

A Little Bit Country and a Little Bit Rock 'n Roll:
Moving from a Library 2.0 Model to a Model of Knowledge Ecology

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Knowledge Management Systems

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In May 2006, Michael Casey posited on his blog LibraryCrunch that libraries fail in respect to knowledge management. They cannot maintain the knowledge they and their customers created, do not invest time in eliciting tacit knowledge from librarians leaving their jobs or the field, nor consider alternatives to spending money on fancy technological solutions when challenges arise via the digital divide. The library's potential remained untapped.

Permeating the professional discourse then and now is the desire to remain relevant culturally and financially. The profession's fears and the emergence of inexpensive, easy-to-use, and exciting technology coalesced to highlight the need to reconsider how these institutions functioned in the most basic senses. Restructuring the way that libraries and librarians captured, distributed, and cultivated knowledge within the organization, Casey suggested, could lead to a "library 2.0" much the way businesses recasting their management style to emphasize knowledge management lead to "business 2.0." It was here librarianship found its tipping point.

Casey and Savastinuk (2007) define library 2.0 as: (1) a model for purposeful and continuous change; (2) a means of empowerment for library users via user-centered and participatory services; (3) an improvement to services to current users with the forward thinking and outreach to potential new users; and (4) an impetus to improve services and procedures through empowering users by seeking input and outreach. Library 2.0 is not simply the implementation and use of web 2.0 tools, though it is often attributed as so; rather, it is a way to recognize and nurture the human elements comprising a library while implementing new technology in a purposeful, user-centered manner (Michael Stephens

2007, as cited by Casey and Savastinuk 2007). Instead of continuing a model where libraries are book repositories with librarians as authority in determining knowledge value, library 2.0 allows the user makes the determinations, ideally with librarian acting as a partner in the process.

While librarians find 2.0 exciting and many rush to implement the idea, it is actually not that revolutionary, nor is it all together absent from the library. Many of the philosophies behind library 2.0 correlated to what Thomas Davenport (1997) labels the knowledge ecology. A knowledge ecology is a culture of knowledge use, reuse, and creation, consisting of: an information environment, or the interconnectedness of staff, strategy, culture/behavior, politics, architecture, and process; the organizational environment, which explores the business, physicality, and technology; and the external environment. These mirror the issues and elements comprising library 2.0.

Principles of knowledge management have historically been ignored in US libraries, particularly in public libraries (Grey 2006a). This oversight left libraries as static repositories for information that users could access via the gatekeeper librarian. This information, then, would be digested by the individual and encoded into the individual's mind as tacit knowledge. Over the years as libraries implemented more technological advances – from the card catalog to the online public access catalog (OPAC) and on to computer/internet access and electronic databases – it has become clear that libraries serve a wider purpose. In its most traditional iteration, the library is an ecosystem – people, ideas, and technology all interact. However, because interaction in the traditional library depended upon the librarian as central authority to implement, interpret (vis a vis choosing what metadata about material was important to include in the card catalog), and use these

technologies for their patrons, they still acted as gatekeepers to knowledge. Casey and Stephens's library 2.0, on the other hand, is the realization that libraries need to cultivate and nurture a whole system, teaching users how to use the tools and offer input about the tools, rather than just supply and protect them.

Libraries can be complex and dynamic environments that not only elicit librarian and patron tacit knowledge, but also provide space and encouragement for sharing, augmenting, and exchanging knowledge. In libraries, the control can move away from central authority to the masses. When costs of communication become cheaper and more ubiquitous thanks to new information technology, control can become less centralized (Malone, 2004). Because libraries strive to respond to issues like the digital divide, they have implemented these technologies (even if at a slower pace than desired). This decentralization helps initiate the move to a knowledge ecology, as libraries now must rely not only on their own knowledge repositories – the tacit – but they must depend upon their colleagues and patrons to teach them new technologies and make explicit *their* tacit knowledge. Each library, from the rural public library serving 200 in North Dakota to the major metropolitan system serving millions in Houston, can cultivate their own ecosystem while contributing to the greater library ecosystem worldwide. By recasting library 2.0 as what it really is – the implementation of knowledge management philosophies like Davenport's knowledge ecology in the library – libraries can not only remain relevant but also become third places that nurture and encourage public knowledge exchange.

