The Applications of Lead User Method in Knowledge Management Practice at Malaysian Universities Library

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In Malaysia, the interest of Knowledge Management (KM) practices is still growing especially among Malaysian universities library. The truth is big multinational companies still lead the way, but a number of large corporations in the country are beginning to take their steps down the KM road. This paper is seek to fill a significant method of multi-cross discipline approach so-called the "Lead User" method from technology management and manufacturing area to generate an appropriate concept of the lead user in the context of Library and Information Science (LIS) environment. While the lead user method is frequently cited in the preceding literature, yet, there are only limited attempts to comprehensively discuss on how this approach is embedded in theories and empirical findings of linkage between KM practice and library users' satisfaction at Malaysian university libraries. The lead user method is in the focus of the present paper, both with respect to develop its theoretical foundation and its implementation into the KM in the library environment. Therefore, an empirical research on the lead user in the library is reviewed to clarify the theoretical foundation of the lead user method. Finally, the finding of this study hoped that the "Lead User" method can be accepted and contributed as a new body of knowledge in the LIS environment especially in Malaysia. The implications of finding in this study hoped would show a development trend of KM practices at Malaysian universities library.

Keywords: knowledge management, library and information science, technology management, manufacturing, lead user, Malaysia

Introduction

Today, we are living in the era of knowledge explosion. LIS professionals have shown a great interest in the implementation of KM in the libraries. Information environment expressed a need for a deeper understanding of its many dimensions and relevance to their work (Wormell, 2004). The success of libraries depends on their ability to utilize information and knowledge especially for its staff to better serve the needs of the organization and users. The multidisciplinary nature of KM has resulted in input from people in different fields including economists, human resource professionals, IT professionals and library and information professionals. A strong customer orientation encompasses acquiring information about customer needs (intelligence generation), disseminating the information throughout all critical functional areas like marketing, Research and Development and production (intelligence dissemination), and translating this information into marketable products and services (responsiveness) (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Kaplan and Norton (2004) stated that "….strategy is not a stand-alone management process. It is one step in a

logical continuum that moves an organization from a high-level mission statement to the work performed by frontline and back-office employees" (Takala et al., 2006). Therefore, this research needs to focus and identify a strategy to narrow down who's the real "Lead User".

Literature Review

Much definition can be found in the literature related to "Lead User" and/or "User Groups" in the library context. Von Hipple (1986) defines "Lead User" are users whose present strong needs will become general in a market place months or years in the future. Cihak and Howland (2002) described user group is graphically like intersecting circle which is new users and senior users cross over subject-based groups.

Imhoff and Maslin (2006) and Anwar (1981) agreed that one useful way to determine the target user is to group people by their usage of the library. One possible group is the regular patrons, those people who already use the library and library services generally. Many of these will be library card holders or another group might be termed "nonusers", people in the community who typically do not have library cards. This group may also contain a significant immigrant population,

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depending where libraries is located. Stubley and Kidd (2002) points out that users were chosen from academic staff, researchers and post graduate research students because it was felt that they represented a pro-active group with experience of searching library catalogues borne out of wide-ranging and demanding information requirements, substantial knowledge of differing information resources and related library services such as inter loans.

Lead users often attempt to fill the need they experience. They can also provide new product concept and design data as well. The question is how lead users can be systematically identified, and how their perceptions and preferences can be incorporated into KM practice at the library?

To fit in, Von Hipple definition in the library context, therefore lead users can be refers to library users' at universities such as administrations, lecturers, undergraduate (Diploma/Degree) and postgraduate (Master/PhD) who have transaction process such as borrowing and returning books. Oldroyd (2004) support that users has expansion and diversification of the student population with more mature, part-time, postgraduate, research and international students. Through a variety of lead users, it is helpful to know who's our user might be (Urban & Von Hippel, 1988). It was recognized that this was not the sole group that could provide useful input, but it was important that the resource committed to the survey be finely focused for optimal results. Therefore, Gruner and Homburg (2000) stated in summary, the lead user concept also underlines the important of choosing customers with specific attributes (vs. random sample) for cooperation.

