantage while only 4 respondents or 30 per cent said that it can highly help in improving competitive advantage. Majority of respondents, which are 77 per cent or 10, agreed moderately that KM culture can assist in innovation as against 23 per cent who highly agreed with it. Generally, the data in table 3 revealed the uncertainty among the library personnel towards the role of KM culture in achieving significant results. It was found that the majority of the staff of LUCT Library were aware of the implementation of the knowledge culture inside the organization. They believed that KM implemented in the organization is beneficial to the organization. However, the library administration needs to convince and assist the staff by providing more trainings with the goal of educating the staff and changing their perceptions.

Table 4: Responsibility in nurturing the knowledge culture

Responsible in knowledge culture in LUCT Library	Frequency	Percentage (%)
It is the job of R&D department only.	1	8
It is everyone's job and everybody should contribute to it.	2	16
Top management takes active interest and supports it continuously	5	38
It is part of the organization's philosophy and culture.	5	38

The study also attempted to find out how the staff develops their knowledge culture. In relation to this, question was asked as to who should be responsible for nurturing the knowledge culture in the LUCT Library. From that data, all the respondents, 100 per cent noticed that their library is developing the knowledge culture. As shown in table 4, 38 per cent or 5 respondents agreed that the top management should take active interest in the knowledge culture and supports it continuously. The same percentage of the respondents also indicated that the knowledge culture can be considered as part of the organizational philosophy and culture. While the rest, which is 16 per cent believed that knowledge culture is viewed as everyone's job, while one respondent indicated that the knowledge culture is the job of R & D department only. The data revealed that LUCT library has already applied knowledge culture at an early stage, because all the staff in library department knew about the need to develop it. Majority of the staff believed that the top management should take serious responsibilities in nurturing the culture as part of the organizational philosophy and culture.

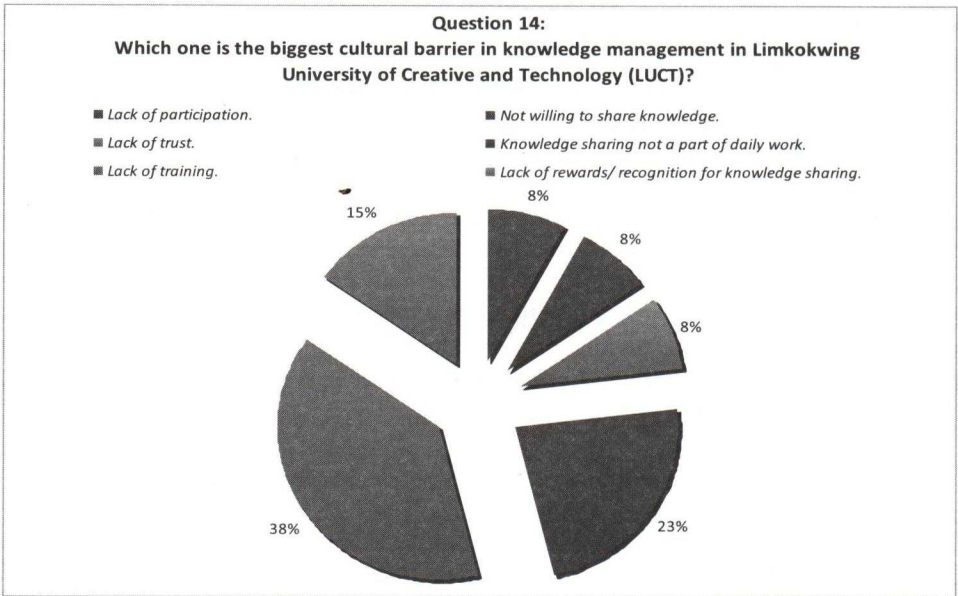


Figure: 1 The biggest cultural barriers in KM

The study also attempted to determine the cultural barriers faced by the staff in implementing knowledge culture in LUCT library. The pie chart in figure1 above shows that 38 per cent of the respondents' answered that the biggest cultural barrier faced by the library staff is the lack of training on knowledge management culture. 23 per cent of the respondents noted that the staff were not acculturated with the KM culture and knowledge sharing as part of their daily work. Another 15 per cent of the respondents said that the barrier faced by them was the lack of rewards or recognition offered to them for knowledge sharing. While the rest of the staff , 8 per cent believed that the other reason leading to the barrier in KM culture was the lack staff participation, their unwillingness to share knowledge that they have, and the lack of trust among them.

