How can professional associations continue to stay relevant? Knowledge Management to the rescue

Naresh Kumar Agarwal  
Simmons College, School of Library & Information Science  
Boston, MA, USA  
agarwal@simmons.edu

Md Anwarul Islam  
Japan Advanced Institute of Science & Technology, School of Knowledge Science  
Nomi, Ishikawa, Japan  
anwar81du@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Professional associations across various fields have largely been struggling to stay relevant. Many have been watching a steady decline in membership numbers over the years. In many cases, members who join do not renew their membership. Existing members complain about the association not giving enough value for their membership dues. While the association does all the right things that it has been doing for the years since its existence, there is often a gap in what a changing membership base or potential audience for membership demands and what the association is able to deliver. In such a scenario, what must associations do to change the tide, to continue to stay relevant, to stem the decline, and to attract new members, and retain the ones they have? Using literature from knowledge management (KM), especially Agarwal & Marouf (2014)’s KM adoption framework, Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)’s SECI model, and Agarwal & Islam (2014)’s KM Tools framework, and a study of the websites of professional associations in library and information science, this paper proposes a thriving KM strategy as a way for professional associations to not just survive, but to thrive. The ideas presented would be relevant to the leadership of professional associations.

Keywords
Professional associations, LIS, membership, recruitment, retention, knowledge management.

INTRODUCTION
Professional associations across various fields have largely been struggling to stay relevant. Many have been watching a steady decline in membership numbers over the years, and are seeing that the members who join do not renew their membership. This was reported in associations such as the Association for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the American Library Association (ALA). “Most professional associations are struggling to sustain, never mind grow, membership, and ASIS&T is no different.” (Dillon, 2013, p.3). “Across the past 20 years, there has been a gradual but steady decline in ASIS&T membership. This decline is a deeply troubling trend.” (Bruce, 2014, p.4). “Analysis of the trends over the period 2010 to 2014 shows that [the IFLA] membership in Africa, Asia-Oceania and Latin America-Caribbean are holding up well, and figures for National Associations are generally stable. The biggest drops in membership have been Institutional, particularly in Europe and, to a lesser extent, in North America, and Student Affiliates” (IFLA report, 2014, p.14). ALA also reported a gradual decline from 58,996 to 54,166 members between 2011 and 2015 (ALA annual membership statistics, 2016). “Membership has declined in ALA since 2005 due to a number of factors. The largest factor was the long, deep recession, which forced individuals or libraries to cut back on their memberships” (Dowling, 2014, p.20).

Across associations, existing members complain about the association not giving enough value for their membership dues. While the association does all the right things that it has been doing for years, there is often a gap in what a changing membership base or potential audience for membership demands and what the association is able to deliver. Various wings of the association have difficulty in hiring new leaders. New leaders are lost on what to do. Procedures for documenting best practices and lessons learned are either non-existent or broken, and the services provided by the association not disseminated to the audience adequately, and where they are, the services don’t measure up to the changing needs of its members. Agarwal (2013) writes in the ASIS&T Bulletin, “In order to take on new challenges in an ever-changing world, I’d like to see ASIS&T become more agile and responsive to change, while retaining its core values ” (p.21).

In such a scenario, what must professional associations do to change the tide, to continue to stay relevant, to stem the decline, and to attract new members, and retain the ones they have? How can they be innovative rather than simply doing more of the same things that they have been doing for...
years? How can they make their services attractive for current and potential members? What role can knowledge management (KM) play in this?