Lead User Method

According to Luthje and Herstatt (2004) stated that in the 1980s, Von Hippel and his scholars developed a methodology to identify lead users to obtain unique data regarding new emerging needs and solutions responsive to those needs. The methodology has depicted in Figure 1.
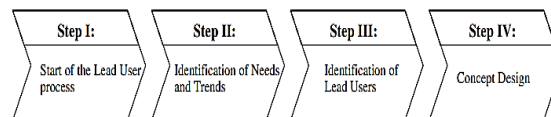

Figure 1. The process of the lead user method.

From this method, it will derive a number of key questions with respect to the practical implementation of the lead user approach in the library to develop an agenda for future research. It is a good method to be adopted in this study to identify and categorize the lead user in libraries which should be taken as a respondent in the future analysis when the distribution questionnaire process takes part. Thus, it is important that the users actually should lead the trends that were chosen as being important in the previous step. To facilitate this propose lead user through an existing literature about the linkages, this study tries to adopt a general representation so-called strategy map. The strategy map illustrated by Kaplan (2004) and Kaplan and Norton (2004) is a visual representation of the linked components or factor of an organization's. Therefore, the strategy map could give a big insight and in-depth understanding to this study.
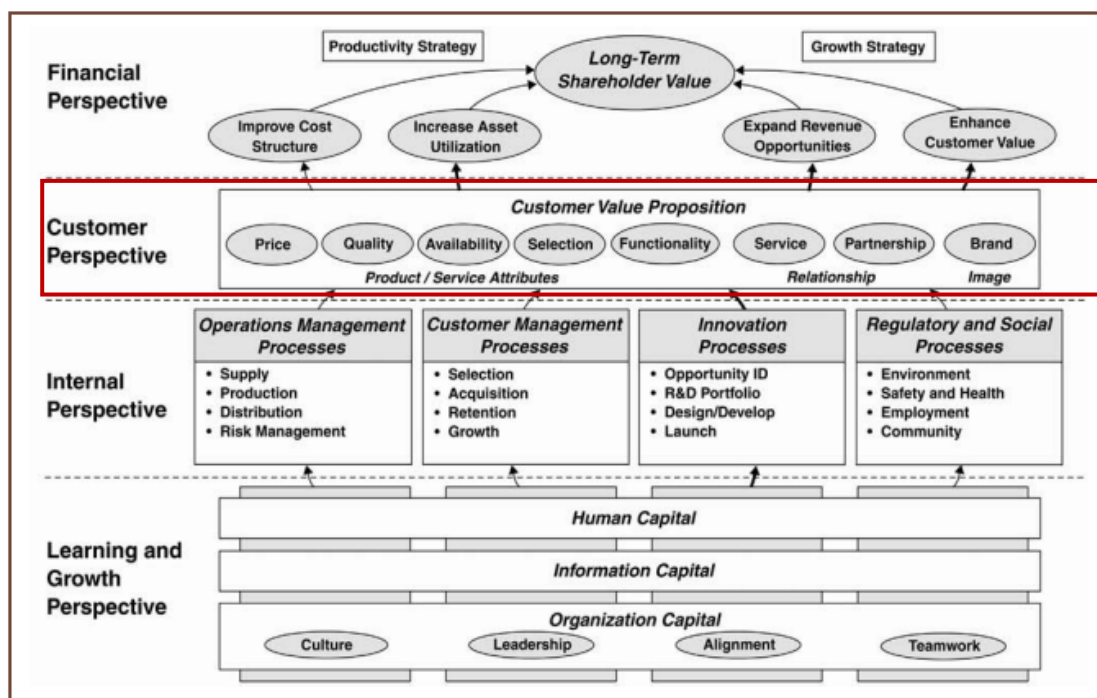

Figure 2. An overview of strategy map in the organization. Source: Kaplan and Norton (2004).

