

# Trust on Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour Among Academicians in Public Universities: A Review

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**Abstract** - Universities are probably the places, where knowledge is freely and openly shared among the academicians. Although, the knowledge sharing is hardly presented within the university level these days in reality. Academic institutions, specifically the public universities are now experiencing the ever rising faculty demands for quality expertise and resource sharing. As a consequence, knowledge sharing has become a rising concern in academia. The study has aimed to assess the factors concerned with knowledge sharing among academicians in public universities. The study has reviewed the knowledge-sharing behaviour concept from the academic perspective in terms of written contribution, organizational communications, and communities of practice. Trust based on Social Exchange Theory has also been reviewed along with the association between trusts and knowledge-sharing behaviour. The study has highlighted trust as an essential factor, which makes an organization strive on valuable resources. Knowledge, on the other hand, is deemed as a power and considered as an undeniable aspect. Knowledge-sharing behaviour and humans are the two main constituents of knowledge. The study has presented the theoretical assessment of how the academicians are disposed positively towards the knowledge sharing within an organization. It is essential to assist practitioners to create and promote a knowledge-sharing environment especially within the context of public universities.

**Keywords:** Trust, knowledge, knowledge-sharing behavior, public universities, Malaysia.

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## 1 Introduction

Knowledge is valuable when it is shared with other employees (Renzl, 2008). According to O'neil and Adya (2007), knowledge is a prime source, which drives strategic competitive advantages in organisations, especially in today's dynamic business arena. It is believed that society values individual achievements more in comparison to organisation successes, which are aimed towards the accomplishment of organisational goals and objectives. Therefore, there is a relatively weak willingness in sharing knowledge among academicians as it is seen as individuals' personal asset. According to Fullwood, Rowley, and Delbridge (2012), universities act as constituents in promoting knowledge creation by research, which can later be disseminated through publications. Subsequently, universities play an important role in enhancing the need for innovation by learning and teaching particularly pertaining to the conduction of business and communication. However, despite the existence of strong bodies of research, the matter still lacks adequate attention of higher education institutions.

Trust is an important determinant of knowledge sharing, which seeks communication, performance, virtual space, physical space and goal-setting among academicians in educational institutions (LI, 2013). Previously, the attitude of academicians toward knowledge sharing is influenced by his or her knowledge sharing behaviour. It is because that mostly individuals are not born to share what they knew or not willing to share knowledge what they knew with other colleagues. Another important reason besides this factor is the lack of social trust among academicians (Abbas, 2017). Therefore, trust is based on understanding, non-judgmental, and encouraging nature that occur when the demands of both parties are agreed, understood, accepted, and recognized. Similarly, trust assists academicians in promoting active knowledge sharing behaviour.

Likewise, trust is important for the mutual exchange process and social interaction and; therefore, it is an essential component in a social exchange relationship. The social exchange relationship will be strengthened when trust is higher among individuals (Mallasi & Ainin, 2015). Moreover, social climate and trust are

important determinants that affect knowledge sharing in educational institutes with a strong support from management (Fullwood, Rowley & McLean, 2018). A strong foundation for learning and knowledge will be established from interpersonal trust (Tangaraja *et al.*, 2015). The available knowledge, responsibility, and competence of academicians promote the cognition-based trust. In contrast, the emotional bonds between academicians promote the affection-based trust. Thereby, the dimensions of trust include integrity, benevolence, and competence. It is emphasized that the collaboration of social networking and trust is important in academic institutions as academicians need to work collaboratively to attain common goals and objectives. Relationships among academicians cannot be effective for knowledge sharing without trust (Fauzi *et al.*, 2018). An academician will not share the information to others except for those he trusts, if it is confidential and personal. Trust should be present in educational section to ignore misuse of the knowledge for fostering the trust among academics (Mallasi & Ainin, 2015). Therefore, the top management should discover approaches and strategies to urge the trustworthiness to be integrated among educational institutions (Rahman *et al.*, 2016). It is essential that trust can be accessible to academics so that their intentions to knowledge sharing are improved as compared to force them to share their knowledge.

As discussed by Sohail and Daud (2009), who symbolised higher education institutions as reservoirs of knowledge, these institutions enable the management, blending, sharing as well as the development of knowledge. This is due to academicians being appointed and given grants to implement and explore various fields of knowledge. Even though knowledge sharing is undeniable beneficial, the process is hindered due to the unwillingness to share. Organisations which are in possession of valuable and critical knowledge immensely benefit. However, if organisations were to share their valuable knowledge, all benefits will be lost. Therefore, the pivotal questions are: (1) why should people share valuable knowledge with others? (2) Does the existence of trust among academicians' attribute or contribute to sharing interactions? Due to new and valuable knowledge being difficult to be tapped into and attained, individuals may choose to hoard knowledge and information unless a motivational factor surfaces (Mansor, Mustaffa & Salleh, 2015).

