

## Academic culture and its role in knowledge management in higher Education system

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### ABSTRACT

Culture provides the main background of knowledge increase. As an important sub culture, academic culture has a large impact on the development of knowledge creation.

This research studies academic culture and knowledge management in higher education system. For the purpose of study, a sample including academic scholars and experts (academic staff members) was chosen using objective sampling and interviewed. Interviews continued until implicit effective cultural aspects and factors on the knowledge management of academic staff members were identified and described.

Qualitative stage of current study led to the identification of effective cultural factors on knowledge management. Additionally, the constructs of knowledge culture in higher education system was identified considering research theoretical bases and findings.

### KEYWORDS

knowledge management, academic culture higher education.

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## Introduction

Academic culture receives its meaning from the interaction between educational groups on university community level. Academic culture refers to communication channels and interaction among university members (Sabaghian, 2009). It's also regarded as one of effective determinants of higher education policies.

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According to Robins (2007: 375), organizational cultural context has the most profound, the broadest and the most long-term effects on the social behavior of most organizational members. Knowledge is a social phenomenon. Knowledge improvement doesn't occur on its own but requires suitable backgrounds.

In an organization with Knowledge culture, every individual is involved in the creation, sharing and application of Knowledge. In every society, culture provides Knowledge improvement and academic culture, as an important sub-culture, greatly influences on the development of Knowledge creation.

Academic culture in anthropology is defined as a system of beliefs, values and cultural actions academics hold. Academic culture is an implicit pattern of meanings which is expressed as symbols such as actions, tokens, artifacts and other meaningful categories by which scholars communicate and share their common experiences, perceptions and beliefs (Beeren Baum, 2004).

Shein (1992) believed that beliefs and presuppositions form an organizational cultural core which influences individual's perception, thought and feelings. Human nature is one of these presuppositions whose related theories, due to their importance are classified in university culture, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: organizational theories based on the approach to human in human evolutionary trend (Safae Fakhri and Behrangi, 2010).

Approach	Presupposition	Focus/Values
Classic	Economic human	Wealth/authority
Primitive modern	Scientific human	Rationality/ control. Man agreement
Modern	Ecologic human	Environment/external control
Symbolic- interpretive	Symbolic human	Interpretation/ meaning
Post-modern	Aesthetic human	Creativity/ freedom/ responsibility

As knowledge management has been defined differently it can be concluded that scholars don't emphasize on a single concept of Knowledge management. Multi-disciplinary nature of Knowledge management brings about different approaches and epistemology (Dalkar, 2005, p:4). This means that Knowledge management depends on management outlook. Differences in Knowledge management results from information-oriented technology-oriented and culture-oriented outlooks (Gatchalak, 2005).

If information-oriented outlook dominates on the management level, Knowledge management focuses on the access of information. Technology-orientation approach emphasizes on information technology tools while culture-orientation approach focuses on the spread of Knowledge. However, an appropriate one among all these approaches relies on the situation of organizations.

According to Adhikari (2010), higher education contexts are currently faced with non- Knowledge orientation culture challenges, unidentified weaknesses in Knowledge creation, the lack of technological thought as the most significant element of Knowledge management, the emphasis of university contexts on the recreation of old-fashioned Knowledge rather than the creation of up-to-date

Knowledge, traditional methods and techniques of university Knowledge management and reluctance to change behaviors in university contexts while implementing the innovations of Knowledge management. Because of the aforementioned challenges, Knowledge creation strategies need to be developed for is a central concept for activities in universities and research centers, Knowledge management is also especially important in those contexts.

Numerous studies have shown that cultural factors are the biggest deterrents of contributors of Knowledge management activities. Results from experimental studies such as those conducted by davenport and Prousak (1998) , Holaspel and Joshi (2000), Kim and Lee (2004), wang (2005), linder et al. (2006). Allameh et al, (2006) and Zhang et al (2010) lead us to the conclusion that organizational culture is effective both on facilitating and continuing Knowledge management activities.

Butnariu and Milson (2012) showed that Knowledge management in universities should improve the Knowledge creation appropriate with its context and provide a better atmosphere for the emergence of talents and capabilities.

Given the discussions mentioned above and the importance of culture in Knowledge management for the identification of effective cultural factors in the currents study. We'll try to answer the following questions:

- 1- what's the role of Knowledge creator culture in Knowledge management in higher education?
- 2- what are effective cultural factors of Knowledge management in higher education?

