

A Review of Knowledge Sharing Barriers among Academic Staff-A Malaysian Perspective

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Abstract

Nowadays within the era of new technology and knowledge, the worldwide becomes more knowledge oriented. Despite the growing significance of knowledge sharing practices for university success and competitiveness, several barriers make it difficult for knowledge sharing to achieve the goals of universities to deliver innovation and improve the social and cultural enterprise. This paper highlights the barriers that affect knowledge sharing among academic staff in Malaysian universities, categorizing them into two main domains of recently published works, the first domain is the internal barriers and second domain is the external barriers. This review of knowledge sharing barriers among academic staff provide the university management a starting point to evaluate their situation, towards achieving the vision of 2020 and one of the most important objectives for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in Malaysia.

Keywords: Academic staff; knowledge sharing barriers; Malaysian universities

Abstrak

Warga dunia masa kini merupakan masyarakat yang berorientasikan maklumat selaras dengan perkembangan semasa teknologi dan ilmu pengetahuan. Di sebalik amalan perkongsian maklumat yang ketara, terdapat pelbagai halangan yang menyukarkan perkongsian maklumat dilaksanakan terutamanya terhadap perkongsian dan hebahan maklumat di peringkat pendidikan tinggi. Justeru, artikel ini cuba menyelidiki halangan yang menjejaskan perkongsian maklumat di kalangan kakitangan akademik universiti di Malaysia melalui domain halangan dalaman dan halangan luaran. Adalah diharapkan sorotan terhadap penyelidikan ini menjadi titik permulaan untuk menganalisa halangan terhadap perkongsian maklumat di kalangan kakitangan akademik universiti dalam usaha memacu pencapaian Wawasan 2020 terutamanya dalam merealisasikan objektif Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia

Kata kunci: Staf akademik; halangan perkongsian maklumat; Universiti Malaysia

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays with the rapidly changing in the world toward knowledge era, knowledge become the base of success and provides a competitive advantage for any organization (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Moreover, the world become more knowledge oriented (Jain *et al.*, 2007; Sohail and Daud, 2009). Knowledge is the most important intangible assets and infinite resources that human possessed (Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2011). As more knowledge is exchanged between employees as more the organization achieves success (Cheng *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, managing knowledge resources become the main concern for any organizations (Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2011). One of these organizations is the university.

Universities have different interests, goals, values, needs, and motivation comparing to other organizations (Siddique *et al.*, 2011). Universities considered as knowledge-based organizations because of their major role in knowledge management and knowledge development (Rowley, 2000). In the context of universities, academic staff tacit knowledge considered as main resources and assets, and their main role is to disseminate the new knowledge that they create to all organizations toward spur innovation and improve the social and cultural enterprise (Kidwell *et al.*, 2000; Fullwood *et al.*, 2013; Howell and Annansingh, 2013). Academic staff is knowledge worker since they based on their tacit knowledge rather than any skills to accomplish the job (Sohail and Daud, 2009). Furthermore, knowledge sharing is the regular daily work for the academic staff (Rowley, 2000; Jain *et al.*, 2007).

In order to leverage more from knowledge sharing among academic staff in universities, many universities start adopting different approaches in order to achieve success and get a competitive advantage. One of the famous used approaches is the knowledge management system; this system can transform academic staff knowledge and intellectual assets into enduring value (Rowley, 2000; Muhammad *et al.*, 2011). Another approach used is the collaborative knowledge sharing system, this system can link academic staff knowledge, and their learning together towards enhancing overall university performance (Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2011). Moreover, Amin *et al.* (2011)

suggest a new approach toward increase the level of research work among academic staff called (special interest group research) by grouping the academic staff based on their knowledge interest and concern.

In the context of universities in Malaysia, the numbers of universities is growing towards achieving the vision of 2020 (Suhaimee *et al.*, 2006). On the top of any mission and vision that have set by the management of Malaysian universities, the ultimate objective of any university is to be a world class university. In fact, this is also one of the most important objectives for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in Malaysia.