From the findings, it was found that the staff perceptions towards KM culture were positive in view of the fact that the LUCT library has provided the relevant knowledge. However, it was also suggested that leadership should play a bigger role in its implementation.

Table 5: The barriers in effective implementation of KM culture

The barriers in effective development of KM culture in LUCT Library	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Changing people's behavior from knowledge hoarding to knowledge sharing.	1	8
Lack of understanding of KM culture and its benefits	4	31
Determining what kind of knowledge to be managed & making it available.	3	23
Justifying the use of scarce resources for KM.	0	0
Lack of top management commitment in implementing KM culture.	3	23
Overcoming technological limitations.	2	15
Attracting & retaining talented people.	0	0

The respondents were also asked to determine other main factors that can affect to effective implementation of KM culture in LUCT library. Table 5 above shows that 31 per cent or 4 respondents indicated that the main hurdle was the lack of understanding of the KM culture itself and its benefits. Problems also surfaced when 3 or 23 per cent of the respondents voiced out their difficulty in determining the kind of knowledge to be managed and making it available. Similarly, the data revealed that 23 per cent of the respondents placed the barrier on the lack of top management commitment in implementing KM culture. The data also shows that 15 per cent of the respondents required the library to overcome technological limitations. One respondent stated that there is a need to change people's behavior from the knowledge hoarding to the knowledge sharing. It appeared that the biggest barrier that might be faced by the library are the lack of training and the staff reluctance to share knowledge as the main barriers to KM culture development.

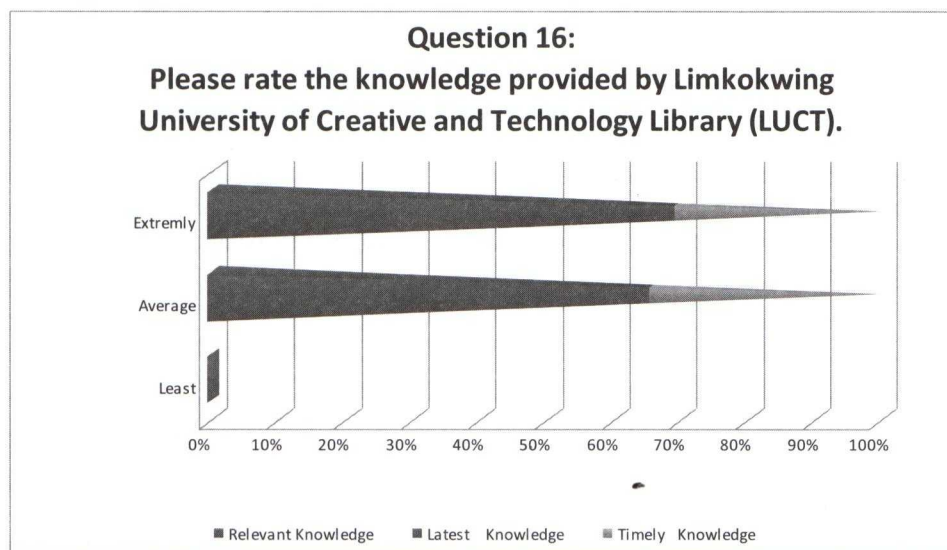


Figure 2: Knowledge provided by the LUCT Library

Table 6: Knowledge provided by the LUCT Library

Knowledge provided by LUCT Library	Least	Percent(%)	Moderate	Percent(%)	Highly	Percent(%)
Relevant Knowledge	0	0	7	54	6	46
Latest Knowledge	0	0	10	80	3	20
Timely Knowledge	0	0	9	69	4	31

Table 6 and figure 2 above, show that 54 per cent or 7 of the respondents indicated that the library provided the relevant knowledge while 46 per cent or 6 of the respondents highly agreed that the library provided the relevant knowledge to the staff. Majority of the respondents, which is 80 per cent, agreed that the information provided to them was the latest while 20 per cent of the respondents highly agreed that the library provided them with latest knowledge. At the same time 69 per cent of the respondents agreed that the knowledge provided by the library was moderately timely, while 31 per cent of the respondents highly agreed that the library provided them with timely knowledge. This means all the respondents agreed that the library has provided them with relevant and timely knowledge. However, since the KM culture is rather new, perhaps more training and guidance were needed.

