Defining Effective Knowledge Management to Empower Citizens and Members of Parliament

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Abstract:

Knowledge management theory alerts us that in today's society "knowledge is power" and only those with access to quality knowledge will be able to stand out, make informed decisions and develop products and services of value to others. In our democratic system, access to knowledge is crucial to empower citizens and Members of Parliament. The challenge for libraries is therefore to ensure effective knowledge management within Parliament. Knowledge Management in libraries is a daunting task, with (ironically!) few successful case studies to draw on and the constant risk of seeming to be promoting yet another empty management fad. In contrast to many KM publications, the following aims to be a concrete account of how knowledge management has been implemented in a Library. To do so it will review briefly the importance of managing knowledge for Parliament drawing on the Finnish Parliament experience, introduce the Chilean Library of Congress project and conclude by analysing future challenges and opportunities.

1. The Importance of Managing Knowledge for Parliament

MPs require knowledge to make policy decisions, understand current social contexts and envision future trends and challenges. Citizens on the other hand need knowledge to be able to participate and debate in politics, exercise their rights and vocalize demands. These are diverse and demanding audiences that require a

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comprehensive and flexible knowledge management strategy. Young people, senior citizens, legal experts, social organizations, Members of Parliament, parliamentary and constituency staff constantly challenge Libraries with evolving knowledge needs and expectations.

Abundant material has been published on knowledge management within government and state administrations and its effect on evidence based policy-making and citizen participation. There is however a notorious gap in knowledge management literature when it comes to knowledge management within or for Parliament. In 2002 the Finnish´s Parliament Committee for the Future published the pioneering book "Developing and Implementing Knowledge Management in the Parliament of Finland" that emphasises the importance of knowledge management for democracy and economic growth, whilst proposing a knowledge management strategy for the legislative context. [1]

To date it remains the only publication dealing exclusively with knowledge management in Parliament and provides therefore valuable guidance to any parliamentary library in its effort to design an appropriate strategy. The Finnish Parliament proposes a holistic approach that changes the working culture within Parliament with the aid of technology, and both MPs and citizens putting forward and answering knowledge needs.

Crucially this publication makes the case for knowledge management in Parliament, arguing that the state's relationship to knowledge has changed fundamentally over time. No longer the sole possessor of knowledge and under pressure to live up to new values of openness and transparency, state administration, including Parliament, must facilitate the citizen's access to knowledge, whilst opening up to the diversity of knowledge sources now available.

2. Our Approach to Knowledge Management

For geographically isolated countries such as Chile new publishing models mean the amount of knowledge now available online has the potential to fundamentally shape almost any policy discussion. On the other hand ICT enables Parliament to give access to citizens to participate in many aspects of the legislative process. How can parliamentary libraries help exploit this potential?

According to its mission-vision statement defined in 2004 the Library possesses three roles: for society to be the repository of the Parliament´s archive, for Member´s to be a key instrument in fulfilling their commitments and anticipating new challenges for our country and finally a public role that translates in being the

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[1] For more information see:
http://web.eduskunta.fi/dman/Document.phx?documentId=gk11307104202716&cmd=download

space for knowledge creation, exchange and understanding of policy and legal issues that are of national priority. Due to these roles the Library has developed a range of products and services to fulfill this definition, including the adoption of the Library's own knowledge management guiding principles.[2]

Based on the Knowledge Management framework developed by the Finnish Parliament in 2002 ours is therefore a practical hand-on approach. We have identified basic principles, actors and processes that will allow us to improve both intra and extra library knowledge management in order to enhance services for our audiences. Our focus is not only technology, but the creation of spaces of interaction, communication and participation through a culture of trust and innovation.

2.1 Our Definition

The Chilean Library of Congress understands knowledge management as the constant challenge to identify, rescue, create, access, develop, preserve, disseminate, promote, use and reuse knowledge in order to answer to our audiences delivering an excellent service.

The Library aims to be a bridge between Congress and the world of knowledge, identifying new trends and rescuing information that adds more value to the legislative context. It promotes the creation of a collaborative culture among staff, recognising that the diversity of experiences and knowledge contained within the organization all constitute a source of quality and innovation.

2.2 Our Guiding Principles

- **Accessibility and Transparency:** Creating access to available knowledge, writing down and sharing procedures, products and experience. Ensuring usability in the formats and platforms that manage knowledge.