Denham Grey (2006a) earns his reputation from being the first and only writer who attempts to equate library 2.0 with the knowledge ecology. Inspired by the work of Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day (1999), Grey began a wiki to discuss how librarians and knowledge

managers view the ideas of information and knowledge differently. As libraries struggle to maintain relevancy in a time of budget cuts, staff shortages, and bookstores catering to the mass and to the long tail, it is imperative to draw upon the principles and strengths of other organizations. For libraries, turning to viable and established knowledge management principles that have been implemented in the corporate world will better illuminate the library's competitive edge. Grey outlines how libraries should adapt their services to consider themselves a knowledge organization by:

- Connecting users with more than simply the objects in the collection (teach how to use recommender systems rather than simply hand over objects)
- Educating users how to utilize collaborative filtering systems
- Building and marketing digital communities and relationships
- Focusing on network building within the library and beyond into the community

Moreover, librarians need to collaborate amongst themselves by developing mentoring relationships that facilitate cross-generational knowledge sharing – this gives those new in the field the opportunity to gather tacit knowledge from seasoned professionals and it gives seasoned professionals insight into not only new technologies, but new forms of acquiring and sharing tacit knowledge of those with different experiences. The wiki entry ends with a short, but telling, note that that thread had been taken over by the library 2.0 meme in October 2006. Each of these suggestions for building a knowledge management system represents an aspect of the knowledge ecology – people, things, ideas, and technology all continuously interact.

Grey (2006b) also comments on the connections between library 2.0 and the knowledge ecology in his blog Knowledge-at-Work. In a moderately snarky tone, he suggests

that library 2.0 pioneers like Michael Casey and Michael Stephens are not on to an ephemeral trend, but rather were discussing core knowledge management topics. Library 2.0, in emphasizing participation, community, conversation, and technology, was doing precisely what knowledge management systems were meant to do. Grey's blog post stops short of teasing any ideas out further, though as his libraries and km wiki indicated, at the time of the blog entry, he had become an active contributor to the library 2.0 meme.

Now, libraries are scrambling. They are slowly recognizing the value of developing a teaching and learning information environment, as well as implementing user-centered, participatory services to both current users and reaching out to potential users. Public libraries, and to a lesser extent academic and special libraries, emphasize the need for applicants who are versed in web 2.0 tools in their job advertisements. Libraries believe that by recruiting and hiring those familiar with the technologies, they will be able to not only sustain themselves, but they will be able to become library 2.0. However, they are still missing the crucial importance of building and cultivating an entire ecosystem – while costs of information technology has decreased and while it is possible to teach and use these new tools, these alone will not build a knowledge management system. Rather, libraries need to restructure their models to become sustainable ecologies that make them information environments, connecting not just people to technology, but people to people, people to technology, and technology to people in ways that encourage knowledge building and sharing. By returning to the prime source of knowledge – people – libraries can build sustainable ecosystems that depend upon eliciting tacit knowledge from one another that can be used explicitly in ways to continually evolve in ways that encourage more knowledge production and exchange. While library 2.0 is a start, it does not offer as understandable or

powerful an analogy as knowledge management does through the ecological perspective. Moreover, though this sounds like a daunting task, the elements to recast library 2.0 as knowledge ecology already exist. What it requires now is thinking differently about the tools and programs as knowledge exchanges and exploiting the opportunities to structure a vibrant ecosystem.

From library 2.0 to knowledge ecology

Bainbridge Island Public Library, just outside Seattle, held its first “living library” October 28, 2008, which drew a crowd of 116 readers. The living library had a catalog of 19 titles and each title was a best seller. The living library, a program coordinated by a company with the same name, purports to be a way for people to rid themselves of prejudice by allowing library patrons the opportunity to “check out” a human being for a 30-minute conversation. These living books sit in the stacks, near an area in which they are experts, be it their sexuality, ethnicity, or sheer interest. Though program founders claim the purpose is to assist in erasing prejudice and stereotyping, the living library showcases knowledge management principles in action – the “books” and their patrons engage in knowledge exchange, eliciting tacit knowledge from one another. This knowledge then circulates throughout the library and, ideally, further and beyond the library walls.

