

## Knowledge Sharing Culture in Malaysian Public Institution of Higher Education : An Overview

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### **Abstract**

*Knowledge sharing culture plays very important role in the successful implementation of Knowledge Management in any organization. A study has been conducted to explore the current status of Knowledge Sharing Culture among the Community of Practice in Malaysian Public Institution of Higher Education. Based on the questionnaire distributed to all 17 IT Managers in Malaysian PIHE, we found that the existence of Knowledge Sharing Culture in Malaysian PIHE still very low. Besides, this study came out with a proposal on how to motivate the Knowledge Sharing Culture in Malaysian PIHE.*

### **Keywords**

*Knowledge Sharing Culture, Malaysian Public Institution of Higher Education, CoP.*

### **1) Introduction**

Knowledge has been identified as one of the most important resource that contributes to the competitive advantage of an organization. (Applegate et. al, 1996) Since early 1990's, many organization moving towards the implementation of Knowledge Management to achieve the competitive advantage among their competitors.

Towards Knowledge-based Economy in Malaysia, it is a must for Public Institution of Higher Educations (PIHE) to plays their role parallel with the Vision 2020 by Malaysian Government. One of the Seven Strategic Thrusts

in the Knowledge-based Economy Master Plan is to develop the public sector into K-based Civil Service. In order to develop a skilled and knowledge-based public sector, one of the recommendations in developing Human Resources in the Knowledge-based Economy Master Plan is to develop and implement Knowledge Management System in Malaysian Government Agency including Malaysian PIHE. (MOF, 2002)

Considering the distributed nature of organization cognition, an important process of knowledge management in organizational setting is the transfer of knowledge to locations where it is needed and can be used. An important aspect of transfer is that of knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing involved organizational members willingly contributing their knowledge to organizational memory. (Kayworth and Leidner, 2004) Thus, culture is an important resource in encouraging individuals to share and as Hargadon (1998) notes, this resources can either encourage or discourage innovative knowledge management practices.

A Study was conducted in 2005 to gain the current status of KM implementation in Malaysian PIHE and the Knowledge Sharing Culture among Malaysian PIHE staffs and lecturers.

### **2) Methodology**

A quantitative research methodology has been used in this study to gain information about the real situation of KM implementation in Malaysian PIHE. A Study has been conducted from September 2004 until February 2005 on the

KM implementation status in Malaysian Public Institution of Higher Education (PIHE). The main objectives of this study are to get the current status of KM implementation in Malaysian PIHE and how far Strategic Information System Planning (SISP) has been used in the implementation process. It is very important in order to ensure the implementation of KM can be implemented without ignoring the existing ICT opportunities in their institutions.

### 2.1 Data Collection

Main respondents in this study are all the PIHE IT Managers in Malaysia. A set of questionnaires has been distributed to all 17 Malaysian PIHE as indicated in Figure 1.

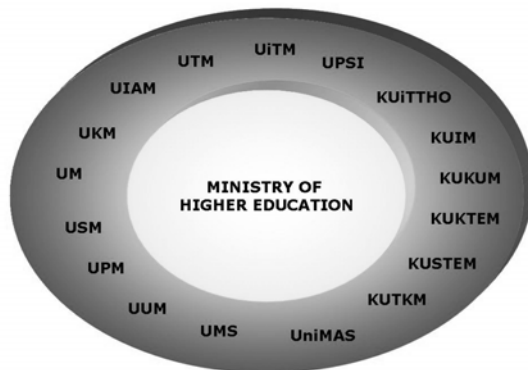


Figure 1: Malaysian PIHE

### 3) KM in Malaysian PIHE

Based on a study in 2005, the implementation of KM in Malaysian PIHE is still in the intermediate level, only 47.1% or 8 universities have implemented or started the implementation process of KM in their organization. Other universities still do not implement KM in their organization or are not sure about it as shown in Figure 2. (Suhaimi et al., 2005)

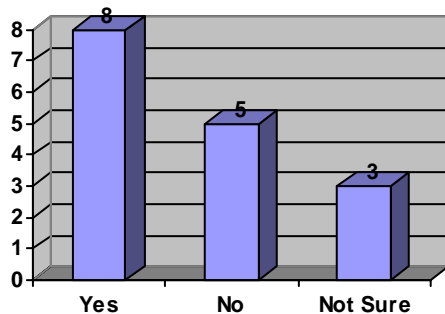


Figure 2: KM implementation in Malaysia PIHE

Only one university claimed that their organization has fully implemented KM and the others are still in progress or in the initial stages or not starting to implement KM yet. (Figure 3) Latest information showing that another university has implemented KM in their organization widely.