Using literature from KM and its applications to various fields, and a study of the websites of professional associations in the field of library and information science (LIS), this paper proposes a thriving knowledge management strategy as a way for professional associations to not just survive, but to thrive. Specifically, we use three KM frameworks and apply them to helping with membership engagement/recruitment in professional associations. The roadmap and ideas presented would be relevant to the leadership of professional associations.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Why are Professional Associations needed?
As non-profit organizations, professional associations usually come up with the interests of particular professions that engage individuals and represent the interest of professional practitioners (Harvey & Mason, 1995). Associations are involved in the development & monitoring of professional activities by offering educational and training programs, conferences, seminars and other activities that help engage the professionals and improve the profession as a whole. In some cases, practitioners or their employers treat membership of an association as professional certification. Nearly every profession has its own association, either nationally or globally, and some have regional chapters that one can join (Cherwin, 2010). The associations help provide a professional home to people who identify with the profession and help them engage with those who feel part of the same identification. Way back in the 1950s, Merton (1958) noted the contributions that professional associations make to society e.g. one of the principal aims of the American Medical Association is to improve health care, whereas the American Bar Association promotes the administration of justice. Professional associations help foster professionalism in society (Yeager, 1981), help provide updated and extended professional knowledge, enact knowledge in practice, and act as change catalysts (Rusaw, 1995). Cherwin (2010) identified three reasons why people might want to join a professional association: 1) enhance their network by creating and maintaining professional relationships; 2) take charge of their career by taking advantage of the career and job-search resources provided by associations; and 3) broaden their knowledge through the publications and research literature spearheaded by an association. Six focus groups conducted by ASIS&T (two of practitioners, two of academics, one of students, and one of leaders) at its 2014 annual meeting led to these reasons as to why members valued the association: 1) ASIS&T is home and provides them with personal connections with a scholarly or professional community through chapters, special interest groups (SIGs) and annual meetings – ‘This conference is like a family reunion.’; 2) It helps them get recognition and built reputation, pursue leadership opportunities and continue their professional development. (Hirsh, 2015a, p.4).

LIS Professional Associations
There are a large number of professional associations pertaining to the fields of Information Science and LIS. ASIS&T, the premier association for Information Science & Technology, was founded on March 13, 1937, and has a number of regional and student chapters, and SIGs in different areas (ASIS&T, 2016). There are also associations in information science focused on specific countries. E.g. the Canadian Association for Information Science (CAIS) brings together information science professionals based in Canada (CAIS, 2016). The Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) was founded in 1915 and serves as the intellectual home of university faculty in graduate programs in LIS in North America. (ALISE, 2016). Founded on October 6, 1876, ALA has become the world’s largest and oldest library association. It has eleven membership divisions focusing on different types of libraries. E.g., the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) has its own set of goals and objectives to drive its activities (ALA, 2016). IFLA, representing many voices of library associations internationally, has around 1500 members in approximately 150 countries (IFLA, 2015). The European Bureau of Library Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) was founded in 1992 and serves as an independent umbrella association of library, information, documentation and archive associations and institutions in Europe (EBLIDA, 2016). Apart from these, there are various library associations spread across the world. Library associations (2016) lists 351 associations – 184 in North America, 61 in Europe, 47 in Asia, 14 in Oceania, 10 in Africa, 8 in the Caribbean, 8 in Latin America and 19 that identify as International associations. These include national, provincial and territorial associations, school & college library associations, and special library associations that are specific to a particular location. Meinhold (2010) provides a guide to over 600 associations from over 130 countries concerned with the fields of librarianship, documentation, information science and archives. Other listings can be accessed at USC Libraries (2016) and UW Libraries (2016). The latter organizes the list by location, library type, and interest.

The Challenges Faced by Professional Associations
Harris (1998) notes that little attention has been paid by researchers on the challenges faced by voluntary associations. Given the shortage of human and other resources, even the most up-to-date, well-run organizations will run into trouble with retaining its membership, and maintaining other relevant activities (Harrison, 1998). McQuide, Millonzi & Farrell (2007) write that associations mostly sustain themselves through the contribution of membership and sometimes it becomes challenging to maintain the association’s activities with the limited fees paid by the members. While the members have auxiliary
priorities and limited time and energy in their association duties, without funding for full time staff, the professional association faces difficulties. Professional associations find it difficult to stay relevant to membership with constantly changing technology, resources and the effort required in volunteer recruitment & retention (Kolar, 2015). Harris (1998) identifies five key challenges of associations as meeting long-term goals and individual member’s needs, balancing member-benefit and public-benefit goals, setting priorities in the face of competing interests, controlling member volunteers, and integrating paid staff. Mainland (2015) further identifies the top three challenges faces by the associations as communicating the value of membership, understanding the challenges/needs and attracting new members. She notes that understanding member needs is key to the sustainability of any organization. The focus groups run as part of the ASIS&T Strategic Planning were in this direction of understanding member needs (Hirsh, 2015a). Some of the challenges faced by IFLA (Willhite, 2012) have included insufficient financial and other resources, dependency of membership income, lack of infrastructure, geographically scattered members (Lor, 2007), creation of a new professional structure, strengthening the relationships with strategic partners, and the development of advocacy policy (Lux, 2009). Many people are no longer willing to pay for the privilege of belonging when they can get connected with other professionals through Facebook and other social networking tools for free (Kahan, 2013). It is apparent from these studies that leaders of professional societies & associations are grappling with the issues of membership retention and recruitment.