- **Interaction:** Promoting interaction, both physical and virtual and recognising that knowledge management does not necessarily results in documents or a new technological appliance, but translates mainly in enriching the knowledge of people through joint learning, both formal and informal.

- **Communication:** Easing communication within the organization, through adequate technology and open spaces for interaction.

- **Integration:** Guaranteeing the integration of the actors involved and the support platforms available through the definition of common standards.

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[2] Parliament of Finland & Senate of the Republic of Chile (2012). Desarrollo e implementación de la gestión del conocimiento en el Parlamento Finlandes. Senado de Chile. Available: http://www.bcn.cl/obtienearchivo?id=documentos/10221.1/26296/9/Gestion%20del%20Conocimiento.pdf

- **Trust:** Generating a culture of trust where a person feels comfortable to share, participate and ask.

- **Horizontality:** Open spaces of interaction and participation beyond the hierarchical structures of the organization. Value the knowledge of all members of staff, beyond their job title or educational background.

- **Diversity:** Recognize that there are multiple opinions, specialities and experiences that can be equally valid and valuable to enrich the work carried out by an organization.

- **Anticipation**: Observe and anticipate signals and tendencies based on each person's area of expertise, raising the alert when new opportunities or possibilities arise.

- **New Practices:** Incorporate new knowledge to enrich products, processes and people to promote a culture of permanent innovation.

2.3 Our Actors

- **Our Audiences:** Based on our mission / vision statement, the knowledge to be managed will be defined according to the needs of our audiences. To do so audiences must be identified and a range of products and services designed that recognise and respond to their concerns. Social media is a valuable tool to enhance communication, feedback and audience participation.

- **Our Culture:** Promote an institutional culture that aids knowledge, raising awareness on the importance of sharing, providing incentives, evaluating the use of knowledge and modifying structures. Recognise that everybody can contribute with their personal knowledge and that different viewpoints can be equally valid. Trust is key to reaching knowledge exchange and collaboration. Learning and rescuing best practice must be inherent to all processes.

- **Our People:** The people within an organization obtain, retain and generate knowledge. It is the interaction between each individual, their relationships, informal conversations and formal exchanges of information that allow for knowledge to be shared, used and managed. By working and learning together a shared reality is created, joint knowledge that adds value.

- **Our Technology**: Appropriate shared technology based on common standards is crucial to ease information transfer and knowledge management. Technology allows to store, structure, process and retrieve knowledge and ease communication. It also helps to innovate and improve access to knowledge. Technology however does not guarantee interaction, use and knowledge creation. Implementing a knowledge management

project does not limit itself to finding a technological solution, but in promoting a culture of learning and sharing.

2.4 Our Assets

Information Management

In recent years the Chilean Library of Congress is evolving from knowledge storing to knowledge creation and knowledge management. Key to this transformation have been a strong drive towards innovative products and services, based on new technologies, in-house expertise and learning from the best practice of libraries, Parliaments and other leading organizations. Our actions have focused on achieving a sound information management strategy and knowledge architecture. Ongoing digitization projects, institutional repositories and modular web-portals for target audiences, have provided a solid base for making knowledge available to citizens and Parliament and sharing knowledge within the Library. Current initiatives include implementing an open-linked data model.

Information management at our Library has focused on the client´s perspective, developing cores of information that integrate diverse resources and databases, based on the exhaustive use of metadata and SQL queries to configure these services.

This strategy changes the treatment of information defining firstly the service to be developed to later on establish how content will be processed and structured. It is applied to all the Library´s information products in order to prepare them for integration with Senate and Chamber of Deputies as well as other public institutions, introducing new knowledge that will strengthen our information infrastructure. Within this strategy metadata plays a crucial part, becoming the tool for integration and modeling, giving content a semantic structure and transforming in-house repositories into Content Management Systems (CMS).

Technological Infrastructure

The Library counts with a sound and hybrid technological platform that is mainly based on open source software and some commercial elements. It uses CMS/Plone as a backend and frontend administrator and digital content publisher It also includes other software such as Mediawiki, dSpace, Horizon, Autonomy and Oracle[3]. The integration of content is based on XML modeling and SQL queries.

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[3] For more information see: Chilean Library of Congress. The value of meta-tagging in document repositories to support flexible publishing in digital form. Paper presented for the IFLA Conference 2011.

