

## How do Islamic Values Illuminate and Elevate Knowledge Sharing in Private Higher Education?

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### Abstract

Islam encourages knowledge sharing through knowledge collection and dissemination, which further benefit organizations and humanity. This paper investigates the effect of organizational culture on academicians' sharing of knowledge in an Islamic context. Using in-depth interviews and focus group instruments, ten (10) academicians from private HEI participated in the study. The findings suggest that Academicians with a comprehensive understanding of Islam's teachings on the significance of sharing knowledge were more willing to share their knowledge than those with a superficial understanding. The paper further suggests on the practical implications of Islamic Work Ethics as part of organizational culture in private HEI.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing, Academician, Private Higher Institution, Organizational Culture

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### 1.0 Study Background

Academicians who accurately communicate their knowledge will be able to assess it effectively and expand it. Parallel to this, academicians can interact with professionals from a variety of backgrounds through knowledge-sharing or information-exchange activities, sometimes known as "networking" among professionals. Academics who are willing to share their knowledge thereby contribute to the growth of private higher education institutions in Malaysia (HEIs). The transfer of knowledge from academics to private HEIs, where it is translated into economic and competitive value for their organizations, is made possible by knowledge exchange. To strengthen their operations in teaching and research, Malaysian HEIs need to become more competent in academics. The expansion of creative expression and variety in HEI is due to a lack of intellectual property, nor can they encourage the wider diffusion of inventions through publications and licensing. This issue may be even more concerning because private HEIs are knowledge-based. Furthermore, resistance to sharing knowledge may jeopardize the survival of private HEIs, as knowledge sharing is a fundamental component of organizational competitiveness and growth. Academicians in HEIs, often, encountered difficulties in conducting research that would make the university proud, and teaching quality became a major impediment (Abdahir et al. 2021).

To attain an adequate level of quality assurance, Malaysian educational institutions place a priority on research activities and instructional effectiveness. Academicians at research universities work to produce better graduates by fostering an atmosphere that is conducive to both teaching and research. Academicians at private HEIs have several difficulties when conducting research as their careers advance, yet they must not shirk their duty to society as knowledge suppliers. A HEI must establish a culture of research activities such as knowledge acquisition, retrieval, sharing, cooperation, and dissemination if it wants to be successful in research. Given the significance of academicians as knowledge providers through their research, it is now necessary to investigate how organizational culture affects information sharing.

Private HEIs in Malaysia are currently ranked based on the results of the Malaysian HEI Ranking System 2011 (SETARA 2011) and Malaysia Research Assessment Instrument 2011 (MyRA), both of which were announced by the Higher Education Minister in November 2012. SETARA 2011 is administered by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), while MyRA 2011 is administered by the Malaysian

Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The Malaysia Qualification Framework level six SETARA 2011 focuses on the quality of teaching and learning (undergraduate level). SETARA 2011 aims to improve the quality, autonomy, and performance of HEIs as part of the MOHE's drive to instill a culture of continuous quality improvement and strengthen the HEI sector. As a result, since the ranking system has been implemented, the success of private HEIs is contingent upon the production, application, and originality of their knowledge base (Quaresma & Villalobos, 2022).

Thus, the objective of this paper is to investigate the influence of organizational culture on research knowledge sharing from Islamic perspectives, in the hope of improving academicians' intellectual capacity and knowledge exchange programs in private HEI settings.

## **2.0 Literature Review: Bridging Knowledge Management, Islamic Organizational Culture, and the Theory of Planned Behavior**

### *2.1 The Crux of Knowledge Management (KM) and Knowledge Sharing (KS) in HEIs*

The rich tapestry of Islam is woven with threads of knowledge dissemination, steeped in profound teachings from the Qur'an and Hadith. Both sacred texts accentuate knowledge sharing not just as an ethical imperative but as a spiritual duty. Furthermore, the organizational culture derived from Islamic principles holds a mirror to values like transparency, fairness, and continuous growth. Researchers such as Sa'ari (2018) and Ekawati et al. (2019) emphasize the profound integration of Islamic work ethics in diverse settings, highlighting trust, cooperation, and good deeds as cornerstones. The dynamics observed by Hakim (2012) in Shariah banking serve as a testament to the effectiveness and relevance of an Islamic organizational culture. Herein lies a holistic framework that intertwines spiritual, ethical, and professional facets. Central to the knowledge-based industry, HEIs confront multifaceted challenges in optimally implementing KM and KS. Academicians often resist sharing their valued expertise, viewing it as a distinct professional asset that offers them a competitive advantage (Musselin, 2021; Ismail 2016). While both private and public HEIs inherently embrace the principles of KM due to their intrinsic roles in knowledge dissemination, private institutions have showcased remarkable adaptability, navigating through complex bureaucratic and political landscapes (Oumran et al., 2021). However, the most profound barrier identified is culture. There exists a deep-rooted academic culture that doesn't necessarily recognize knowledge as an asset that grows in value when shared. Bolormaa (2015) advocates for a paradigm shift in this perception, emphasizing that KS, beyond mere possession, paves the way for broader intellectual collaboration and consequent innovation.