So, what approaches need to be taken to strengthen professional associations? McGuide, Millionzi & Farrell (2007) recommend two broad areas for associations to focus on: 1) improving its internal structure and organizational effectiveness, and 2) strengthening its activities. To stay relevant with the user communities and to cope with a changing world, associations need to understand, appreciate and apply KM as a strategy to retain membership, to improve the skills of members, and to help them with their goals. KM can help to address these challenges, while helping increase two-way interaction between the association and its members.

**KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TO THE RESCUE**

**KM in LIS**

Knowledge Management is the process of acquiring, creating or capturing, sharing and applying knowledge to fulfil the goals of a for-profit or non-profit organization (King, 2009). Dalkir (2011) provides an extensive review of KM. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) define KM as the capability of “a company as a whole to create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organization, and embody it in products, services and systems” (p.3). Considering the importance of KM, it has been practiced by a number of fields such as information systems, business and management, computer science and communications, and is also being applied to LIS. As an interdisciplinary approach, Roknuzzaman and Umemoto (2008) explored the relevance of KM to LIS. They found that highest number of KM graduate programs originated from LIS/Information Management (IM). Considering the growing visibility of KM in the academic field, Sutton (2007) recommended KM as a valuable opportunity for LIS schools to help learners gain skills for new knowledge work. A number of other researchers (e.g. Todd & Southon, 2001; Hazeri & Martin, 2009; Agarwal & Islam, 2014, 2015; Islam, Agarwal & Ikeda, 2014, 2015) have looked at different aspects of KM, ranging from KM awareness to KM tools to knowledge retention and transfer in the context of LIS and innovation in library services.

**METHODOLOGY**

In this theoretical paper, we first apply Agarwal & Marouf (2014)’s 10-step framework for the adoption of KM in universities to the case of associations, with the value proposition being member retention and recruitment.

Second, we study the websites of LIS professional associations to see what membership benefits they provide. This data is mapped across the quadrants (socialization, externalization, combination and internationalization) of Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)’s SECI model to identify how these knowledge processes are being achieved in these associations, and what are the gaps that remain.

Finally, using Agarwal & Islam (2014)’s framework on KM tools and mechanisms, we propose solutions for knowledge capture/creation, knowledge sharing/transfer and knowledge application/use so as to retain and recruit members in professional associations. Findings from studies (e.g. the Strategic Planning Process by ASIS&T) are also cited to help in this direction.

**USING KM FOR MEMBER RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

While KM has been applied in for-profit and non-profit organizations, including universities and libraries, in the past two-three decades, we could not find a single study that had investigated KM in a professional association. We contend that professional associations are ripe for adopting knowledge management. With the number of challenges facing associations, especially in the area of member engagement, retention and recruitment, they must focus on creative ways to keep volunteers motivated and develop a culture where the knowledge of members is retained and shared regularly in a variety of organic communities. KM can offer the processes for the best use of the association’s resources for sharing and creating new knowledge, which can help enhance the association’s activities. Once KM is embraced by the association, members can identify and share the best practices and lessons learned, contribute to a thriving virtual repository and engage in a variety of ways (including face-to-face and online) for gathering and exchanging knowledge. This knowledge can then be
transferred to those who need it, at times and in ways that address the right teachable moment.

Implementing KM in Professional Associations

Agarwal & Marouf (2014) presented a 10-step process for the adoption of KM in universities. We can apply their framework to professional associations as a starting point for them to initiate KM. The value proposition that we use is the need for member retention and recruitment by the association. Divided into the four phases of plan, design, implement and scale-up, these steps provide the sequence to follow to implement KM. The framework also requires the enabling factors of culture, measures, technology and infrastructure for KM to succeed. Some associations e.g. ASIS&T have already adopted such a process in the form of strategic planning (Hirsh, 2015a, 2015b).

Figure 1. Framework for initiating KM in a professional association (adapted from Agarwal & Marouf, 2014).