### **Research methodology**

The present qualities study was conducted using semi-structured interviews and exploration approach. After having completed objective sampling, we organized interviews with those scholars and expert's academic staff members in Tehran city who possessed were aware enough of Knowledge management. Interviews continued until different implicit aspects and factors of Knowledge management were identified and described and a theoretical ground was reached. At the end of qualitative stage of our present study, effective cultural factors of Knowledge management were identified and discovered.

Using qualitative information derived from interviews and their equivalent concepts, data were analyzed through qualitative data encoding method in data review stages, encoding manual preparation, data organization, data classification, open encoding, axial encoding, writing final report and qualitative data analysis.

### **Research Findings:**

While we were trying to find answers to above question, which sought to determine the role of culture and effective cultural factors on Knowledge management processes in higher education system, we managed to identify

effective cultural factors using semi-structured interviews and research literature. It should be noted that data from semi-structured interviews were classified and encoded after interviews, had been completed. These factors along with documented evidence from interviews will be discussed in the following separate sections. Table 2 shows results from data encoding which were related to a Knowledge -e-creator culture.

Table2: qualitative data encoding derived from semi-structured interviews (the role of a Knowledge-creator culture)

Interviewees code	Open encoding (Knowledge-creator culture factors)	The most important interviewees oral statements
M1-M2-M3-M4-M5-M6-M7	Knowledge- oriented mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ main mission of academies Knowledge creation. Thus their culture should be centered around Knowledge creation.</li> <li>✓ Trust among academics facilitates their communication and interaction as well as their knowledge sharing and transfer.</li> <li>✓ Trust is a channel through which Knowledge flows. It also influences on the amount of Knowledge flow among individuals.</li> <li>✓ Collaboration and team work contribute Knowledge sharing and Knowledge creation.</li> <li>✓ Unity culture and members integration in their organization and its mission are a background for Knowledge creation and result in member's commitment. There for, Knowledge is</li> <li>✓Teamwork and inter-disciplinary cooperation develops as a result of more idea and viewpoint expression and increased capabilities. Thus, more Knowledge is created and communicated among individuals.</li> <li>✓Academic leadership style plays the key role in academic culture. As a consequence, a supportive atmosphere should be created by university manager.</li> <li>✓Organizational managers as an effective factor of organizational culture can have the main role in the formation, improvement and continuity of Knowledge culture in an organization.</li> <li>✓Authority delegation should give more freedom of action and speech to academics.</li> <li>✓University dependence is linked to hierarchical and centralized university management so that it affects on scientific freedom.</li> <li>✓The lack of scientific freedom influences on academic communications and associations. Critical evaluations, and scientific. Freedom emerge through scientific actions and lead to Knowledge criticism, transfer and creation.</li> <li>✓Knowledge culture aims to create, organize, evaluate and apply Knowledge. Valuating reward system encourages individuals to explore and test in a cultural context.</li> </ul>
M1-M2-M3-M4-M5-M6-M7	Management support	
M1-M2-M3-M4-M5-M6-M7	Individual independence and freedom of action	
M1-M2-M3-M5-M6-M7	Open and creative context	
M1-M3-M6-M7	Trust among members of scientific community	

M1-M2-M3-M4-M5-M6-M7	Extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors	
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As can be seen in Table 2, “cultural factors” encompass a wide range of activities in universities. The first and second rows in open encoding column suggest that Knowledge -oriented mission and university management support are the main elements of academic culture. Unity culture and individuals integration in an organization and its mission, as a background of Knowledge creation, contribute to their commitment and consequently lead to successful Knowledge management. Organizational managers, as an effective factor of organizational culture formation, can play a key role in shaping, encouraging and continuing Knowledge culture in organizations, results from our research are consistent with other studies such as Butnariu and Milson (2012), Parutis and Saleh (2009), Arntsen et al (2009) and Nicholds and Mabey (2015).

The third row in open encoding column shows that collaboration and cooperation in scientific activities are major factors of academic. Staff members empowerment. Mutual understanding improves social relations and supportive behaviors. These skills contribute to mutual friendship among organization members and social relations so that they strengthen ties among members in this network (Sayyadi, 2010, cited from Ebilly and Zare Khalili 2013). A study by Sveiby and Simons (2002) shows that a working atmosphere is also another major factor of Knowledge creation. The ability of an organization in Knowledge sharing influences on organizational performance. This is itself influenced by cooperation level in an organization.

