

The Factors That Affect the Knowledge-Sharing Behaviours of Female and Male Academics in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: For academics to be successful in a university career, it is generally acknowledged that relevant professional development is a necessity. Research by academics should be innovative and demonstrate an understanding of current issues and developments in their subject. Sharing such knowledge with others who are also endeavouring to learn, to understand or to keep abreast of current developments is as important. Knowledge management and knowledge-sharing in commercial settings, together with the elements that influence these practices, have been investigated by numerous researchers over a long period. However, there are few studies which have evaluated knowledge-sharing in an educational environment, and even fewer in relation to academics in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is, however, exceptional, in respect of knowledge management and sharing in the academic ecosystem, due to its atypical, prevailing socio-political environment and this may impact on the mechanisms and patterns of professional development amongst academics. Research in this social context, of behaviours well understood in conventional environments, is therefore merited in order to identify similarities and differences, filling an important literature gap and potentially contributing insights which may improve academic success in Saudi and stimulate new ways of thinking in other contexts. The aim of this paper is to determine the factors that affect knowledge-sharing behaviours amongst female and male academics in one of the higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. A theoretical framework is proposed which is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1985). The factors which are commonly considered to be the most influential on both gender's knowledge-sharing behaviours will be analysed and discussed in this exceptional setting. A survey will be distributed amongst academics to gather information for this research. The findings of this study will contribute to the body of published knowledge relating to the practice of knowledge-sharing among academics through the differentiation and quantification of factors which affect it. This will offer academics the opportunity to enhance their understanding of this topic and subsequently, to optimise their part in knowledge exchange processes.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing Behaviour, Higher Education, Knowledge Sharing Attitude, Academic Staff.

1. Introduction

Knowledge is an essential asset of institutions, and since economic dependence on knowledge is well established, it is also recognised as a precious and valuable resource (Fullwood et al., 2013; Amayah, 2013; Howell & Annansingh, 2013; Bello & Oyekunle, 2014). Commercial enterprises have long recognised that, from the perspective of gaining a competitive foothold, the possession and appropriate management of knowledge is extremely advantageous (Iqbal & Mahmood, 2012; Nielsen & Cappelen, 2014). The benefits are multiplied when knowledge-sharing (KS) is a routine practice (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and numerous initiatives pertaining to knowledge management (KM) have been based on facilitating and improving KS (Hislop, 2013). Educationally, KS can be broadly defined as a societal exchange which advocates optimal practice and sustainability, whilst disseminating both established and novel information. KS in an academic context ensures that up to date research and pedagogical practices, as well as many other proficiencies, are exchanged, in an attempt to guarantee their success in a competitive environment (Tan & Ramayah, 2014).

KS is a major contributor, which ensures a positive outcome from processes pertaining to KM and related agendas. There is a societal expectation that universities are knowledge-rich institutions, and so an absence or diminution of KS could be perceived as detrimental and as well as affecting both research performance and pedagogical commitments (Ali et al., 2014), could cause institutional reputational damage. Thus the practice of concealing or stockpiling knowledge, which is considered prevalent by some academics in a number of disciplines, causing either a direct or secondary effect on innovative skills (Bogilovic et al., 2017; Malik et al., 2019) and professional abilities (Nguyen et al., 2022), is widely considered an institutional hindrance. Furthermore, such secrecy may harm social interactions and create a circular lack of trust which precipitates additional undesirable consequences (Cerne et al., 2014; Bogilovic et al., 2017). This practice of the accrual of unshared knowledge has, nevertheless, continued to plague and adversely affect academic establishments (Cheng et al., 2009; Fullwood et al., 2013; Carband and Jafari Navimipour, 2018; Fauzi et al., 2019).

A number of studies have suggested that there is little research relating to KS, compared to other aspects of KM (Jain et al., 2007; Amayah, 2013; Fullwood et al., 2013), a view substantiated by Ali et al. (2014) in their review. This is especially the case with respect to KS in universities and between academics (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020). The

lack of essential research into KS specifically is demonstrated by scarcity of studies which address educational KS and the relevant influential factors (Fullwood et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2014; Akosile & Olatokun, 2020).

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to determine, from the broad spectrum of factors established as important in other sectors and socio-political environments, those that most affect KS behaviours amongst female and male academics in one of the most important higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia.

In view of the lack of studies on this subject and, specifically, research relating to KS within educational establishments in Saudi Arabia, a major objective of this study is to recognise openings for further research. Analysis of the factors that affect KS processes would also be of value for the improvement of a positive university environment that advocates KS and optimises productivity. It will also enable the KS behaviours, positive and negative, of academics to be identified. These findings will contribute to the development of an educational ethos that supports the process of obtaining de novo knowledge, and the better sharing of such knowledge between academics.