### *2.2 Islamic Organizational Culture and Knowledge Sharing*

Drawing from the Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic teachings underscore the moral and spiritual imperatives of knowledge sharing. In the realm of organizational culture, these teachings foster a holistic ethos that emphasizes attributes like transparency, fairness, justice, and continuous personal and communal growth. Researchers, including Sa'ari (2018) and Ekawati et al. (2019), have underscored the transformative impacts of integrating Islamic work ethics into diverse organizational structures. Key principles such as trust, cooperation, and purpose-driven actions are foundational. Hakim (2012) delves deeper by exploring the dynamic interplay of these principles in the context of Shariah banking, offering insights into how an Islamic organizational culture can be both sustainable and innovative.

### *2.3 Theory of Planned Behavior: A Lens for HEIs and Islamic Organizational Culture*

The TPB, as postulated by Ajzen (1991), offers a nuanced understanding of the determinants of individual and collective behaviors. It identifies attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as instrumental factors shaping behavioral intentions. Empirical studies have consistently evidenced the pivotal role of positive attitudes in influencing an individual's intention to share information (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006; Kolekofski & Heminger, 2003; Bock, Kim & Lee, 2005). Contextualizing TPB within HEIs underscores a compelling narrative: academicians with positive attitudes towards KS, potentially molded by Islamic teachings emphasizing knowledge dissemination, are more inclined to actively engage in this practice. Furthermore, the theory suggests that if academicians perceive a high degree of autonomy and control in the knowledge-sharing process, they're likelier to participate and endorse it within their professional communities.

In weaving these concepts together, it becomes evident that the integration of TPB with the principles inherent in HEIs and reinforced by Islamic organizational culture provides a comprehensive framework to understand, advocate for, and enhance the practice of knowledge sharing within academic domains.

## **3.0 Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative methodology, chosen due to its capability to delve deep into subjects' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations. By utilizing qualitative methods, the study aimed to explore and understand the complex dynamics surrounding knowledge sharing in higher education institutions.

Building on the robust framework provided by Yin's multiple-case study approach (Yin, 1994), the study adopted a multi-case design. This approach is particularly effective in understanding intricate phenomena by considering them from multiple contexts, thereby enhancing the study's robustness and depth.

Utilizing a purposive sampling technique, participants were chosen from private higher education institutions located in Selangor, Malaysia. Four faculty members, representing both social and natural science disciplines, were selected for in-depth individual interviews. These interviews provided a nuanced understanding of each academicians' unique experiences and viewpoints on

knowledge sharing. Additionally, a focus group was conducted involving five academicians. All participants in the focus group held either a master's or Doctoral degree and had at least two years of teaching experience in the chosen private university. This selection criteria ensured the participants had ample experience and exposure to the university's knowledge-sharing culture.

Data collection involved semi-structured, open-ended questions during both the interviews and the focus group discussions. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Thematic analysis, an iterative process of coding and synthesizing emerging themes, was employed to scrutinize the data, providing insights into the factors influencing academicians' knowledge-sharing behaviors.

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent before data collection, ensuring they understood the study's objectives and their rights. Confidentiality was paramount; pseudonyms were used in presenting findings to protect participants' identities.

#### 4.0 Discussion of Findings: Sociability and Solidarity Culture

Islamic religious value has been identified as a new individual factor capable of stimulating KS. One of the informants provided her justification, admitting that the culture of sharing with their colleagues becomes the most important driver of knowledge sharing because they know their colleagues very well, dismissing the risk of losing ownership of her knowledge. She believes that human relationships flourish when people successfully combine their knowledge and experience to create something greater than the sum of their parts. She stated her point of view emphatically.

*"Having positive relationships with co-workers boosts our sense of purpose and meaning. We have no problem sharing knowledge when we have a genuine, positive impact on someone else because a strong culture of sharing has been established and nurtured through rewards and incentives".*

She believed that the more she shared her knowledge, the more she would receive from Allah SWT in terms of benefits and strength. As a result of the findings, it is clear that Islamic religious value is a new individual factor derived from this study, and it is strongly thought to be intrinsic motivation capable of stimulating KS. KS in Islam, as is well known, requires no further explanation because there is a vast literature on the subject. According to Islamic teaching, all Muslims, men and women, are required to learn and seek knowledge.