In the figure depicted, this study assumes that the "Lead User" in the library situated at "Customer Perspective". The lead user was integrated with a price, quality, availability, selection, functionality, service, partnership and brand. Together with this integration, it provides the conceptual of the lead user for developing method for this study. Through much literature (Anwar, 1981; Von Hipple, 1986; Urban & Von Hipple, 1988; Cihak & Howland, 2002; Stubley & Kidd, 2002; Imhoff & Maslin, 2006), in this study found that there was a need to identify and categorize the lead user in LIS environment. Aswath and Gupta (2009) stated that to provide relevant and value added services to the user community and libraries, librarians need to change their work as custodians of information resources in the library for information providers, navigators, and cybrarians. It assumes that the lead users were selected from postgraduate group which is PhD student as depicted in Figure 3.
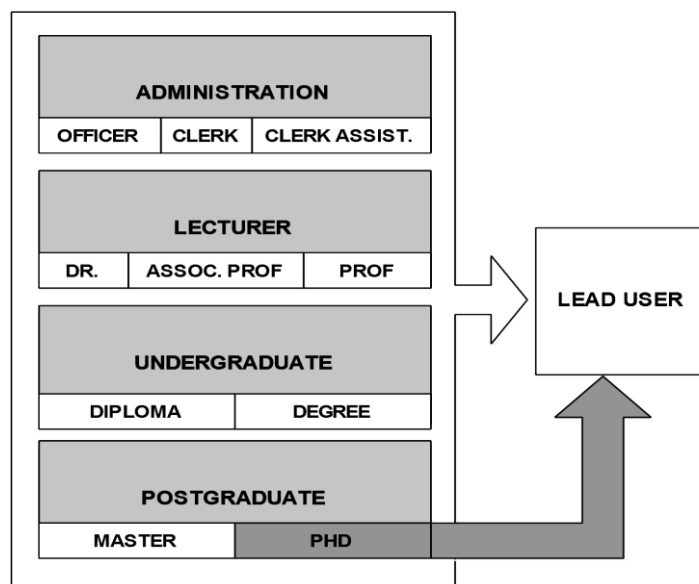

Figure 3. Focus group of PhD students' using "Lead Users" method.

PhD group was selected because they are addicted and have a strong need to seek and searching information related to their research or studies in the library. They also used every part of facilities (i.e. reference desk and etc.) and services (i.e. inter library loan (ILL) and etc.) offered by university libraries. It is very important to identify and categorize the lead user in this case. This group of users was selected in this study because they are the best knowledge creator in universities (Tandale, et al., 2011). These are from administration, undergraduate and postgraduate involve in a part of library environment. They are unique and heavily use the library as their center of resources. Therefore, this component of the lead user with this regard, suggest to be taken in this part of the measurement process of the lead user method. Therefore, it is hoped that by applying this method, this study found the focus group or the lead user which have strong need in the context of Malaysian universities library.

Conclusion

This study tries to formulate the lead user theory as a set of interrelated with the lead user factor in the LIS environment for the first time. More specifically, this study found in literature, four components or factor of the lead user such as admin, lecturer, undergraduate and postgraduate student can be measured. Based on the illustration of two figures, this study has illustrated the various process steps of the lead user method. The expected outcome of this study was the PhD students as a focus group. As a consequence, it is hoped that, by adopting this method could help this study in determining specific the lead user who heavily use knowledge at the library. In additional, this study also found from the literature that a Strategy Map which look suitable to adopt and explained give better understanding by using the lead user method. The lead user method in general in this study, could be assumes worked well in this case study. The reader should note that it is still a very new method introduced in LIS environment. The details of method application will appropriately differ from study time to time. To conclude, the implication of this study hoped that the "Lead User" method found could be contributed as a new body of knowledge in the LIS environment especially in Malaysia.

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