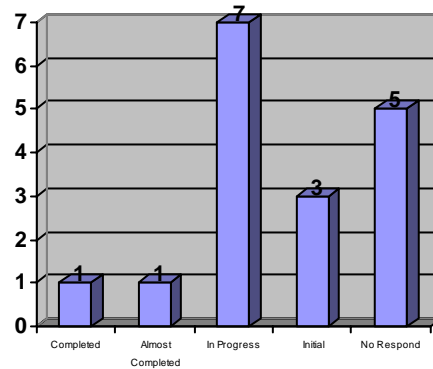


Figure 3: KM implementation status

### 4) Knowledge Sharing Culture

As KM developed, Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) became popular, even dominant, “KM” intervention. Soon it was supplemented with storytelling (Denning, 2001) interventions encouraging knowledge workers to use stories to both “sell” KM internally, share knowledge and facilitate collaboration. More recently, Social Network Analysis (SNA) (Cross and Parker, 2004) is being used to discover the structure of relationship in existing communities. (Firestone and McElroy, 2004)

Knowing the importance of Knowledge Sharing Culture as a part of Critical Success Factor in the implementation of Knowledge Management in an organization, the study has touched the existence of Knowledge Sharing Culture in Malaysian PIHE.

#### 4.1 Current Status

The study in 2005 involved all the 17 public universities in Malaysia. From the study, we found the existence of Knowledge Sharing Culture in Malaysian PIHEs still very low. Only 29.4% of the Malaysian PIHE staffs have this positive culture in their routine work. (Figure 4) In other hands, the awareness of the importance of Knowledge sharing culture among employees only exist in 5 public universities in Malaysia.

So, some strategic steps must be planned to encounter this problems in order to practice Knowledge Management in Malaysian PIHE.

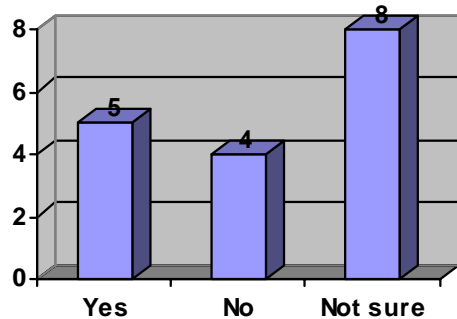


Figure 4: Existence of Knowledge Sharing Culture in Malaysian PIHE

The mantra within the knowledge management community is that 80% of knowledge management is people and culture, and 20% is technology. A key component of the people and culture factors deals with encouraging a knowledge sharing environment within the organization. (Liebowitz, 1999; Davenport and Grover, 2001). Kochikar (2000) has develop a knowledge management maturity model which the highest level is “Sharing”. This level involves reaching the institutionalization of a culture of sharing, whereby sharing becomes second nature to all. (Liebowitz and Chen, 2004)

As Knowledge sharing has become a cornerstone in many top companies, many organization like American Management System has created Corporate Knowledge Centers in core competency areas to encourage online communities of practice for increased knowledge sharing (Preece, 2000).

### 4.2 Knowledge Sharing Motivation

Several organizations already have develop knowledge sharing proficiencies in order to further encourage the use of knowledge sharing within the organization and externally to organization’s customer (Liebowitz and Chen, 2001) For example, The Public Services Commission in Canada has “Knowledge, Information and Data Should Be Shared” as one of their four guiding principles. Specifically, they indicate:

- Sharing will be rewarded. They create an environment where people free to contribute what they know and to seek out knowledge from colleagues.
- Performance evaluations should be linked to how well a person contributes to generating, assessing and transferring knowledge.
- Knowledge will be available to all employees except where there is a demonstrated need for confidentiality or protection of privacy.
- Knowledge will be shared to support collaboration with other federal governments department, other levels of government, and other partners.
- Establish processes and tools to enable to capture and share knowledge in order to support collaboration. (Liebowitz and Chen, 2004)