The table below (adapted from Agarwal & Marouf, 2014) provides the details of each step in the context of professional associations, the mechanisms to fulfil it, and its outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLAN</td>
<td>Find a champion(s) from the Board of Directors; form a KM planning team involving leaders from chapters, interest groups and committees.</td>
<td>Consultation for team formation involving various stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Align KM goals and priorities: a) align KM goals to the perceived crisis and opportunity – to increase member recruitment and retention; b) prioritize the critical knowledge to manage e.g. member needs</td>
<td>2-3 retreats involving stakeholders (Board and other leaders of the association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Determine your current state – people, culture, processes &amp; IT</td>
<td>Survey, interviews, focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Ten-step KM initiation plan for professional associations (adapted from Agarwal & Marouf, 2014)

Agarwal & Marouf (2014) provide details on each of the steps. In the next section, we will focus on Step 4 of the framework to determine the approach and mechanisms for member recruitment and retention by professional associations. This is based on a study of the websites of six of the large professional associations in information science and LIS – ASIS&T, ALA, IFLA, ALISE, CAIS, and SLA. EBLIDA was considered but excluded as we found it mostly limited to organizational memberships. While not exhaustive, these associations represent some of the major voices in the field in North America and across the world. We use Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)’s knowledge management framework as a theoretical lens to map our findings. This will allow us to study member recruitment and retention approaches in the context of knowledge management in LIS professional associations.

Approaches for member retention and recruitment: Mapping findings from Association websites to Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)’s SECI model

One of the most popular KM frameworks is Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)’s SECI model where they examined the knowledge creation and transfer process within an organization. Here, SECI stands for Socialization, Externalization, Combination and Internalization. The KM literature typically classifies knowledge into one of two types – tacit and explicit. The tacit knowledge is one that is in people’s heads and is difficult to capture or codify. The explicit knowledge is what we find in books, documents and in online repositories. For effective knowledge
management, both tacit and explicit knowledge needs to be managed. The four quadrants of Nonaka and Takeuchi’s SECI model relate to the conversion from the tacit to the tacit (socialization), tacit to explicit (externalization), explicit to explicit (combination) and from explicit to tacit (internalization). See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)’s SECI model for Knowledge Creation in organizations.

With the value proposition as member recruitment and retention in professional associations, we discuss below the strategies that LIS professional associations are adopting for each of these four quadrants of the SECI model. The SECI model was chosen as it is among the simplest and most comprehensive model for knowledge creation in an organization. Here, we analyze the quadrants as they relate to the members of an association and the benefits the association provides for them. Thus, the members’ point of view is important here, as opposed to the organization’s point of view. Hence, as we draw data from the websites written by the associations, the SECI model helps us identify gaps from the members’ point of view.

1. **Socialization** (tacit – tacit exchange of association members’ knowledge)

**ASIS&T**: Members have networking opportunities through the local chapters and special interest groups, and get reduced rates to annual conferences and summits. They also get to meet prospective employers through job placement.

**ALA**: ALA members can attend its conference and round table discussion, and network with other librarians interested in improving library services. Job seekers also have access to the JobLIST Placement Center which helps them connect with potential employers. Through official social media channels, ALA members connect with a virtual workspace where ALA groups and communities of interest collaborate online.

**IFLA**: Members can take part in meetings, seminars and workshops, discuss important issues with colleagues from all over the world, and exchange information on the topics they work on.

**ALISE**: Members connect with other LIS educators at the Annual Conference, in a committee they might serve in, or as a member of the Board of Directors. They can also participate in Special Interest Groups. Job seekers can network to meet the people with positions available and take advantage of formal and informal placement services at ALISE conferences, including resume dissemination and interviews.

**CAIS**: Members are given the opportunity to meet like-minded scholars and practitioners throughout the information science world, and to connect with an international group of researchers.

**SLA**: Members can network, face-to-face and virtually, with seasoned professionals from around the world in a variety of LIS roles and business environments. They can connect with professionals in their geographical area through a chapter, or with their discipline through a division. They can also volunteer with these units. The connections can be online, or in person at local meetings and events at the SLA Annual Conference. Job seekers can connect with potential employers through the Career Center. Recent graduates and new professionals can share experiences with and get advice from members of SLA’s First Five Years Advisory Council.

Most of these associations allow members with accepted papers, posters, panels and workshops to present at their annual conferences to other attendees. Members socialize through many formal activities like forum meetings, workshops, and through informal activities like having a cup of coffee with colleagues, seeking tips for job hunting, and getting to know other researchers and practitioners. These types of socialization activities with others from the field may attract new members to join an association. They also help with member retention. A lot of members e.g. at ASIS&T have been coming to its annual conference each year for twenty or thirty years.