Thus, this study aimed to provide insight pertaining to the influence and impact of trust in knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians. This study will be important for academicians to aware the significance of knowledge sharing and trust. The use of behaviour, motivation, and barrier is indicated from the classification of knowledge sharing. Academicians are recognized as knowledge worker who are acquiring value in educational institutions specifically public universities to become more professional knowledge worker. The objective of knowledge sharing in public universities is to endow reliable, easy access and efficient knowledge, and assist the collaboration for enriching performance and growth of university.

## **2 Methodology**

The study has opted a review based theoretical analysis to assess the influence of trust and knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians in public universities. Different works of literature have been reviewed based on knowledge sharing behaviour from the academic perception, which has assisted to assess the significance of knowledge sharing and also the influence of trust on knowledge sharing behaviour among academicians. This study has contributed to provide the researchers with a sound theoretical understanding of why academicians are or is not positively disposed toward knowledge-sharing behaviour in the organisation which involves the integration of trust in the social exchange theory in relation to knowledge-sharing behaviour. This study aimed to apprehend knowledge management particularly in knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians. There are limited amounts of past research, where its focal point is the relationship of trust attributing to knowledge-sharing behaviour. Moreover, previous studies may not have focused on all dimensions which may affect this particular behaviour. That is, especially on these four specific dimensions: (1) written contributions; (2) organisational communication; (3) personal interactions; (4) communities of practice.

### **2.1 Review**

#### **2.1.1 Knowledge-sharing Behaviour concept from The Academic Perspective**

Knowledge-sharing behaviour can be defined as a process, which involves the exchange of knowledge with other individuals or groups of people. The process comprises of the owner of the knowledge (sender) and the party, which receives the knowledge (receiver). According to Bartol and Srivastava (2012), in terms of knowledge-sharing behaviour in tertiary institutions, knowledge-sharing behaviour can be categorised into three aspects; knowledge through written contributions (publication of scholarly journals, articles and books), knowledge through organisational communications (across teams or work units during workshops and meetings), knowledge through personal interactions, (outside constituents) and knowledge in communities of practice.

### ***Written Contributions***

This particular dimension revolves around the formation of ideas, information, and expertise through writing and publications (Yi, 2009). This form of knowledge-sharing behaviour captures the contributions from academicians. Publications are inclusive of dissemination of knowledge through journal articles, newsletters, magazines as well as the sharing of information on public-accessible mediums such as databases, discussion boards and submission of reports among universities and other scholars. In short, this dimension represents explicit knowledge, which can be categorised as a person-to-document form of knowledge dissemination.

### ***Organizational Communications***

This dimension of knowledge-sharing behaviour can be affiliated to the behaviours of sharing knowledge through interactions between individuals and groups of people (person-to-group interaction (Yi, 2009). An exemplary situation would be: if an academician were to share information and knowledge with groups or teams through department or faculty meetings and brainstorming sessions. These are means to evoke and generate ideas, solutions, and thoughts which are beneficial to more than one party.

### ***Communities of Practice***

This dimension of knowledge-sharing behaviour requires the participation of a community network, which comprises voluntary groups of academicians to share similar interests in a non-routine and personal way. This is somewhat similar to personal interactions. However, the prominent difference between the knowledge-sharing behaviour of personal interactions and communities of practice is that this particular dimension is conducted in informal mediums. According to Kaser and Miles (2001), this dimension is a form of tacit knowledge in which it thrives on general expectations of reciprocity and is a form of social knowledge exchange of information.

## **2.1.2 Trust Based on Social Exchange Theory**

According to Kramer and Tyler (1996), trust is a concept that is highly debated. There are innumerable definitions of trust. However, Simons (2002) is an advocate of the definition created by Mayer *et al.* (1995). That is, trust can be defined as a specific set of primary beliefs which involves the affiliation of integrity, benevolence as well as the willingness of another party (Chie *et al.*, 2006). The social exchange theory by Blau (1964) suggested that in any social exchange process, trust is pivotal. Trust is essential in forming an exchange in which it can maintain relationships which contribute to good quality of knowledge sharing. According to Goshal (1998), it is believed that when trust is presented between two parties, cooperative interaction is highly achievable rather than with its absence. According to Homans (1958), SET is one of the most renowned sociology and psychology literature framework which is considered to be the oldest theory pertaining to social behaviour. The social exchange involves the participation of two people, where one person may have some benefit or valuable information or role to the other and it is contingent upon rewards from the other. SET defines trust as an act of succumbing to vulnerability and believing in positive outcomes from their actions (Gambetta, 2000; Reigilsberger *et al.*, 2003). Leonidou, Talias and Leonidou (2008) also advocate that trust is pertinent in any relationship and interpersonal interactions.