The fourth row in open encoding column indicates that a significant index of organizational culture dominating universities is independence and freedom of action which are supported by authority delegation and individual independence from higher education managers. Organizational communicative pattern also facilitates freedom of action. Scholars believe that scientific freedom and critical evaluations manifest in scientific actions and associations, and result in Knowledge criticism, transfer and creation.

The fifth rows in open encoding column represent the need for emphasis on open organizational culture. An open organizational culture fosters interaction and the exchange of viewpoints, experiences and opinions, it also allows staff to express their ideas without the fear of being laid off. An organizational culture in which Knowledge is emphasized and fed strengthens the ability to use prior Knowledge for determining the value of new Knowledge. Integrating and applying the new Knowledge for the creation of new capabilities. A culture with

positive tendency toward Knowledge values learning whether combined with employment or not. Cultures which directly support Knowledge sharing, transfer and acquisition provide a suitable background for more application of Knowledge and creation of Knowledge culture.

A Knowledge -oriented culture manifests itself in organizational features which facilitate Knowledge exchange and production. A Knowledge culture not only has a special informational architecture and structure but also provides such a situation in which users develop informational needs, analyze and interpret information (Meathal, 2008). A study by Poursaeed and his colleagues (2012) showed that an organizational culture as an official structure and higher education strategy has the biggest impact on the inversion of Knowledge resources into axial qualifications Siyadat and his colleagues (2010) indicated that the general effects of social interaction.

Organizational culture and social capital variables on Knowledge creation variable are meaningful.

Open encoding in the sixth column shows that academics trust facilitates their communication and interaction, and fosters the x change of Knowledge. Thrust is a channel through which Knowledge flows and influences on individuals Knowledge. There of the development and improvement of Knowledge management in universities require the improvement of communication and interaction based on academic staff members' trust as well as the spread of social capital in universities.

Individuals share their Knowledge only if they trust each other; otherwise they won't act on their common Knowledge. Results of our study are consistent with previous studies. They suggest that trust not only facilitates Knowledge sharing but also leads to the creation of organizational Knowledge.

The last column is concerned with incentives and motivational factors. As Hegstraum stated, rewarding in a scientific institution is one of the most significant building blocks of an academic culture. Knowledge culture aims to create, organize, evaluate and apply Knowledge.

Reward system through valuation encourages individuals to discover, explore and experiment in a cultural atmosphere. In a Knowledge culture, individuals are valued based on their Knowledge management measures rather than their organizational hierarchical position. Rewards are also given according to Knowledge management (Alic and Romizen, 2002; Malhautra and Gatla 2003; cheng et al, 2009). Rewards aren't necessarily financial motives aren't fulfilled through financial rewards either. Instead, motives can be intrinsic.

## Discussion and conclusion

Discussions mentioned above suggest that every social institution including academic institutions are both the product of community culture and creator of the cultures. The interaction between culture, educational institutions and other institutions in necessary for the development and globalization. Nowadays, most

organizations suffer from distrust, closed communications and excessive formality. Thus, it's essential to make changes for more personal mutual trust, more open communication, personal flexibility and more organizational communication. Academic context aren't an exception since academies are faced with poor interaction interpersonal and group communication, organizational identity, low trust, team work and poor collaboration among academic staff members. Through investments in social capital, universities are able to increase their academic staff members Knowledge, skills, qualifications as well as their structural capital including intellectual assets, innovation, processes, working procedures, organizational learning, information systems etc.

In the following, some suggestion are provided for Knowledge management level through communication at improved organizational culture.

- ✓ Interaction among Academics leads to mutual trust commitment to values and norm and consequently to scientific culture. Thus, it's necessary to improve informal communicative channels. In this regard, scientific association, group research, expeditions and the like are very helpful.
- ✓ Proper information systems should be developed for Knowledge sharing in academic groups.
- ✓ Appropriate incentives should be distributed for the purpose of encouraging communication and Knowledge sharing behaviors among academic staff members.
- ✓ Participation levels for decision making should be increased while at the same time organizational intra-level limitations should be removed in order for information flow horizontally through out the organization.
- ✓ Academics attitude should be shifted towards the role and status of Knowledge. Academics should be given independence and vocational freedom.

Cultural management requires that academics stop regarding culture as an existence but try to do something that they really understand. Indeed, they need to consider an organization as an identity for interpretation. Successful organizational management needs managers to reflect on cultural aspects. That is they must manage their organizations with cultural awareness.

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