However, members who cannot travel to the annual meeting do not benefit from socialization. The interaction during webinars is often limited. Thus, there may not be an incentive for them to join or renew their membership. A lot of times, participation in local chapters does not require association membership.

2. **Externalization** (tacit – explicit conversion of members’ knowledge)

**ASIS&T**: Authors are able to contribute to articles in JASIST and the Annual Meeting.

**ALA**: Members contribute to books, periodicals, posters and promotional events published by ALA.

**IFLA**: Members with accepted papers are able to publish in conference proceedings at a discounted rate. Other people can contribute to the IFLA journal and publication series. As part of working groups, members can help develop standards and guidelines.

**ALISE**: Members can contribute to the JELIS journal and the annual conference.
CAIS: Researchers can contribute to the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science (CIJILS) and to the annual conference proceedings.

SLA: Members can ask or answer questions through SLA’s discussion lists.

As members publish their research activities through peer-reviewed conference and journal papers and present their research ideas, knowledge is crystallized, which can then be shared with other LIS professionals, and becomes the basis for new knowledge.

However, apart from the annual meeting, authors don’t need to be members to publish e.g. in ASIS&T’s journal JASIST, in ALISE’s journal JELIS, etc. Due to limited acceptance rates, a lot of new researchers are also not able to publish in the premier journals of the associations (though many are able to make it to posters during the annual meetings).

3. Combination (explicit – explicit reformulation of member’s knowledge)

ASIS&T, ALA, IFLA, ALISE, CAIS, SLA: No specific member benefit identified.

Combination refers to the “process of assembling new and existing explicit knowledge held by individuals into a knowledge system” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p207).

Apart from posting about events/publications in blogs and social media such as Facebook or Twitter, there aren’t any identified opportunities for explicit to explicit conversion of member knowledge. E.g. the mid-term and annual reports of the Board, Chapters and other groups of an association could be combined, edited or processed, which would lead to new knowledge. The new explicit knowledge could then be disseminated among the association’s members.

4. Internalization (explicit – tacit conversion of knowledge by members)

ASIS&T: Members have free access to webinars, which provide online live and on-demand content by experts. They also have access to JASIST, the premier journal by the association, ASIS&T news from the Bulletin, and job listings in the information science field. Members have unrestricted access to the online membership directory, directory of members in chapters and special interest groups, and the digital library. However, members may not always login to the digital library or the ASIS&T website to access the content. Students may be able to retrieve the publications from their university libraries. The usage for connecting to other members might be limited.

ALA: Members can access conference proceedings, and join continuing education and leadership development programs to learn how to transform their libraries. They also have access to turnkey tools, advocacy tools, resources and materials that can be utilized by all types of libraries. They have access to printed membership lists that can help them connect with other members if they want to.

IFLA: Members have free access to the IFLA journal and the annual report.

ALISE: Members have access to the quarterly Journal of Education for Library and Information Science and to ALISE.org, which includes an online membership directory and other member-only documents.

CAIS: Members have access to the CIJILS journal, conference proceedings, and postings in the mailing list / Google group.

SLA: Members have continuing education opportunities through webinars, wikis, and more. They can develop new skills via certificate programs, and can stay current with industry trends via SLA’s online magazine, Information Outlook and its social media channels. They also have access to SLA’s Salary Survey, and its discussion lists.

Members internalize knowledge when they read posters, papers, slides and brochures during the conferences.

While most of these associations provide a lot of learning opportunities, these are dependent on the learning orientation and individual motivation of the members or potential members. It is only during the annual meetings where an immersive learning environment is created which benefits most attendees. While members have access to the publications of the association, very few members actually access them on a regular basis. Those who do might get these from their institution’s library, as opposed to the secure website areas of these associations.

Solutions for Member Recruitment & Retention – KM Tools and Mechanisms

As seen from the analysis above of the member benefits, associations provide a number of opportunities for knowledge creation and exchange among their members. Yet, these are clearly not enough to stem the decline in their membership numbers (Dillon, 2013; Bruce, 2014; IFLA report, 2014; ALA annual membership statistics, 2015). Using Agarwal & Islam (2014)’s framework on KM tools and mechanisms, we propose solutions for knowledge capture/creation, knowledge sharing/transfer and knowledge application/use so as to retain and recruit members in professional associations. These are key phases of the KM cycle as outlined in Dalkir (2011) and Agarwal & Islam (2014). Findings from studies (e.g. the Strategic Planning Process by ASIS&T) are also cited to help in this direction. Implementing these tools and strategies might help fill the gap between the member needs and the association’s perceptions of those needs.