Table 7: Role of educational institutions/industries enhance the KM culture base

Educational institutions/industries can help to enhance the KM culture base	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Staff participation within the organization	3	23
Hire consultant to guide in guide and nurture the knowledge culture	4	31
Provides more training for the staff	5	38
Expands the knowledge sharing between staff	1	8

As shown in table 7, 38 per cent of the respondents agreed that the educational institutions and industries should provide more training for the staff in KM culture. Another 31 per cent of the respondents suggested that the library should hire or provide the experts to guide and nurture the staff while 23 per cent respondents agreed that the organization should instruct all the staff to participate in related events organized by the institution. One respondent believed that the staff should expand their knowledge sharing activities.

Table 8: How LUCT Library staff can be motivated to develop KM culture

How a LUCT Library can be motivated to develop KM culture.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Through business environment	3	23
Staff awareness in the existence of the knowledge culture	4	31
Through the leadership that leads	6	46

The respondents also indicated in table 8 their thoughts on how the LUCT library staff can be motivated in developing the KM culture. Motivating the staff towards developing the KM culture is crucial. To this effect, it was found that 46 per cent indicated that the

leadership of the library should be more active in leading the task. While 31 per cent agreed that the staffs of the library are aware of the existence of the knowledge culture and 23 per cent believed that the business environment also plays the role. Based on the study, it is recommended that:

- more training should be provided to the staff of LUCT library and the training should be relevant to the development of KM culture. Educational institutions and industries should also provide education and training in KM and KM culture as an academic module as well as part of continuous education and training program.
- the LUCT library should monitor and evaluate their staff performance and provides rewards incentives. The organization should continuously exercise promotion exercises and rewards, based on performance on adopting the knowledge culture.
- the LUCT library should also hire consultants and experts in helping and guiding the staff in managing and applying the knowledge culture in the library and organization. Certain activities that can be conducted by the consultants include; induction sessions in order to introduce the knowledge culture to the staff, and also relevant talks conducted from time to time.
- the LUCT library should try to encourage their staff to suggest or adopt other methods in knowledge sharing and culture within the library and university in order to create the knowledge culture environment in the organization. LUCT library should develop the knowledge culture as part of the organization daily work process and environment.
- leadership of the library should be more active in leading the task in motivating and rewarding the staff towards the success of developing the KM culture.

KM is also aimed at extending the role of librarians to manage all types of information and tacit knowledge for the benefit of the library. It can help transform the library into a more efficient, knowledge sharing organization (Jantz, 2001, 34). As Kim (1999) pointed out, KM practices aim to draw out the tacit knowledge people have, what they carry around with them, what they observe and learn from experience, rather than what is usually explicitly stated. Management may need to be aware that information resources of a library are their collection and materials, however, the knowledge resources of a library are its staff (Middleton, 2002, 433).

CONCLUSION

Both knowledge and wisdom sharing require mental structural changes to reach learning effect. Therefore, to ask the staff to change their perceptions, the organization has to actively develop the culture of knowledge sharing; and to ask the staff to change their thinking habits, and make knowledge sharing possible. More organizations, attempting to implement KM in Malaysia should realize the importance of knowledge culture in their organizations. They should also ensure the staff of their organizations be aware of knowledge management culture. Knowledge management process involves the creation, capturing, sharing and utilization of knowledge. Organizational culture change is essential in successfully developing the knowledge management culture in any organization, including the academic library. One of the main determinants to the success of KM implementation is leadership which is committed and creative. At the same time, the culture of assessment is essential to maintaining libraries as relevant

institutions in the new information environment and more training should be provided to the staff of LUCT library. Other than that, the basic goal of KM within libraries is to leverage the available knowledge that may help academic librarians to carry out their tasks more efficiently and effectively. It is hoped that this study will inspire the library staff to face the new dynamic in business environment and develop the changing culture. Further studies should be undertaken to include other types of libraries in both private and public institution of higher learning.

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