Therefore, Malaysian government, via the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has embarked as series of efforts in order to achieve their objectives. One of these efforts is through appointing four universities under Research-University (RU) in 2006. These universities are Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Universiti Putra, since these universities have a big potential opportunity to become in the forefront of innovation and research outputs that based on the international standards (Masron *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) developed a program called (APEX) “Accelerated Program for Excellence” which aims also to promote at least one public university to be among the top 100 universities in the world. Universiti Sains Malaysia was pleased to be the first public university that given this opportunity in 2008 (Masron *et al.*, 2012).

As a way to achieve these objectives and to have at least one university ranked within top 100 universities in the world. Many researchers from different universities in Malaysia study the factors that can affect university performance and innovation (for example Iqbal *et al.*, 2011; Supar, 2012). One important factor has been under considerable studies is the level of knowledge sharing among academic staff (Jain *et al.*, 2007; Amin *et al.*, 2011; Goh and Sandhu, 2012; Goh and Sandhu, 2014).

Knowledge sharing in universities is a common occurrence for both administrative and teaching department. Knowledge sharing in the administrative department can benefit the universities in many ways such as the administrative services, alumni services and the development of the strategic planning, as well as for teaching department knowledge which will enhance the research process, curriculum development process (Jain *et al.*, 2007). Thus, knowledge sharing can affect the whole success for any university (Rowley, 1966).

The success of knowledge sharing occurred when organization create a knowledge sharing culture and environment that support and encourage employees to work together (Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2011). However, early studies found that universities have already an embedded knowledge sharing culture (Fullwood *et al.*, 2013). And the academic staff perceptions toward knowledge sharing are different than other organizations, since the academic staffs are totally aware of how knowledge sharing is important and how it can benefit on themselves and their university (Kim and Ju, 2008).

Knowledge sharing concern more about the desire of individuals to share with each other’s the knowledge they have acquired or created (Davenport and Probst, 2000). On the another hand, knowledge retention as an opposite of knowledge sharing among the academics staff could be a big problem, since academic staff are promoted and evaluated based on their individual performance (Maponya, 2005). Therefore, a strong motivation for knowledge retention will be accrued among academic staff in order to achieve their own goals (Maponya, 2005). To overcome this retention among academic staff, higher management in universities must eliminate any kind of barriers that affect the knowledge sharing activity, in order to increase academic staff performance toward university success and achievement (Muhammad *et al.*, 2011).

Past finding shows that knowledge sharing in the organization can be affected by different factors these factors can be classified into internal and external barriers. The internal barrier comes from the individually-driven considerations such as attitude, intention and behaviour towards knowledge sharing. The external barrier comes from the organizational context such as the environment and culture, working condition, management support, organizational structure and technological challenges (Riege, 2005). Therefore, determining the factors that can affect knowledge sharing among academic staff is crucial, particularly in Malaysia universities in order to achieve the objectives of the Ministry of Higher Education.

Therefore, the main purpose for this review is to classify and highlight the factors that consider as a barrier for effective knowledge sharing among academic staff in Malaysia context, which will provide a knowledge base for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) regarding these barriers to overcome their effects.

■ 2.0 KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Knowledge sharing is a combination of two words ‘knowledge’ and ‘sharing’. According to Davenport (1997), that sharing is a voluntary action that implies on a conscious act by an individual to participate in the knowledge exchange without any compulsion to do it. Thus, knowledge sharing concerns more about the behaviour and practices between the source and the recipient for knowledge exchange (Taylor, 2006, p. 252). Therefore, knowledge sharing can be considered as a process in which individuals exchange their knowledge (implicit and explicit) and the top management should provide the infrastructure that support these practices and jointly create a new knowledge. This new knowledge can facilitates new ideas and innovation, which will enhance organizational learning capacity to produce a new product and services (Iqbal *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, it will increase the ability to achieve the individual goals (Stewart, 1997).

Consequently, the main aim of knowledge sharing in any organization is to either create new knowledge or better exploit existing knowledge (Christensen, 2007; Davenport and Probst, 2002), because of the potential benefits that can be gain from knowledge sharing. Many organizations have invested in new technology that can facilitate the communication between employees in order to collection, storage, and distribution their knowledge (Kidwell *et al.*, 2000; Wang and Noe, 2010). Thus, knowledge sharing between employees is a fundamental issue and organizations must find the best practice that can enhance employee’s communication. In conclusion, knowledge sharing involves breaking down all the barriers that can affect knowledge sharing activity between employees (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

■3.0 KNOWLEDGE SHARING BARRIERS

Numerous researchers identify many barriers that affect knowledge sharing; these barriers can be classified into internal and external barriers. Academic staff considerations such as attitude and behaviour are the internal barrier. University context such as culture, environment, structure, management support and technological infrastructure are the external barriers. Thus, the next sections will discuss these barriers.