Some of the mechanisms for knowledge capture/creation (Agarwal & Islam, 2014) are already implemented by most associations now e.g. guest speakers are brought in for webinars. Knowledge marketplace is implemented through linking members with the research interests of other members, and connecting job seekers with institutions with
openings. Other mechanisms that can be applied to professional associations are listed in Table 2 below.

**Ad Hoc Sessions / Knowledge cafe:** Associations can provide for face-to-face and virtual ad hoc sessions which can be formed quickly to address a particular issue based on a member’s call for help. An easy way to do this is a place in the website such as ‘request an ad hoc session’ with (other researchers, experts, etc.). This can be linked to the schedules of members. Right now, most associations have no mechanisms, for instance, to share Google calendars with other trusted members. Members should also be able to share ‘online networking hours’, similar to office hours provided by faculty to students. This would enable members to network with other members of their association in real-time. Social media such as Facebook provide this in a limited manner, but it doesn’t include the research interests of each member.

**After action review:** After each event by the association (and its chapters and SIGs), there should be a mechanism to elicit and save the lessons learned, and best practices generated. E.g. ASIS&T has started sharing the winning annual reports of SIGs and Chapters with other SIGs/Chapters via a Wiki to serve as best practices. However, more help and mentoring is needed for SIGs/Chapters, especially if their officers have graduated/left, or if they have had a lean year.

**Learning history:** For every lesson learned, a learning history should be captured that describes what happened, why it happened, how the association reacted, and what current members can learn from this experience. These insights will help increase the association’s reflective capacity.

**Brainstorming / learning and idea capture – learning from others:** Regular in-person and virtual brainstorming sessions can be instituted where members can discuss current issues/ideas pertaining to the profession as a whole or the association or membership in particular. Most communication from the association to its members is one-way. Webinars provide a similar kind of one-way communication. More interaction and two-way communication mechanisms can be instituted through meet-ups, and online synchronous meetings. Tools such as Google Hangout, Skype and screen-sharing can provide simple mechanisms for these.

**Knowledge exchange/exit interview:** Templates need to be created for exit interviews. These need to be filled out each time an officer from the association or its various committee’s moves on, or when a member leaves the association. This information is often lost (and is only passed on selectively, if at all).

**Peer assist / mentoring:** This refers to direct knowledge transfer from individuals to others. While most associations have mailing lists and presence on social media, associations can help create a culture of active help seeking from peers and subject matter experts on issues individual members might be facing. These could range from research methods to job searches, or other areas. When the members of an association actively start seeking and helping each other with their goals, it can make for a powerful community and help retain and recruit members. E.g. ASIS&T offered a paper mentoring service for its 2016 Annual Meeting by allowing authors to solicit feedback before the actual paper submission deadline. Such an initiative would be helpful for students and junior researchers who have limited experience writing peer-reviewed papers.

Let us now look at the mechanisms for knowledge sharing and dissemination identified by Agarwal & Islam (2014) which could be applied to associations (Table 3).

**Embed KM in association HR:** This encourages KM behaviors and overall cultural change. Appropriate rewards and incentives need to be in place for knowledge sharing behavior within ALL roles of the association – ranging from administration to Board of Directors to chapter/SIG/committee leaders and members.

**Collaborative virtual workspaces:** A collaborative physical workspace (as recommended by Agarwal & Islam, 2014) is only possible during the annual conferences (most associations already take advantage of this) and chapter events. To provide value for members throughout the year, the association needs to create mechanisms for live, synchronous, dialogue within all areas of the association. An easy way to accomplish this is by scheduling monthly virtual meetings of the Board, Chapter, SIGs, and committees, which are well-publicized and open to members, where applicable. Also, those members who cannot attend the annual conferences in person should be able to ‘call in’ to the programs and participate virtually by paying a reduced fee. This would require remote technology integration in different rooms when planning for the conference.

**Community of practice:** While associations have special interest groups, the members don’t necessarily derive value from being part of these as most activities are limited to the annual conference, or a few webinars in some cases. Mechanisms need to be created where members can feel more involved and develop a sense of connection and pride by being part of a special interest group. This can be achieved by involving group members in each stage of activity planning. Collaborative virtual workspaces discussed above can help in this.