2. Knowledge Sharing in Higher Educational Institutions

Although a number of endeavours have been made to offer descriptions of knowledge, KM and KS, controversy remains regarding agreed definitions, the latter varying according to the standpoint or setting to which they are applied (Iqbal & Mahmood, 2012; Ragab & Arisha, 2013; Ali et al., 2014). One academic-context definition of KS is that it comprises the basic method utilised by employees to participate in the effective implementation of knowledge and the development of creativity within the institution, to the latter's competitive benefit (Jackson et al., 2006). Accepting this definition means that KM and KS can be construed as being key elements for maximising competitiveness (Al-Kurdi et al., 2018).

Typically knowledge-rich institutions, universities are major players in the discovery of knowledge via their research programmes, and in KS, through their published literature. Their engagement with commercial enterprises and other bodies facilitates both KS and development, as well as social and cultural profitability. University curricula also offer education and training courses for potential researchers. It could be anticipated that because of this reliance on KS, universities would take the initiative with respect to approaches to KM and that they would have an advanced and rich understanding of ways of dealing with and maximising their knowledge worth (Fullwood et al., 2013).

Academics are expected to be knowledge leaders, who should not demonstrate any reticence regarding KS, with the objectives of their university given primacy above their personal preferences (Al-Kurdi et al., 2018). The goals of higher education facilities include facilitating the development of de novo concepts through collaboration, encouraging KS and optimising learning proficiency through their academic staff, to benefit both the university and the academic staff themselves and to promote the institution's wider agenda (Tan & Ramayah, 2014; Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000).

3. Research Model and Hypothesis Development

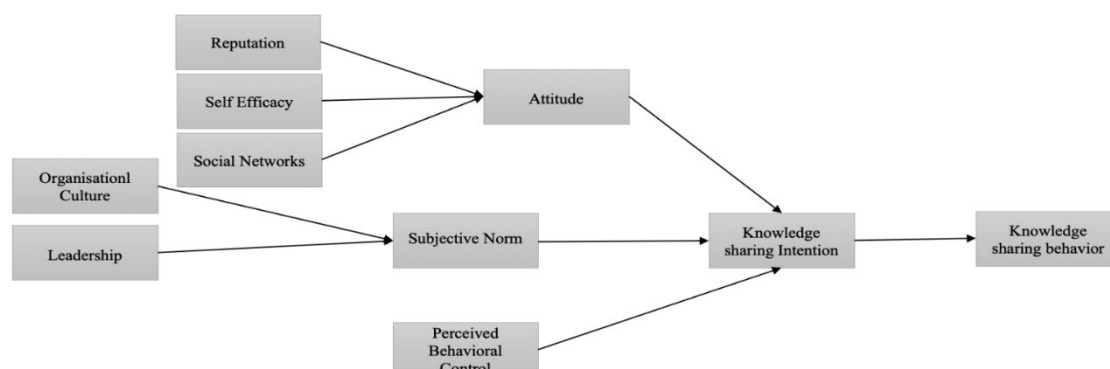


Figure 1: Research model

The TPB is the most commonly referenced explanation for why people act in certain ways (Sussman & Gifford, 2019) and postulates that behavioural intention can be used to predict, and is the best determinant of, certain actions. TPB has been frequently employed in relation to KM. According to the TPB (Figure 1), behavioural

intention is impacted by a triad of components: (i) attitude with respect to the behaviour; (ii) subjective norms relating to the behaviour; and (iii) perceived behavioural control affecting the behaviour (Sussman & Gifford, 2019). KS has been described in terms of the TBP by numerous researchers (Jolaee et al., 2014; Bock et al., 2005; So & Bolloju, 2005) and evidenced in a wide range of settings. In a similar manner, the TPB will be applied in the current study, which will investigate a number of pertinent covariates (elements or factors) identified in the literature as being influential on behavioural intentions. These elements, which were used to extend the research model, comprise reputation, social networks and self-efficacy, which are thought to influence an individual's attitude to KS, as well as the culture and leadership of an organisation thought to influence subjective norms towards KS intention. The aim was to identify those elements which had the greatest impact on KS behaviours practised by academics in higher educational establishments.

3.1 Intentions

within a KM domain, intention refers to a practitioner's enthusiasm and desire to share knowledge (Wu & Zhu, 2012). Many studies have evaluated this characteristic in academics with respect to KS, and determined that, overall, academics express positivity regarding their KS intentions. The first hypothesis arises from this.

H1. Intentions greatly influence knowledge sharing amongst academics.

3.2 Attitude

according to Kuo & Young (2008), attitude refers to the extent to which an individual makes a positive or negative assessment of a certain phenomenon. It has also been described as a psychological leaning with respect to any entity that is influential on intention (Hepler, 2015). A number of important studies have evaluated the association between attitude and KS practice (e.g. Fullwood et al., 2017; Jolaee et al., 2014). Their results demonstrate how people's attitudes about sharing knowledge reflect how ready they are to participate in the process. In particular, the more positivity a person demonstrates with respect to KS, the greater their intention (Afshar Jalili & Ghaleh, 2021; Stenius et al., 2015). Consequently, a second hypothesis is proposed.