Social interactions immensely affect trust between people. Blau (1964) alongside many other researchers advocated the importance of trust in social exchanges. Economic development, promotion of outcomes by legitimate government institutions and relationships strive on trust which is aimed towards the best interests of society (Gilson, 2003). Trust can be defined as “expectations that an exchange partner will behave benignly, based on the attribution of positive dispositions and intentions to the partner in a situation of uncertainty and risk” (Molm *et al.*, 2000, p. 1402). According to Lou (2002), actors in social exchanges focus on long-term benefits, not merely on short-term inequities. Thus, trust is essential in forming long-term relationships. For example, a one-shot transaction with the market brings about a minimal impact and requires less trust as opposed to a long-term interaction between society and the tourism industry. However, the trust is highly subjective, when it involves a legal framework (Cook, 2000).

## **2.1.3 Trusts And Commitment in Academic Institutions**

Trust is considered as one of the most influential elements which affect learning in organisations (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Knowledge-sharing behaviour, as well as trust, are pertinent in reducing the gaps between employees of different generations in organisations (Samadi, Wei & Wan Yusoff, 2015 Mayer *et al.*, (2005) and Colquitt, Scott and LePine (2007) suggested that trust also plays a circumstantial role in the performance of employees (Samadi, Wei & Wan Yusoff, 2015). Moreover, Lorens (2008) asserted that trust enables the sharing of knowledge due to the employees feeling comfortable and safe in terms of learning and sharing of

information. When people are willing to disseminate and share knowledge with others, relationships based on mutual trust are developed and formed (Mooradian *et al.*, 2006; Becerra & Gupta, 2003). Trust for the information disseminator (sender) also highly affects in which the knowledge is deemed useful (Abrams *et al.*, 2003).

Communication in organisations is highly affected by the existence of trust between major constituents of an organisation with its sub-units and members (Abili, Thanib & Rashidid, 2012). Consequently, trust also plays a major role on the amount of knowledge that is shared between constituents in organisations. Lack of trust is proven to be one of the most massive obstacles faced by employees in inculcating positive knowledge-sharing behaviour. According to Pai (2006), social exchanges and relationships are stronger with higher levels of trust. Hence, it can be concluded that in any form of the mutual exchange process, the existence of the trust is vital in knowledge-sharing.

Likewise, trust and commitment are important to maintain the exchange relationships among academicians. Academicians are more willing to involve in interaction and to share or exchange knowledge when trust exists among themselves. In this regard, trust is considered as the belief in the reliability and integrity of the exchange partner. In contrast, commitment is perceived as an exchange partner that deems a continued relationship with another to ensure maximum efforts to maintain it (Maiga, 2017). Social exchange theory has explained that it is important to maintain mutual commitment of academicians for the sharing or exchanging of knowledge to be successful. Developing trust is a significant component of social exchange theory as it is governed to a higher extent by social obligations as compared to contracts. Therefore, trust is observed as an essential means to improve knowledge sharing (Demirkasimoglu, 2015). It is argued that social exchange relationships ascertain when demands and needs of academicians are catered to develop strong relationship throughout university environments. It will also allow facilitating the development of exchange relationships and creation of an effective culture based on knowledge sharing.

### **3 Conclusions**

The existing era of wisdom and knowledge is highly cognizant that knowledge is circumstantial and pertinent across all platforms. Organisations, in particular, strive on valuable resources and profit which are not achievable without the existence of the trust. Knowledge is widely deemed as power. However, knowledge is only powerful when disseminated and utilised. When knowledge is shared with others, it is in its most powerful state (Liao *et al.*, 2004). Although, inculcating the willingness to share knowledge is no easy task. Noraka *et al.*, (1994) proposed that knowledge is with the individual's asset and it is in the hands of the beholder whether to share or not to share the asset. In addition, the two main constituents of knowledge involve knowledge-sharing behaviour and humans. It is also highly undeniable that the value of an organisation depends on its possession of critical knowledge. Therefore, it is evident that the importance of knowledge sharing should be apprehended and promoted.

The main objective of the study was to scrutinise the role of trust in knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians. It is prominent that trust is pertinent and is deemed as a backbone of knowledge-sharing behaviour in organisations worldwide. Numerous researchers advocate that knowledge sharing alongside trust is circumstantial in organisations. Trust is essential to all organisations particularly in nurturing and developing skills, value, competencies and to sustain competitive advantages. Knowledge, in universities, are rigorously taught and disseminated through various mediums. These mediums are inclusive of teaching, publications, training, and research. It is widely believed that constituents in universities are proactive in the development and sharing of information and knowledge. Additionally, in an attempt to enable knowledge-sharing behaviour, trust is paramount and must concurrently exist.

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