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What Deter Academia to Share Knowledge within Research-Based University Status

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***Abstract*—**This paper discusses the issues and challenge that academia faced in knowledge sharing at a research university in Malaysia. The partial results of interview are presented from the actual study. The main issues in knowledge sharing practices are university structure and designation and title. The academia awareness in sharing knowledge is also influenced by culture. Our investigation highlight that the concept of reciprocal relationship of sharing knowledge may hinder knowledge sharing awareness among academia. Hence, we concluded that further investigation could be carried out on the social interaction and trust culture among academia in sharing knowledge within research/ranking university environment.

***Keywords*—**Knowledge sharing awareness, knowledge sharing practices, research university.

I. Introduction

KNOWLEDGE sharing practices (KSP) is viewed as an important platform that can bring an organization to remain competitive and innovative. However, the unwillingness to share knowledge becomes the main issue and is difficult to manage. Knowledge sharing (KS) is not a natural act and need to be nurtured and facilitated [1], [2], [3], especially on tacit knowledge [4]. A study on KM/S reveals that technology is not the main issue that deters KS, but the human resource themselves [5]. For example, only seven percent of the companies surveyed by KPMG mentioned technology as a barrier to successful managing knowledge management (KM), whereas others mentioned about non-technological problems [5], such as, individual barriers [6], supportive culture for KS [7], [8]. [9] also highlight that "the main barriers to implement KM were all people related".

In academic setting, maintaining remarkable learning quality [10] in changing the function of a university into a knowledge-based society [11] became a real challenge. The changing role has also demanded the institutions to focus more on identification, sharing and utilization of knowledge [12]. In 2010 Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has been awarded as 'Research University' (RU) which is one of a reputable status for Malaysia's ivory towers. Since then, UTM just like any other research universities in Malaysia is to take action of the requirements of an emerging knowledge-based society which leads to change in education and training need, as well as the trend of learning such as lifelong learning [13]. Academia are the important engine to gear their institutions in coping with edges, because they are categorized as a knowledge worker. They rely on knowledge rather than skills, possess intelligent input, creativity ability and the authority to perform a job. They are given autonomy to perform their tasks in teaching and researching and recognized as experts in their particular fields of discipline [14]. As a result, they must be responsible to develop and share their knowledge and expertise continuously [15].

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II. Methodology

A. Participant and Setting

This paper only presents an analysis of interview data. The actual study adopts mixed method sequential approach using survey and interview. The sampling method for interviewing uses the non-probability or purposive approach. The criterion selection is based on the specific group that will provide the most information for the study [16]. In this phase, top management including Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and head of department from five selected public universities are chosen to explain on factors that constitute to the major issues arising from the survey such as issues and challenges in KSP.

The interviews are informal face-to-face and semi-structured which lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. These interviews do not restrict the interviewees to speak only in English, because some preferred to use their native language which is "Malay".

B. Data Analysis

Data is analyzed according to data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion [17]. This process starts with coding data chunks, sorts, discards and organizes data. Then this data is displayed into a table or matrix and then pattern occurred is identified and the meaning understood. The interviews are taped and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Though transcribing one-to-one interview recording is a very time consuming process as it is in this study, it is a very useful way for a researcher to get close to the data [18].

III. Findings and Discussion

At this stage, the researcher provokes the participants with the issues and challenges that pop up from the survey analysis, which is supported by the statistical data to alert the

participants' awareness on the significant of the identified issues and challenges. From the leader's point of view, the aim of this section is to provide more detail explanation on several issues that challenge KS among academia. This section reports two main issues that hinder KSP in research university namely university structure and designation and title.

A. University Structure

1. Corporatization

The process of corporatization among public universities in Malaysia has changed the university's role into a resource centre. University basically emphasizes more on efficiency, effectiveness and performance [19]. Due to the intellectual properties, commercialization value, and copyright practices it has made knowledge in a university not for public community anymore ("in terms of IP regulations you have to pattern, to filed, it is secretive. In fact you are not allowed to discuss it with your family members. That's one aspect, the extreme. Knowledge has commercial value". – Participant R10). This process has unintentionally influenced KS practices in the university as well [20]. People see knowledge belongs to ones with regard to individual's self interest, and concerns for tangible reward. Instead of being a source of expert knowledge to the university and continue sharing and developing knowledge, people might become protective to their knowledge in order to increase their job security level.

2. Research University

In order to achieve the RU level, universities have set their Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in academics. For example, number of publications per year (Participant R05, R06, R10) and Ph.D is a parameter for job promotion (Participant R16). This factor has also changed culture in publication, where for some universities recognizance is only given to first authors and not to all members in a group publication (Participant R10). As a result, people perceive knowledge as an asset (Participant R10), become individualistic and are concern on rewards (Participant R04, R10), and people prefer to acquire knowledge from Ph.D holders than community of scholars (Participant R06). Comment by participant R10 reinforces this discussion:

"We provide academic portal and e-learning to promote dissemination of knowledge. Academicians are encouraged to upload lecture notes and others into this system. But people query whether will the lecture notes uploaded into the portal appraised for job promotion? The reason is because it is not prescribed in job promotion's indicator".