3.1 Internal Barriers

Since knowledge sharing concerns first about the behaviour of the source and recipient for knowledge exchange. The internal barriers that can inhibit academic staff from applying the knowledge sharing activities are the individual barriers.

3.1.1 Individual Barriers

Barriers that stem from academic staff attitude or behaviour towards knowledge sharing activities at the individual level, in Malaysian universities are diverse. This review has identified them as shown below.

- Lack of Trust.
- Personal attitude.
- Subjective norms.
- Personal expectation.
- Lack of rewards.
- Lack of time.
- Staffs are reluctant to seek knowledge from their seniors because of the fear.
- Misused of knowledge.
- Misunderstanding the value and benefit of knowledge sharing.
- Knowledge is power.
- Poor verbal / written communication and interpersonal skills.
- Affective commitment.
- Affiliation.
- Reciprocal Relationship.
- Peer pressure.
- Motivation and opportunities to share

In general, individual is unlikely to share their knowledge without a trusting feeling between each other's. Trust means that the knowledge will not be accurate from the source, or individual will not be misuse this knowledge form the recipient side. Thus, lack of trust between employees can be a main barrier of knowledge sharing activity (Stauffer, 1999). Lack of trust among academic staff in Malaysia universities comes in the first place as the main barrier for knowledge sharing (Amin *et al.*, 2011; Goh and Sandhu; 2013; Goh and Sandhu; 2014). This can be due to the national culture of Malaysia, since it has several races (Malay, Chinese, Indian, others), and they work in the same university. In addition, it means also that their attitude is different for knowledge sharing (Cheng *et al.*, 2009; Sohail and Daud, 2009; Iqbal *et al.*, 2011) as well as, their subjective norms will be also different regarding knowledge sharing (Teh *et al.*, 2011; Goh and Sandhu, 2014).

Past research by Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Hendriks, 1999; Meyer, 2002, found that communication between employees is the first and the most important tools for effective knowledge sharing between employees. And both verbal and nonverbal communication between employees is fundamental for knowledge sharing activity. Thus, the ability to share knowledge depends on employees' level of communication and their personal skills. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Jain *et al.*, 2007; Zawawi *et al.*, 2011 in Malaysian context. Thus, Poor communication, interpersonal skills can be considered as barriers for academic staff.

Academic staffs are hired in universities for a specific daily time work. Thus, time restriction can be seen as another barrier for communication and also a reason for an individual to hoard their knowledge rather than spending their time for knowledge sharing. Amin *et al.* (2011), found that the lack of time for sharing and lack of formal and informal activities among academic staff are the strongest barriers for knowledge sharing among academic staff and this finding was in line with the finding of Jain *et al.* (2007) study. Both of these studies insist that and management should take these issues in order to enhance knowledge sharing among academic staff.

Academic staff knowledge seen as a power for them and losing this power will decrease their opportunity for promotion (Jain *et al.*, 2007; Cheng *et al.*, 2009; Iqbal *et al.*, 2011). In addition, most of the new staff in Malaysian universities is unwilling to seek knowledge from their senior academic staff because of the fear (Jain *et al.*, 2007).

Goh and Sandhu (2014) found that the intention of academic staff towards knowledge sharing in Malaysian universities is affected by their affiliation and reciprocal relationship. Finally, the lack of effective reward system and motivation form top management was also found as barriers for knowledge sharing among academic staff in Malaysian universities (Sohail and Daud, 2009; Jain *et al.*, 2007; Amin *et al.*, 2011; Amzat and Idris, 2011; Zawawi *et al.*, 2011).

3.2 External Barriers

The external barrier that comes from the university context is the working condition, management support, organizational structure and technological challenges. Therefore, this section will be divided the barriers into two subsections; the first section is the organization barrier and the second section is the technology barrier.