The living library is not a knowledge ecology in itself, but in conjunction with other programming and services the library offers, it is a dynamic component of such an ecology because it requires knowledge exchange among people, pulling tacit knowledge and making it explicit from both the “book” and the “reader.” In Davenport’s (1999) ecology, the living library allows staff, patrons, and culture interact within an informational environment that will lead to an impact outside the environment, as well as within it. Grey (2006a) would

applaud this as a means of connecting users with more than the collection: now patrons can connect with living, breathing knowledge sources. If more libraries adopt programs like Bainbridge Island and connect patrons with not just the people supplied by the living library company but people within their own community, the knowledge ecosystem gains more nutrients and builds a network connecting more and more nodes both inside and outside the library's walls. Inviting members of the community to take part in a living library, as well as in additional programs where they can lend expertise, people are connected to other people, encouraging knowledge exchange inside and outside the library walls.

In the environment Davenport (1997) delineates, staff and patrons connect through technology – this happens first in the library and later can be transposed in situations outside the library. Library 2.0 emphasizes both implementing and teaching how to use technology, and without doubt, knowledge management systems provide solid tools worth learning and sharing. Learning and teaching e-mail skills, including personal information and knowledge management principles in tandem will enhance how patrons connect to one another digitally and will also assist patrons in their informational needs when they use library and web services. Implementing collaborative filtering systems within the library where patrons can interact with the OPAC or with one another will not only enhance collections through user-generated resource identification, but it draws upon the tacit knowledge and the tacit and explicit experiences patrons have had with different materials and media. Allowing users to input their own metadata into the OPAC is another level of extracting tacit knowledge from both patrons and librarians. Librarians can spend less time making sometimes arbitrary decisions on OPAC metadata that patrons do not necessarily find useful in favor of crowdsourcing much of the process to users – letting users input tags

or reviews can build a vast system of recommendation becomes accessible for both the librarian, who no longer has to be command central for reader advisory, and the patron, who can discover new things from their desktop or portable device outside the library.

And the backbone of the entire ecosystem, of course, is its network. Each librarian, patron, community member, computer, and digital system represents a node and each node can connect limitlessly – the librarian uses the computer as a way to teach the patron how to access a digital collection which in turn allows the patron to connect to the community. By continuously thinking of networking building, libraries become catalysts for system building – a cornerstone of knowledge management. And moreover, this all returns to Davenport's (1997) ecology. The library becomes an ecology by first rebranding itself as an information organization, developing a staff to develop strategies that create a culture of knowledge creation, sharing, and building through updating antiquated, authoritarian-centered processes and policies. With the implementation of technology, and the education of librarians and patrons to use and understand technical tools, the information environment spreads wider. Physical space becomes an irrelevant constraint on the library, as community becomes more distributed and more based on networks loosely tied through sinews determined only by the limits of the librarian, patron, and community mind. While the library's primary service community may be a selected set of zip codes, the implementation of technology brings their business of knowledge creation and dissemination far beyond the walls of the library. Users can link into a network without the constraints of time or place. The internet facilitates rapid access and librarians have an opportunity to exploit this via value-added services and tools available both on their library's website and through their library's web presence on other social sites.

In an information environment, knowledge exchange is the business, and it extends far beyond the four walls of the library. It is people, knowledge, and technology engaged in networking and engaged in making what is implicit explicit. These are the goals of knowledge management, and these are what the corporate world takes advantage of to build and maintain a competitive edge – the more knowledge, the more on which they have to draw for their business and market plans. Returning back to the goals of library 2.0 as set forth by Casey and Stephens, which include developing a model for purposeful, continuous change, empowerment vis a vis user-centered and participatory services, outreach to new users, and impetus for improvement, it seems libraries have begun moving in the right direction. Omitted, however, from the library 2.0 model and mentality are the big picture ideas that emerge from knowledge management; library 2.0 focuses on the human element, but it does not take the meta approach and consider how the library is an ecosystem in and of itself, developing not only user-centered services, but centering its services on connecting users to knowledge inside and outside of its walls. By focusing on knowledge ecology, rather than library 2.0, as a model for growth and relevancy, libraries can better conceptualize new, value-added services uniting people and technology as well as reconsider how current models can be utilized or retooled for maximum impact and penetration as knowledge exchange. This dynamic system approach takes what libraries are best at – public service – and ties it to what the corporate world is best at – continually examining and asserting its value with a focus on continual improvement.

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