



Young librarians unite: Possibilities for professional transformation in Japanese librarianship

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Abstract The interorganizational networking communities have spontaneously emerged among young Japanese librarians in recent years. This study explores the role of the communities from the perspectives of professional knowledge management, social networks and social capital, and the possibilities to reconstruct the Japanese librarianship. The study examined the following research questions: 1) What outcomes did young librarians who had participated in the interorganizational social networking communities get especially in terms of knowledge acquisition and affections? And 2) What possibilities do the young librarians communities have to transform Japanese librarianship? Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with five librarians to gain insight into how they engage in and feel about outside social networking activities and training opportunities. The results showed that the young librarians' voluntary communities helped build social networks, provided opportunities for the transfer of tacit knowledge, and were a source of motivation for the participants. They also suggested that the communities could have a significant impact on the transition of Japanese librarianship.

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Introduction

Many interorganizational networking communities have spontaneously emerged among young Japanese librarians in recent years. This study explores the role of the communities from the perspectives of professional knowledge management, social networks and social capital, and the possibilities to reconstruct the Japanese librarianship.

Emerging communities of young librarians

The activities of the communities comprised of relatively young librarians have become conspicuous in recent years.

The communities were emerged spontaneously in different places throughout Japan and in small groups at the beginning but with a few of them quickly growing into nationwide organizations. They appear to enjoy and make optimal use of the new web-based social networking tools such as Google Groups, Wiki, Skype, and Twitter. These types of networks were referred to as "electronic networks of practice" by Wasko, Faraj, and Teigland (2004). Unlike traditional library associations, these young communities have neither membership systems nor steering committees and are willing to communicate and collaborate with other professions. Here are a few examples:

1. *U40 Future Librarian* (<http://futurelibrarian.g.hatena.ne.jp/>) was organized in 2009 as a loose community of librarians under 40. It seeks to encourage librarianship

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by creating a loose network of library stakeholders. They have hosted nationwide gatherings composed of many different simultaneous meetings in 2009 and 2010 and have attracted to their ranks hundreds of librarians and related professionals.

2. *Lifo* (<http://www.lifo-club.org/>) was originally created by several young librarians working in rather small academic libraries who had difficulty finding hands-on learning opportunities. Its members are scattered throughout Japan; they communicate via Wiki and listserv, and they frequently organize study tours and collaborative activities with other groups.
3. *Code4Lib Japan* (<http://www.code4lib.jp/>) is an overseas branch of Code4Lib, a community of systems librarians and other IT/Web-related library professionals based in the U.S. Unlike the aforementioned communities, Code4Lib Japan is funded by Japan's Library Advancement Foundation. Conducting Information Communication Technologies (ICT) related training programs and making a proposal of the standardization of the API of online catalog are just two of its current initiatives.

Two main factors are considered to drive the development of voluntary communities. The first is the dysfunction of traditional professional organizations. Traditional librarians' associations, such as the Japan Library Association, have tried to encourage librarians to renew their constructs of their profession, but their efforts seem to have had little meaningful impact on the workplace. The power such organizations had to build cross-organizational relationships and manage professional knowledge has been weakened in this age of rapid change in digital technology.

The second factor is the shrinkage of libraries. This has affected universities; for example, as each library has gotten smaller due to human resources cost-cutting, the number of professional librarians per university has been halved over the last 30 years (17.3 librarians per library in 1980 and 7.8 in 2009 on average) and over half of these are part-timers (Ministry of Education, Japan, 1980; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, 2009). While managerial expertise is becoming more important to the profession, the development of part-time paraprofessionals is also becoming increasingly essential for both libraries and the professional community as a whole. Despite the discrepancy between the ideal and the stagnant reality, young librarian communities might have begun to emerge.

This movement of young librarians in Japan has not been introduced in the context of Library and Information Science (LIS) and Education. Effective professional transitions within the librarian community are challenging in every country (Hardesty, 2002; Hillenbrand, 2005; Shen, 2006), but this voluntary practice among young librarians might be a unique example of change creation.

Social networks and social capital

The social network theory has been developed by various researchers to explore the structure and the role of social

networks as social capital from various perspectives (Baker, 2000; Lin, 2001). Adler and Kwon (2002) in their review article describing achievements in social network research, argued that social relations as social capital benefited many aspects of human practice.

The young librarian communities help members build social relationships outside their own libraries and allow them to expand their networks beyond their immediate communities. This form of network has been described by social network theory as "weak-tie." Granovetter (1973) was the first to point out that weak-tie helped job seekers get better information than strong-tie (e.g., family member, close friends) did.

The aspect of knowledge transfer has also been discussed both in interorganizational and intraorganizational context. Burt (2001), using the concept of 'structural holes', compared the role of individuals who had rich interorganizational relationships with the ones who had rather intraorganizational networks and his study concluded that the person who could fill the structural holes between organizations brought benefits to the organization because the person could gain more innovative information through human network outside than the person who acted only in a closed organization. One of the advantages of network forms of organization Podolny and Page (1998) discussed was the learning benefit. Individuals could exchange their knowledge within interorganizational network and it brought benefit to their organization. By an in-depth study on large firms, Byosiere, Luethge, Vas, and Salmador (2010) described how the intraorganizational networks exchange both explicit and tacit knowledge. The richer a person's social network is, the better his or her performance is because the network offers a wealth of necessary information acquired from other people (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). These previous findings in the social network theory lead us to predict that the participants of the young librarian communities bridge the structural holes, play an important role for knowledge transfer and have a positive effect on the organizational improvement.

In the context of librarianship, we must refer to an interorganizational network as a professional network, and this study will discuss the roles and the possibilities of the young librarian communities at the level of the profession. Some articles have mentioned the possibilities of the non-traditional communities for the development of librarianship (Bordelon, 2008), and a few Japanese studies exist on librarians' interorganizational knowledge transfer and social capital; thus, this research will contribute to the research into practice of LIS.

Research method

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with five librarians to gain insight into how they engaged in and felt about outside activities and training opportunities. The interviewees were selected from participants and organizers of events and training programs hosted by the new librarian communities. They comprised two full-time, one part-time, and two (contract) full-time librarians (Males: 2;

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