3.Our Roadmap and the challenges ahead

3.1 Changing the way we work

The Library today is a space for innovation and interaction. A pilot project methodology allows for change on a trial and error basis with minor risk, a learning by doing approach where library staff at all levels can contribute and participate in design and evaluation. Still, a major challenge lies in implementing our knowledge management principles in the way how we do things and how we work with others.

Demographics are a source of concern for our Library. With a considerable number of members of staff reaching retirement age, knowledge on internal processes, everyday legislative procedures, collection history, and past projects is at risk of being lost. The Library has used oral history methods in the past to rescue national legislative history through videotaped interviews with former MPs that have been made accessible to citizens on YouTube. Building on this experience our aim is to ensure that no member of staff retires, without having the chance to share his/her expert knowledge with younger colleagues.

Learning from our own experiences is also a pending issue. Last year we implemented an internal wiki that currently houses most of our manuals and allows for all members of staff to access and update guidelines and procedures in a familiar format. Building on this initiative we plan to expand our wiki to include defined best practice for all our procedures.

As mentioned, the Library uses a pilot project methodology to trial innovative products, processes and services. This approach has proved extremely successful in reducing the risk and associated costs of failed initiatives. However, we must improve our pilot project approach to formalize after-action reviews and hence collectively reflect on factors that led to success or failure, acquiring knowledge that can be applied in future projects. Additionally as required by public sector regulations, each unit within the Library must meet annual goals that if completed successfully result in financial bonuses. An end of year presentation of goals by each unit must include an evaluation of the learning process involved. The aim is to exploit this existing process to install a formal instance of collective evaluation and reflect on lessons-learned.

Within a current strategy of improving information management within Congress, Library, Senate and Chamber of Deputies have been joining efforts to implement Akoma Ntoso standards to process proceedings. Following our suggestion this working group will constitute a Community of Practice using according

methodology, in order to ensure that the knowledge and experience acquired during this process is shared among all relevant actors.

3.2 Rethinking Services for Members

In recent years the Library has made a major effort and fundamentally improved the services it gives to MPs by implementing a Congressional Advisory Service that provides expert impartial advice on any given policy subject in a variety of formats to meet the Member's or Committee´s knowledge need. Today the service consists of around 55 policy analysts and research librarians and produces around 4000 products for Parliament each year.

Due to the nature of a service that must respond to pressing deadlines and requires individual versus group thematic specialization, collaborative work practices are scarce and difficult to implement. A current pilot project focuses on managing existing knowledge to create a knowledge sharing culture within our Congressional Advisory Service. Our aim is to guarantee that through our services MPs will be made aware of the most relevant expert research, future trends and citizens` voices, when making policy decisions, no matter how little time is available to answer information requests. Improving access to external and internal knowledge sources, implementing an information resource storage and sharing platform and promoting communication and joint decision-making among units and departments are at the heart of this initiative.

A recent development are also our discussion groups on major policy areas such as health or education where policy analysts meet periodically to exchange information and ideas, each from their own discipline and expertise. This exercise has helped provide a multidisciplinary analysis for our users and now represent a space for interaction and communal learning for our researchers. Our aims is to evolve from discussion groups to communities of practice, with digital tools that allow for better storing and transfer of information, making sure that no matter if the policy agenda is modified or group members change, the group will continue to exist as such and the knowledge it acquired over time will not be lost.

This year the Library has also reintroduced its civic education and information literacy program for parliamentary staff which aims to ensure that all secretaries or advisors are familiar with legislative procedures and terminology and have been trained to use the Library's own legal and news databases among other core information resources. The aim is to ensure that Members staff provide MPs with adequate and timely response to daily information needs autonomously. The program is particularly useful for new staff, who have no other formal induction process.

In an effort to build bridges and ensure Parliament keeps in touch with society, forecasting future trends and picking up weak signals have been a core concern for our Library, particularly with the recent establishment of the Chilean Parliament´s own Future Committee. We plan to reinvigorate past initiatives, such as thematic seminars and alerts in order to ensure MP's have the knowledge available they need to understand and boost innovation.

3.3 A Library for Citizens

Finally the biggest challenge for our knowledge management strategy is to envision how it will enrich our future Public Library, a major project that give the Library a physical space to reach out to citizens and cater for new audiences.