**Directory of experts / skill mining:** While associations such as ASIS&T already provide links to research interests of members, these are not actively used. A Facebook-like social network needs to be created within association web spaces that can take advantage of these connections. Academia.edu and ResearchGate are attempting to do this in some way, but such networks can be built specific to associations as well.

**Social Network Analysis (SNA) / Sociograms:** These help map the flow of knowledge within an association. SNA should be carried out at various levels of the association – within chapters and interest groups, committees, Board and Administration. It should answer questions such as, “Who do people seek information and knowledge from? Who do they share their knowledge with?”. The association can then work to fill the gaps identified. New members would also benefit from a simple structural map of how the association and its various wings/bodies work together.

**Storytelling:** This is useful for sharing experiential and tacit knowledge. The association can use structured sessions during the annual meeting or virtual sessions (e.g. among leaders or members of a chapter, committee or interest group) to elicit stories of experience, and share knowledge of lessons learned and best practices pertaining to specific tasks or scenarios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Mechanisms for knowledge capture and creation in professional associations (adapted from Agarwal &amp; Islam, 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 3. Mechanisms for knowledge sharing and dissemination in professional associations (adapted from Agarwal &amp; Islam, 2014)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3. Mechanisms for knowledge sharing and dissemination in professional associations (adapted from Agarwal &amp; Islam, 2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, in Table 4, we look at the mechanisms for knowledge application and use (Agarwal & Islam, 2014), which can be used for member retention and recruitment by professional associations.
Cognitive styles and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI): Individual personalities affect the way people acquire and apply knowledge. While it would be difficult to apply this association-wide, it could be applied selectively by the association e.g. by the administrative staff to understand and better predict their personal preferences and behavior when accessing and using information.

Personalization and profiling: Rather than one-size-fits-all, the association website should provide members with personalization and profiling options. The association can seek knowledge of preferences and barriers faced by different member categories e.g. researchers, practitioners, doctoral students and Masters students, which can help the association tailor its programs and activities to serve these different needs.

Knowledge audit: This helps in understanding the knowledge environment of the association or a specific activity e.g. the annual conference, to identify and deal with knowledge gaps. For continuous improvement, the association needs to schedule time and resources to understand the gap in its existing and desired knowledge. This has to be done at various wings/levels of the association.

Taxonomy: It helps organize information and documents in a consistent manner. Effective taxonomies will become increasingly important as the association, its chapters and SIGs start putting together lessons learned and best practices e.g. in a shared Wiki or virtual workspace. The categories should be designed for novice members and new leaders to easily locate the information. Usability testing can be an effective mechanism to evaluate the usability of various components of the association website and other web presence.

Learning reviews: The association needs to carry out regular reviews of what it learned from each activity and process. This will aid association leaders and teams in objective assessment, and help the association become more agile and responsive.

Table 4. Mechanisms for knowledge application and use in professional associations (adapted from Agarwal & Islam, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Mechanisms for knowledge application and use in professional associations (adapted from Agarwal &amp; Islam, 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASIS&amp;T also carried out a strategic planning process in 2014-2015 (see Hirsh, 2015a, 2015b). The report (cited in Hirsh, 2015b) was based on a series of focus groups, surveys and feedback during its 2014 annual meeting. Five key themes – 1) membership; 2) programs, services, mentoring; 3) publications, communications, social media; 4) publicity, outreach, advocacy; and 5) institutional knowledge emerged from their data. Many of the strategic directions in their findings are in line with the KM mechanisms derived from Agarwal &amp; Islam (2014) discussed above. In discussing ‘institutional knowledge’, the ASIS&amp;T report says, “As a knowledge leader, ASIS&amp;T institutionally must improve its KM procedures and processes, to enable leadership on all levels – internationally, regionally, and down to individual student chapters – to more effectively capture and assimilate ‘what has gone before,’ thus enabling a faster and more informed decision making process.” (cited in Hirsh, 2015b). Agarwal (2013, 2014) also discusses strategies for strengthening the various units of ASIS&amp;T by increasing collaboration. These ideas could be applied across different associations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As seen from the findings of this study, professional associations provide a number of benefits for their existing and potential members. These typically include an annual conference, and one or more publications and webinars through the year. Associations also have local chapters and special interest groups.