3.2.1 Organizational Barriers

Creating a knowledge sharing culture and environment within the university that can support and encourage academic staff to work together are a key issue related to university itself. The barrier that comes from university level is shows below:

- Organizational support.
- Incentive system.
- Management system.
- Organizational culture.
- Quality of the place and space.
- Lack of formal and informal activities.
- Physical work environment.
- Management support.
- Lack of Team spirit.

According to Riege (2005), organisational context is the main key barrier for knowledge sharing activity. In the context of Malaysian universities, Iqbal *et al.* (2011) found that the organization support has an effective role on individual subjective norm that lead to knowledge sharing intention among academic staff. In addition, Arokiasamy and Othman (2011) stated also that management support has significant contributors to the academic staff career advancement which lead to higher performance for the academic staff in Malaysian context.

Moreover, monetary and nonmonetary incentive systems found as crucial to generate the passion of academic staff towards knowledge sharing behaviour in Malaysian universities (Amin *et al.*, 2011). In addition, most of that academic staff in Malaysian universities prefer to perform based on an incentive system rather than force management system (Cheng *et al.*, 2009; Amin *et al.*, 2011; Arokiasamy and Othman, 2011). In order for universities to create affective knowledge sharing behaviour among academic staff, it's essential to have a good physical environment that contain a high quality level of places and spaces that help the academic staff to feel more comfort in their offices or classes, as well as their meeting rooms (Akhbar and Musa, 2012). In addition, lack of formal and informal activities that organized by university management among academic staff seen as another barrier for knowledge sharing since this activity allow academic staff to meet face to face and know each other and share their knowledge (Amin *et al.*, 2011).

In general, university system that not support the academic staff needs and requires is seen as another reason for the academic staff to hold their knowledge. Finally, university should encourage that academic staff to work as one-teamwork, since it's one of the most aspects that can ensure the success of knowledge sharing. Therefore, Amin *et al.* (2011) suggest for management effective approach that can enhance academic staff knowledge sharing, called special group interest (GPI) by grouping the academic staff based on their research interest.

3.2.2 Technological Barriers

Knowledge sharing is an individual and organizational issue as it is a technological challenge. Technology can offer big access to large amounts of data and information. As well as it provides long distance collaboration among academic staff. The potential technological barriers to knowledge sharing in Malaysian universities are below.

- IT Application.
- IT for knowledge sharing (collaboration).
- Distributed Model.
- Information technological literacy.

The main issue that related to technology is to select the appropriate and suitable application that can provide the best communication link between academic staff and university to enhance the knowledge sharing activity (Supar, 2012). Hendriks (1999) recommended that the use of new technology can enhance employee's motivation for communication. Kim and Lee (2005) found that IT applications that focus more on the end-users satisfaction and provide a good social network are key variables affecting knowledge sharing activities. In the context of Malaysian universities, Supar (2012) found that effective knowledge sharing among academic staff are based more on IT for knowledge sharing (collaboration) and Distributed Model for knowledge sharing. Finally, the Information technological literacy was also more important factor for knowledge sharing among academic staff in Malaysian universities, and university management should provide the academic staff an appropriate training on the usage of all information technology that available inside university (Amin *et al.*, 2011).

■4.0 CONCLUSION

Knowledge sharing is vital to the success for any organizations, including the universities. Universities are knowledge based organization. Therefore, knowledge sharing considered as the most important issues for the university. Thus, effective knowledge sharing is essential for the universities to take the advantage of the knowledge that academic staff have generated or acquire in order to achieve success.

In the context of Malaysian universities, early studies found that both the internal and external barriers are equally important for the academic staff to increase their level of knowledge sharing. Based on this review, knowledge sharing barriers that inhibit the academic staff performance should be eliminated in order to achieve the vision of 2020 and also the objective of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in Malaysia.

Universities should have an effective strategic plan that promotes and enhance knowledge sharing behaviour among academic staff. Effective support from top management in universities will help the academic staff to increase their publication and their dissemination of new knowledge towards improving their community. Finally, Good awareness must be created for the academic staff. Regarding the vision of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in Malaysia, to ensure that the academic staff will work together and change their behaviour for knowledge sharing, and how this success will effect on their country and themselves.

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