From the study within Malaysian PIHE in 2005, several suggestions to motivate Malaysian PIHE employees to get involve in knowledge sharing. Malaysian PIHE needs to establish a new policy through the Ministry of Higher Education particularly motivating workers to share and use knowledge by offering incentives and advantages. (Suhaimie et.al, 2005)

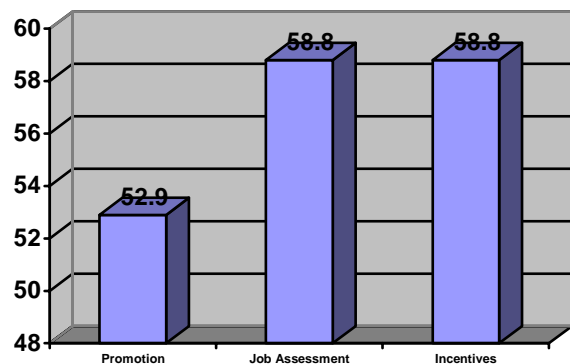


Figure 5: Motivation to promote knowledge sharing culture

The most accepted motivation in promoting knowledge sharing culture among Malaysian PIHE employees are:

a) Incentives

Ministry of Higher Education needs to allocate special allocation in Malaysian PIHE annual budget as incentives for those actives in knowledge sharing activity among PIHE employees. The incentives can be an annually bonus, holiday trip or special vacations for those highly contribute in knowledge sharing process. This will promote an environment where people feel free to contribute what they know to others.

b) Job Assessment

Knowledge sharing activities should be a part of Annual Job Assessment or performance evaluations. It should be linked to how well a person contributes to generating, assessing and transferring knowledge.

c) Promotion

Knowledge sharing and contributions in KM activities should be a part in staff promotion

process beside the existing evaluation from the academic contributions, performance evaluations, seniority and others.

These three types of motivations gets the highest responds from the study done in 2005. Other motivation aspect suggested in the study got lower respond from respondents.

**5. CoP in Malaysian PIHE**

Communities of Practice in Knowledge Management has their own role which is highly important in the implementation of KM. This study has going through the role and contribution of each community related to Malaysian PIHE in Knowledge Management practice in Malaysian PIHE. Each of the community listed in the questionnaire has their own role to contribute in KM implementation. This study showed that the top management got the highest ranking of role and contribution in the implementation of KM in Malaysian PIHE. (Figure 6)