However, while these keep the association going, there is still a gap between what the association provides and what members expect. In many cases, members or potential members are simply not aware of the many activities or benefits provided by the association. Communication to existing members is often one-way and top-down, with little room for two-way interaction and collaboration.

In such a scenario, we have proposed knowledge management as an active strategy that can help stem this decline. While associations such as ASIS&T and IFLA have special interest groups on the study of knowledge management, they are yet to implement KM within their own associations.

We proposed Agarwal & Marouf (2014)’s ten-step framework as a strategy for associations to begin implementing knowledge management. We then proposed Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)’s SECI model as a template for accessing the gaps in the knowledge experienced by members of an association. For effective member retention, engagement and potential recruitment, the association needs to ensure that for every member, and for every region of the world served by the association, active knowledge conversation/ transformation is taking place in all four quadrants of the SECI model.

To ensure the complete KM cycle (Dalkir, 2011; Agarwal & Islam, 2014) across all units of the association, we have proposed a series of mechanisms for knowledge capture/creation, knowledge sharing/dissemination and knowledge application/use that can help in member retention and recruitment in professional associations.

As noted by Agarwal & Islam (2014), there is no single set of tools/mechanisms that would provide a silver bullet or be applicable across associations, and for each one of an association’s members. However, what we have provided are important recommendations. From within these, the association would need to prioritize initiatives for the short and longer term, depending on the time, budget, human and other resources at its disposal.

This paper has implications for both research and practice. E.g. one of the criticisms facing ASIS&T is that its annual meeting and publications are focused only for academic and scholarly work (and those catering to academics but not professionals). This paper can serve as an example of how research/academic/scholarly and practical/professional considerations can be combined together.
On a practical level, the mechanisms and ideas presented would be useful to the leadership of professional associations and their chapters, committees and other units.

At an academic level, the paper applies KM theories and literature (Agarwal & Marouf, 2014’s ten step framework, Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995’s SECI model, and Agarwal & Islam, 2014’s KM tools framework) to professional associations. By showing how these frameworks/mechanisms can be applied to professional associations, the paper provides a template for other researchers to apply these to other settings such as universities, libraries, archives and other organizations.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This paper set out to answer the questions, “What must professional associations do to change the tide, to continue to stay relevant, to stem the decline in their membership, to attract new members, and to retain the ones they have?”

While we have identified the gaps and provided a number of KM mechanisms as solutions, the paper has a few limitations. First, we have only focused on a few LIS associations from among the hundreds of associations worldwide. Second, we have relied on the websites of the sampled associations and not carried out surveys or interviews of their leadership or members. Third, we have only looked at the non-technology mechanisms provided by Agarwal & Islam (2014). Agarwal & Islam also provide a detailed listing of technology tools which could be applied to professional associations. Fourth, the ideas presented in the paper need to be tested for practical utility and any unforeseen barriers. E.g. if leaders of groups try to engage members by asking for their input and feedback for activities online or during the annual meetings, and do not receive enough responses, they might need to create further incentives for gathering feedback, like a gift card each to the first fifty responses or any other incentive. Incentives and peer support would also need to be created for leaders as they often volunteer for association work, which might give way to professional work or family obligations. Thus, gathering more empirical evidence is necessary to show the effectiveness of the proposed approaches.

Also, the paper focused more on member retention, as compared to recruitment, even though the two are linked. For member recruitment, associations would need to create incentives at various levels, ones which they can only get once they are members and not otherwise. E.g. participation in local chapter events, mailing lists and social media pertaining to an association should be linked to association membership. Accepting more papers, panels, and talks from non-members would also provide them an incentive to go to the annual meeting and to join the association. Recruiting members from developing countries would require understanding the context and life world of the people in those countries (Chatman, 1996). Solutions would range from accepting currencies other than US dollars for membership dues, to payment methods other than credit cards, creating websites and publications in local languages and facilitating the creation of local chapters.

Future work can include gathering qualitative data from the administration and leadership of these associations. Surveys and interviews of members of associations (or those that are a part of multiple associations) can also be carried out. More associations can also be included in the analysis, including those from outside the LIS field. Finally, the paper can be shared with the leadership of associations to generate ideas and stimulate discussions around topics. Any adopted ideas and approaches will help in testing the effectiveness of the approaches presented in the paper.

REFERENCES