Academicians who took part in the in-depth interview and focus group agreed that their length of service as an academician, as well as a positive rapport among academicians, influence their research sharing behavior. Senior academics have no problem sharing their research or potential research under certain conditions of acknowledgement and trust. Junior academics, on the other hand, prefer to share their potential research with only those who share similar interests and with their faculty. They have no hesitation about sharing their research with other academics or students once it has been published. One of the informants claimed:

*"Other professors within my faculty are well-known to me, but I only know a few professors from other faculties. I am more comfortable sharing my research with my faculty's lecturers than with those from other faculties".*

The presence of an organizational climate that fosters good relationships between academicians influences the head of faculty to encourage academicians to share their research or potential research. In addition, the faculty head emphasizes the benefits of fostering cooperation in terms of knowledge, experience, and skill development.

Most academicians are aware of their organization's research activity expectations. One effort to encourage research activity is the establishment of a Research and Development Centre. In line with this, academicians have no reservations about sharing research activity if the organization's goal is met. This condition, however, should be supported by management efforts, which offer an appropriate and appealing incentive or reward. One of the respondents stated:

*"My college places a premium on research activity. To support research, there is a research and development center (R&D). The establishment of an R&D center, in my opinion, greatly aids academicians in the implementation of research. My friends and the dean all agreed that the college promotes research."*

On contrarily, not all academician agree with their organizations' research activities expectations. One of the respondents stated:

*"College expectations have no bearing on my knowledge, skill, or experience. If I want to conduct research, it is to broaden my knowledge and skills, as both have aided me in completing my research".*

As stated in the discussion of the challenges in implementing KM at HEI in the literature review, the Holy Qur'an has stated that Muslims should share knowledge or face the consequences of withholding knowledge (Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 159). Man must explore and investigate knowledge because it is an existing phenomenon. Once a person knows, it is transformed into knowledge science because it is applied and taught to others. According to Saeed et al., (2019), the Islamic work ethic has a direct impact on intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Employees who are intrinsically motivated by their jobs are more satisfied with their organizations, according to this finding.

The influence of Islamic Work Ethics is likely to transcend religion and evolve into a universal set of values practiced in Muslim countries' cultures. As a result, in Muslim-majority countries, managers, regardless of their or their followers' faith, should consider implementing an ethics code based on Islamic teachings to improve KS. Because the Islamic work ethic and Islamic teachings provide a practical life program by providing directions for every sphere of life, private HEI management could introduce and implement Islamic work values through training and lecture programs to improve the level of Islamic work ethic among their employees, including academicians. This can be accomplished by improving human resource policies and strategies that emphasize the development of an Islamic work ethic.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The culmination of this study underscores a profound connection between organizational culture and knowledge-sharing behavior, echoing sentiments previously discovered by esteemed researchers like Goffee and Jones (2013) and Gluhareva and Munro (2022). It became evident that the "sociability" and "solidarity" dimensions of organizational culture in private HEIs have a decisive influence on the academicians's knowledge dissemination tendencies. Furthermore, an intricate intertwining was observed between these cultural facets and the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of academics from elite private university colleges. These interconnected elements culminated in molding their definitive intent to disseminate or withhold their scholarly findings. Drawing upon Ajzen's seminal Theory of Planned Behavior (1991), it is evident that individual behaviors germinate from a combination of their behavioral intentions and perceived control, giving further credence to the substantial influence of sociability and solidarity culture on academia in HEIs. However, the narrative does not halt institutional dynamics. Diving deeper, one finds spiritual imperatives advocating for knowledge dissemination. For Muslims, particularly, the journey of knowledge sharing is not merely a professional endeavor but a profound spiritual mandate. Steeped in rich theological foundations, Islam champions the acquisition and sharing of knowledge as a revered pathway to serve God more ardently. The Qur'an itself illuminates the path by heralding the virtues of knowledge, reminding believers of the divine commandment to recite, read, and perpetually seek enlightenment. It's a divine proclamation; Muslims are duty-bound to cherish, pursue, and disseminate knowledge. The ethos encapsulated in the Quranic verse, "and when instructed to stand, stand. Allah SWT will elevate to (appropriate) ranks those of you who believe and have been granted (mystical) knowledge" [Qur'an, 58:11], which is a testament to the exalted stature of knowledge in Islam. This sacred journey toward knowledge not only invites divine blessings but also establishes one's stature as a distinguished servant of God. With these compelling revelations, the study emphasizes the quintessential need for academicians, particularly those of the Islamic faith, to transcend organizational constraints and embrace the higher calling of knowledge sharing, harnessing it as both a professional obligation and a spiritual mission.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the study and practice of the Islamic perspective of sociability and solidarity culture on academicians in HEIs.

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