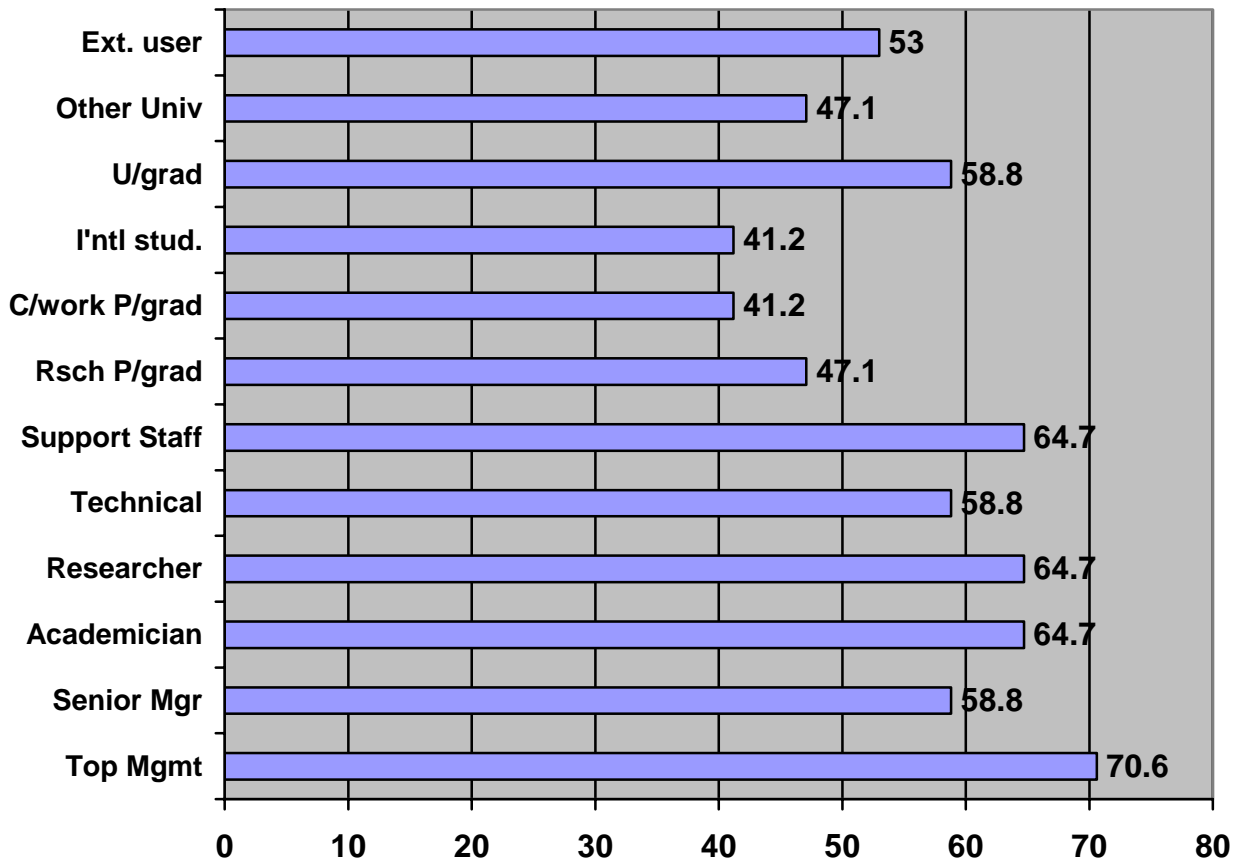


Figure 6: Expected CoP contribution in KM

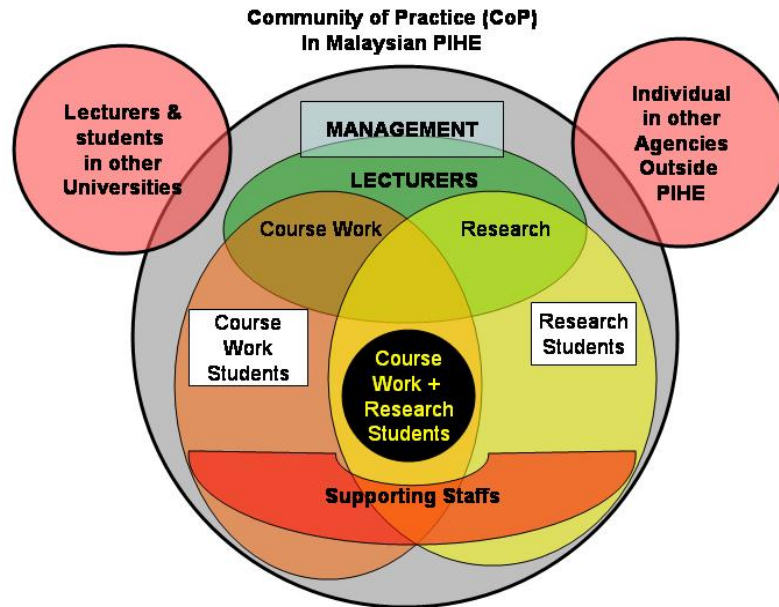


Figure 7: Community of Practice (CoP) in Malaysian PIHE

The connection between each community can be illustrated in figure 6. Besides internal communities, CoP for Malaysian PIHE involves external communities such as:

- Lectures and student from other universities. It consists of Private Institution of Higher Education in Malaysia and other universities from other countries.
- Individual in other agencies outside PIHE including governments, privates agencies, organization and any personal interested in Higher Educations.

## 6. Conclusion

The government, like other non-profit organization, has some unique challenges to develop a knowledge sharing capability as compared with industry. (Liebowitz, 2001). In many government agencies including Public Institution of Higher Education, people keep their knowledge close to heart as they move through the ranks by this “knowledge is power” paradigm.(Liebowitz and Chen, 2004)

In this case, more action must be taken by the Ministry of Higher Education as a central agency for Malaysian Public Institution of Higher Education to endorse a specific policy regarding

KM practice in Malaysian PIHE. One of the elements should be concentrated on promoting knowledge sharing culture among staffs and academicians.

Top management in Malaysian Public Universities must play their own role to enforce the policy implementation after it has been endorsed by the ministry. Without the tight co-operation between both parties in Malaysian PIHE, there are no promises to achieve a successful Knowledge Sharing practice in Malaysian PIHE.

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