On the other hand, this factor causes a gap among universities where some new universities are unable to follow the standard (Participant R16), for instance 60% of Ph.D holder to be a RU. The eagerness to achieve the KPI may lead into failure to perform ones responsibility to share knowledge. Even so, people do it for the sake of rewards (Participant R04). The KPI is observed to have limitation in measuring quality, rather more on quantity-based (Participant R16, R19). These ideas reflects on the contradict perceptions between university's challenge and requirement for RU and individual moral obligation [21]. Participant R10 also commented that:

"We have university rating that requires contribution by university's member in order to compete with other universities. But, when it comes to internal or within university practice, for job promotion we are being valued individually. So, culture in university is more toward individualism for instance recognizance for individual expertise. And it is hard to change".

Therefore, it can be assumed that there is a conflict between the universities mission to become RU and the effect of academia's awareness on knowledge. While the university highlights the importance of managing and sharing knowledge, in the same time the work culture pressures academia to view knowledge as for private goods. This implies that acquiring and sharing public good for the sake of knowledge development is critical.

3. Knowledge Owner

The voluntary issue is also associated with the creation of knowledge owner from the practice of semester system in a university. The following extracts highlight this issue:

"System in a university must have all fields in a faculty. Such as engineering, we must have all aspects of engineering. That is culture in university in Malaysia. Sometimes there is only one expert and sometimes not related. We are required to be up to date with the current field. As a result, you don't have a colleague, and you talk to your own". (Participant R10)

"With the semester system, everyone will produce courses according to their expertise (Ph.D area). People feel proud to be the only one expertise in a department or faculty or university. So, it becomes that way". (Participant R19).

This comment illustrates that the system indirectly encourages academicians to own knowledge and treat it as a source of competition rather than use knowledge for everyones good. They feel that having limited and unique knowledge is one of the critical success factors for academic achievement. According to [21], people are reluctant to share all types of knowledge because of personal perspectives like ownership of knowledge. They are only motivated to share for self-interest; rewards and tangible returns such as promotion [22]. This situation occurs when people do not feel that their sharing will be reciprocated [2] and they tend to view knowledge as private good [21].

B. Designation and Title

Differences in the designation level and status/title creates gap in KS. The differences in the job level such as, professor vs lecturer/tutor slows down the KS process (Participant R10). The juniors normally feel uncomfortable to approach the higher level and status academicians. On top of that, the KS difficulty is triggered by status quo ("At the level of senior professor for instance, they are already in their own world, comfort zone and unaware the responsibility of developing other community in academic and role model KS. So the

young one, stay among themselves." - Participant R14). They less prefer to share knowledge with an inexperienced person whom they may regard as free-riders [23]. This finding explains the difference of perceptions between individuals who are willing to guide juniors vs. individuals who prefer juniors to learn from their own experiences almost equal (result from statistical data).

In addition, the gap could happen with regard to social class status such as the title of *Tan Sri*, and *Dato'*. For Malaysian culture, this title shows high ranking or class status in the society with regard to VIP status. In fact, people with certain social class status also expect some special recognition from the society (Participant R13). Status symbols for academicians in public universities may be represented by office space, university's car and allowances. The following extract from Participant R10 reflects the status symbol:

"If we look at our administration system, we are quite similar with the government. There are certain specifications for tutor and lecturer's room, associate professor's room is bigger and professor's room is much bigger. That is the instruction from the government to structure office layout".

The status or symbol of material may prevent close-ties or warm relationships among individuals. In Malaysian culture, it is common to be understood that the status reflects the need to be respected and treated as 'special'. This culture create unhealthy working climate that deter KS awareness.

IV. Conclusion

KS differs according to the context or environment where people are engaged in. In this study, the concept of reciprocal relationship of sharing knowledge [1], [24] slow down the propensity to share among academia in RU. Individuals are required to share knowledge freely to others who do not know and need knowledge without expecting for any return (intrinsic and extrinsic). The concept of knowledge donating [24] is expected to be applied in academic environment. The importance of KS is to help people gain knowledge and know something rather than expecting for rewards. [15] supports that as soon as rewards were eliminated the sharing stopped.

It is assumed that the 'self' concept (self efficacy) will influence the propensity of KSP level. Indeed, it is also related to motivational factors in order to understand people's willingness to share knowledge. In this study, the level of KS awareness or willingness to share also varies according to the designation category and title for example, associate professor vs lecturer and social status ranking.

The culture of trust is still low since academia is more likely to share knowledge with their 'clique' rather than with everyone. They do not prefer to share knowledge with whom they do not trust and like. This implies that their understanding towards the importance of sharing knowledge is limited to the receiver of the knowledge and not totally based on sharing knowledge freely with others. As supported by [25], Malaysians have a strong affinity for group affiliations and as a result they are likely to group themselves in the same clan or clique.

In a nutshell, future research is needed to study how social interaction and trust culture among academia could be improved. The university strategy to achieve the 'ranking university' must also aim to balance learning culture within the corporatization working environment. Teaching in this university status could change peoples' attitude, in the sense that their self-esteem level can be enhanced. But to some people they may view it differently and feel more threatened. As many academic activities are being commercialized (such as publication and research), it is worried that there will be conflict of self- interest and this will definitely affect the academic freedom and basic research. Unless, people can see that the commercialization activities and support structures are related to the original values of teaching and research. Otherwise, academicians may become selfish because research and rewards for research are not only for knowledge advancement but are tied up to individual careers (academic hierarchy and ranking university).

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