Personal Knowledge Management in Outreach and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The role of librarians today continues to evolve in response to the needs of their academic community. Personal Knowledge Management (PKM) is one example of an untapped arena for outreach and instruction for librarians. To fully embrace this new facet of contemporary research and academic work will require librarians to learn new skills and utilize creative, big-picture thinking to create services and guidance for the faculty and students that they serve. This article will provide an introduction to PKM theories, exploring some of the key tools that support PKM practices. The article will present several examples illustrating some of the outreach and instruction opportunities for librarians as well as exploring some of the possible future directions of PKM where librarians could play a vital support role for their academic communities.

Keywords: Academic Community, Academic Workflow, Attention Management, Content Curation, Faculty, Graduate Students, GTD, Harold Jarche, Information Overload, LibGuides, Notebook Software, Personal Information Management, Personal Knowledge Management, PKM, Productivity, Task Automation

INTRODUCTION

As a cohort, graduate students and faculty are more similar in their research needs to each other than either is to undergraduate students. Their research is expected to meet rigorous academic standards; periodic publication and professional presentations are routinely expected. They may follow the same research topic for years resulting in an impressive body of knowledge which must be organized, maintained and continually built upon. At the same time, they are expected to teach, serve on campus committees, present at professional conferences, and serve on conference and professional association committees; in addition to finding time for their families, and all the other commitments required of contemporary academic life. They may also be required to learn new technologies for their teaching and research. Their competing responsibilities and the growing deluge of information they encounter daily can at times be overwhelming.

Graduate students and faculty recognize the need to be as efficient and productive as possible with the time they have available, but they do not always know which tools to use to achieve

that end. Some of them continue to use methods that worked for them as undergraduates, even when they are faced with diminishing returns as their knowledge base grows. The effectiveness of an individual's personal knowledge management (PKM) system can significantly affect her success in the academic world. Therefore, PKM enthusiasts have developed a set of concepts, tools, and techniques to help people ingest the information they need, synthesize it to form a picture of the current state their subject areas, and then they more easily create additions to the knowledge of that discipline.

Just as the increase in availability and heightened production of information has changed the nature of academic research, so has that change impacted the academic library means of assistance given this reality. Some experts suggest that librarians will be increasingly important in the coming decades as knowledge navigators, recognizing that in a time when the world is drowning in information, librarians who know how to find and manage the best information are more necessary than ever. The successful librarian will be alert to new developments and tools in the information arena, evaluating their applicability to the needs of faculty and students. The new opportunities for outreach are as boundless as the creativity of the librarian.

This article will discuss some of the many aspects of personal knowledge management as well as the opportunities that knowledge management theories and tools offer to the academic librarian. Beginning with a discussion of the development of the PKM philosophy, the article will briefly explore some of the top free tools and techniques that support PKM practices. The librarian has many opportunities to share her PKM knowledge with librarian colleagues at her institution as well as opportunities to reach out to her larger academic community. Instruction and outreach to both groups will be explored, with special emphasis on the new possibilities offered by the content curation movement. The article will conclude with a brief look at possible future trends.

DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Buckminster Fuller (Shilling, 2013) estimated that prior to 1900, knowledge doubled about every century; however, recent estimates show that human knowledge is now doubling every 12-13 months. According to learning-centered brain research neurologist Dr. Judy Willis (2009), at any given moment only about 2,000 bits out of the millions of discrete pieces of information that a person's senses are constantly bombarded with can reach that person's conscious attention. The disparity between the rate of expansion of human knowledge and the ability of an individual to assimilate information cuts right to the heart of the biggest challenge of the information age.

Throughout this age of knowledge explosion, it has become increasingly difficult for experts to keep up with the knowledge in their discipline, let alone broader trends in academic research. In response to technology improvements and advances in science which continued to encourage the information flood, researchers began to fragment traditional disciplines into many sub-units in order to attempt to focus their expertise and learn a specific body of knowledge completely. This acceleration of knowledge does not show any signs of abating, so the assimilation of new tools and techniques to deal with the challenge is an important consideration for successful researchers in today's environment.

The concepts of information overload and the anxiety that resulted was first identified as researchers of the human condition observed individuals struggling to keep up with knowledge's frantic rate of increase The concept soon became a common topic of all sorts of researchers, news programs and even casual conversation. As early as 1989, Richard Saul Wurman (p.34) wrote a seminal book on the topic where he defined information anxiety as "the ever-widening

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