



# Knowledge sharing practices: A case study at Malaysia's healthcare research institutes

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## KEYWORDS

Knowledge management;  
Knowledge sharing;  
Organisational knowledge;  
Malaysia;  
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**Abstract** The main objective of this study was to investigate the perception of the researchers and officers within the National Institutes of Health Malaysia (NIH) about their understanding of knowledge sharing practices in their respective environment. Questions included: what are the perceptions of the respondents with regard to the knowledge sharing practices in their respective institutions? What are the benefits for knowledge sharing practices as perceived by them? What are their perceived organisational knowledge sharing practices motivating factors? Also, what are the hindering factors? The survey of the researchers and officers of the NIH was distributed to 400 respondents from the six research institutes under NIH: Institute for Medical Research (IMR), Institute for Public Health (IPH), Network for Clinical Research Centres (CRC), Institute for Health Management (IHM), Institute for Health Systems Research (IHSR) and Institute for Health Promotion (IHP). The responses indicated that knowledge sharing depends on the context of encouraging and rewarding the practices of organisational knowledge sharing. The findings suggest four factors – Environment and Infrastructure, Management Support, Culture and Technology – as significant determinants in influencing the organisational knowledge sharing practices among the employees. The study was limited to the perceptual aspect of the issue, specifically from the individuals' opinions and sentiments.  
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## Preamble

Drastic changes in the global economic era significantly change the world economic perspectives. The advent of the information and communication technology (ICT) and the information revolution totally changed the way information is being processed, managed and used. In the present knowledge era, the main attention and attraction is on the knowledge that would make people, the customers, clientele or patrons feel good, satisfied and contented at all

times. These changes are transforming the way organisations behave and react. The situation demands optimum treatment of innovation and creativity in organisational operations. Drucker (2001) proclaimed that land, labour and capital are no longer valuable in comparison to knowledge. Organisations need to emphasise adding competitive value to their products and services. This is only achievable through the application of direct human expertise that is knowledge. According to Ohmae (2005) the global economy has its own dynamic and logic; the key

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emphasis, its success and survival is on learning. Cong and Pandya (2003) affirmed the new economy not only poses challenges, but also offers opportunities for the public sector to take active initiatives to adopt new management tools, techniques and philosophies of the private sector. It is not simply about product competitive advantages, or return on investment, but more about policy decisions and delivery of services. It is also about information provision and knowledge indication, sharing and utilisation. Knowledge and intellectual capital determine competitiveness, which play key roles in fostering a culture that promotes information and knowledge sharing in organisation. Trends in the current global economies warrant knowledge and intellectual capital to determine competitiveness. The public and private sectors play crucial roles in ensuring technological literacy among employees as well as fostering a culture that promotes information and knowledge sharing.

In Malaysia, the civil service is among the earliest adopters of information and communication technology (ICT) in its administration and services. The principal motivation behind the effort was to fully exploit the benefits of ICT in raising quality and productivity of the services delivery. The National Information Technology Agenda (NITA) and the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) were among the initiatives initiated by the Government to explore and exploit the potential of creating a knowledge-savvy society. Mahathir (2000) acknowledged Vision 2020 as Malaysia's strategic step into the information age and it is a quantum leap towards re-making Malaysian corporations and re-inventing the Malaysian society. *ISIS Malaysia* (2002) in Malaysia's Knowledge Based Economy Master Plan defines knowledge-based economy as an economy in which knowledge, creativity and innovation play an ever-increasing and important role in generating and sustaining growth. Abdullah (2005) indicated the key driver of economic growth and wealth creation is to develop means having the capacity to harness and apply existing knowledge, create and innovate new knowledge, and utilise cost-saving technologies. This includes efforts to fine tune existing policies and institutional arrangements to promote the culture of innovation and creativity at all levels of society, particularly strengthening the human resources capability, funding strategic research and development activities as well as providing the necessary infrastructure and support mechanisms. Apparently, knowledge workers play crucial roles in facilitating the country's economy to move forward. Knowledge workers create value through their ideas. What kind of knowledge worker individuals are depends on the type of knowledge they produce. Knowledge workers convert their intuition into explicit knowledge later shared and turned into opportunities made available to the organisation. In order to drive the transformation of the nation to a knowledge-based economy, efforts need to be intensified to develop the nation's human capital toward increasing innovation.

According to Izwan (2006), as part of the public sector ICT strategic plan to improve linkages within various agencies, a number of departments and agencies were chosen to pave the way for a more efficient and client-centred public service delivery through knowledge management initiatives. The Malaysian Administrative and

Modernisation Planning Unit (MAMPU) announced Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Works, Ministry of Education, Anti Corruption Agency, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Economic Planning Unit, Prison Department and the states of Selangor, Perak and Negeri Sembilan to kick-start and lead the initiative. Obviously, implementation of such an initiative will enable effective management and organisation of knowledge available within the various agencies. Mohd Najib (2010a,b) attested that the Malaysian Public Service is a vital partner in nation building; however, the challenging environment requires it to take a careful look at its new environment and realities. It requires a mechanism that measures quality human capital and quality of services. Human resource development needs to be given special attention and made a top priority. This calls for the creation of an environment that supports competitiveness, flexibility, dynamism and performance-orientation. The quality of the nation's human capital will be the key determinant of Malaysia's future success. Therefore, there is a critical need to strengthen the overall mindset, culture, norm and values of the people to be more in step with the aspirations for a role in the global economy.

## Rationale and statement of problem

The real concern behind the implementation of a knowledge management initiative is culture: the culture of sharing knowledge and using it instinctively. Abell and Oxbrow (2001) asserted that the implementation of organisational knowledge sharing requires a change in corporate culture, from information is power to knowledge shared builds power. Knowledge sharing behaviours need to be encouraged as it is a positive force in the creation of innovative organisations, especially through the element of reciprocity (Connelly & Kelloway, 2003). Md Zabid, Murali, and Azmawani (2004) contend that high sociability opportunities in organisations enable high commitment and ensure the success of overall organisational sharing practices. Organisation environment and social communications are pragmatic factors that provide indications of the affective aspects of organisational knowledge sharing (Lin & Lee, 2006; Syed Mustapha & Sayed, 2005). Organisation knowledge sharing practices require adjustment in the corporate culture, especially in identifying, accessing and exploiting existing knowledge, and play a key role in developing an innovative and cooperative climate for an effective knowledge sharing process (Chen & Huang, 2007; Christensen, 2007; Oliver and Kandadi, 2006). For the initiative to be effective, the identification and creation of a caring community with a strong organisational common interest, topic and destination of achievement are required.

If the Ministry of Health (MOH) is to be entrusted as among the chosen organisations to spearhead Malaysia's public sector drive towards efficient and client centric public service delivery via knowledge management initiatives, MOH must take on the role of healthcare research as both a means to provide knowledge and as an integral part of the nation's health development. Mohd Najib (2010a,b) contends that primary health care will remain the thrust of the Malaysian transformed health service delivery

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