H2. Attitude greatly influences the academic's intentions to share knowledge.

3.3 Subjective Norm

This term describes a person's subjective evaluation of how specific others anticipate that they should act, or how they should respond themselves in an equivalent context, i.e. a normative belief (Stenius et al., 2015). A number of studies have demonstrated that KS intentions are positively affected by subjective norms (e.g. Bock et al., 2005; Stenius et al., 2015; Igbinovia, 2018; Afshar Jalili & Ghaleh, 2021). These findings lead to the third hypothesis.

H3. Subjective Norm greatly influences academics' intentions to share knowledge.

3.4 Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)

It is the degree to which an individual views their competence to engage in a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). It has also been suggested that if individuals had enough control over their behaviour, they would be likely to follow through with their intentions when practical (Jolaee et al., 2014). Goh & Sandhu (2013) studied the effect of PBC on KS in a higher education establishment in Malaysia, and surmised that it was a powerful positive factor with respect to KS. A further hypothesis was therefore postulated.

H4. PBC greatly influences academic's intentions to share knowledge.

3.5 Reputation

Reputation has been shown to be linked with behaviours related to KS (e.g. Dezdard, 2017; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Such studies have concluded that reputation is a powerful incentive to KS behaviour, findings substantiated by Tan & Ramayah (2014) who found that as an academic's reputation grew, she or he engaged in KS with peers more frequently. These results underpin the fifth hypothesis.

H5. Reputation greatly influences the attitudes of academics towards knowledge sharing.

3.6 Self-Efficacy

A definition of self-efficacy is an individual's confidence that they have the proficiencies required to be successful in a specific setting (Jolaee et al., 2014). This characteristic has also been demonstrated by several researchers to be an important influential factor on the attitude of university academics with respect to KS (e.g. Lin, 2007; Omojowolo, 2014; Dezdar, 2017). Akosile & Olatokun (2020) considered the relationships of self-efficacy and KS practice in the academic environment to merit additional study. A further hypothesis has therefore been proposed.

H6. The self-efficacy of academics greatly influences their attitudes towards knowledge sharing.

3.7 Social Networks

Fauzi et al. (2018) indicate that another factor that has a bearing on the academics' attitude towards KS is social networking. According to (Jolaee et al., 2014), social networks have a favourable and significant correlation with academics' attitudes on knowledge sharing, they stated that academic staff members may develop a propensity for good attitudes toward knowledge sharing if they expand their social networks. The following hypothesis was therefore constructed.

H7. Social networks greatly influence the attitudes of academics towards knowledge sharing.

3.8 Organisational Culture

Promoting an organisational culture that supports knowledge sharing (KS) is one of the main tasks of knowledge management (KM) (Angeloni & Grotto, 2009). According to several studies (e.g. Bousari & Hassanzadeh, 2012; Cheng et al., 2009; Noor et al., 2014), organisational culture is one of the key elements that greatly influences the success of knowledge sharing. A hypothesis was, therefore, postulated in relation to these findings.

H8. Organisational culture greatly influences the subjective norms of academics towards knowledge sharing.

3.9 Leadership

A substantial amount of literature in this field has emphasised the significance of leadership support and its favourable effects on desired knowledge-sharing behaviour inside an organisation (Muhammed & Zaim, 2020). Al-Kurdi et al.'s (2020) study amply demonstrated the beneficial impact of leadership on academic knowledge sharing. Thus, the following hypothesis.

H9. Leadership greatly influences academics' subjective norms towards knowledge sharing.

4. Methodology

A quantitative approach will be employed for this study. Data collection will be carried out using a questionnaire survey, using questions that were adapted from previously published studies to fit this research context. The proposed hypotheses will then be tested by analysing the resultant data using appropriate statistical tools to identify the factors that influence KS behaviour amongst Saudi academics and their relative strengths.

5. Expected Results and Benefits

The context of this research project is rare. It differs from previous studies on KS in that the aim is to determine the factors that have the greatest impact on KS behaviours of both female and male academics in a Saudi university that operates a gender segregation policy. Female academics work on a separate campus to their male counterparts. The results will be important because the importance of KS has been recognised in previous research and emphasised as vital to the success of KM in universities and to universities achieving their objectives. There is, consequently, a prerequisite for academic institutions to create tools that engender an academic atmosphere that promotes KS between academics.

The results of this research will, therefore, be of value to higher management in universities, as they will greatly assist them to identify the factors that have the greatest impact on the KS practices of Saudi academics. In addition to describing an institutional environment that encourages KS, this study will support the development of programmes and the use of incentives to improve knowledge behaviour amongst Saudi academics and their colleagues. The findings will provide administrators with a solid evidence base upon which to build their policies.

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