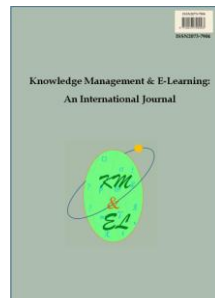

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An exploratory study on knowledge sharing practices among professionals in Bangladesh

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An exploratory study on knowledge sharing practices among professionals in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the environment, behaviour patterns, and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for knowledge sharing (KS) practices by the professionals from different sectors in Bangladesh. This study employs the quantitative approach and a survey method. The findings show that the professionals held positive perceptions about KS practices and most of them believe that KS practices can enhance their professional efficiency. While most professionals found ICTs useful for KS, they faced technological problems in addition to communication and social problems in sharing knowledge.

Keywords: Knowledge management; Knowledge sharing; Professionals; Bangladesh

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1. Background and objectives

Knowledge Management (KM) has emerged as a current ‘hot issue’ for many organizations (Kim, 1999). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) considered KM as the capability

of an organization to create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organization, and embody it in products, services and systems. But the challenge of KM is how to generate and leverage collective knowledge in the firm to create the value that leads to competitive advantage (Zhang, 2007). Many organizations have realized the advantages and benefits of sharing information and knowledge within the organization (Goh & Hooper, 2009). In addition, library and information science (LIS) professionals, working as knowledge professionals, users, and technology experts, were found to contribute to effective KM (Kim, 1999). Knowledge sharing (KS) is an important part of the KM system of an organization (Abdel-Rahman & Ayman, 2011). Recently, organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of KS to survive and remain competitive (Yusof, Ismail, Ahmad, & Yusof, 2012) as KS creates opportunities to maximize the organization's ability to build competitive advantage (Reid, 2003).

As a result, numerous studies on KS have emerged. For instance, Cheng, Ho, and Lau (2009) examined KS behavior among academics in a private university in Malaysia. Babalhavaeji and Kermani (2011) determined the factors that influenced KS amongst LIS faculties, which referred to attitude, intention and intrinsic motivation. Islam, Kunifuji, Hayama, and Miura (2013) explored KS practices of doctoral students in Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology to enhance research skills. Azuddin, Ismail, and Taherali (2009) conducted a study on knowledge sharing among workers, through informal communication outside their organizations. Chong and Besharati (2014) explored the knowledge sharing barriers in the petrochemical companies in a Middle East country. But there are few studies that reported the KS practices amongst different professionals of a developing country. This study has made an attempt to address the gap by exploring the present status of KS practices among professionals from different sectors in Bangladesh.

The objectives of the study include the following:

- 1) To identify the environment of KS practices in which the professionals are sharing knowledge with each other
- 2) To explore the behaviour patterns of the professionals in KS practices
- 3) To examine the use of ICTs for KS practices by the selected professionals in Bangladesh

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 presents research methodology; Section 4 analyses the data and presents findings; Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Literature review

2.1. Knowledge and knowledge management

Knowledge can be defined as a combination of experience; values, contextual information and expert insight that help evaluate and incorporate new experience and information (Gammelgaard & Ritter, 2000). Knowledge is human understanding of a specialized field of interest that has been acquired through study and experience (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004). Stewart (2000) mentioned that knowledge is a conclusion drawn from data and information. Abell and Oxbrow (2001) defined KM as the creation and subsequent management of an environment which encourages knowledge to be created, shared, learnt, enhanced, organized for the benefit of the organization and its customers.

Abdullah, Selamat, Sahibudin, and Alias (2005) mentioned KM as a phrase that is used to describe the creation of knowledge repositories, improvement of knowledge access and sharing, as well as communication through collaboration, enhancing the knowledge environment and managing knowledge as an asset for an organization. KM has defined as the set of processes that create, organize, share, and apply knowledge to optimize the attainment of university missions and goals (Geng, Townley, Huang, & Zhang, 2005). KM links four critical constructs: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory (Cram & Sayers, 2001, p.4). Chourides, Longbottom, and Murphy (2003) identified some critical factors for successful KM implementation in five organizational functional areas: strategy, human resource management, IT, quality and marketing.

2.2. Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing is interrelated with KM. Therefore, KS practice is inspired by KM. If knowledge is power, shared knowledge is real power (Jayalakshmi, 2006). KS is believed to be one of the most important processes for KM (Bock & Kim, 2002; Lahti & Beyerlein, 2000). KS is the process organized through various modes of communication which distribute knowledge to members in the best time, place and form (Zhang, Liu, & Xiao, 2008). Activities of KS of organizations may be on organization level or individual level. The goal of KS can either be to create new knowledge by differently combining existing knowledge or to become better at exploiting existing knowledge (Christensen, 2007). KS of both levels is critical to the success or failure of KM inside and outside of organizations (Cheng, 2009). Explicit and tacit knowledge may affect KS practices. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) stated that the quality of the knowledge to be transferred/learned (tacit versus explicit) affects knowledge sharing. There are some factors which may also affect KS. Bock, Zmud, Kim, and Lee (2005) identified three factors influencing individuals' attitudes toward KS: First one is expected reward, which refers to how one can have extrinsic incentives due to one's knowledge sharing behaviour. Second, expected association refers to how one can improve mutual relationship through KS. The third factor is expected contributions, which refer to the belief of improving organizational performance through KS (Ho & Kuo, 2013). It is not an easy task of sharing knowledge in organizations. People are not likely to share knowledge without strong personal motivation (Stenmark, 2001). For successful KS employee should share knowledge eagerly. KS requires a willingness to collaborate with others within an organization (Assudani, 2005; Zboralski, 2009).

2.3. Relationship between KS and ICTs

The relevance between KS and ICT is recognized by different scholars in their research studies. Information technology (IT) can facilitate collaborative work and enable the knowledge transfer process (Chung, 2001). Hendriks (1999) stated that ICT can enhance KS by lowering temporal and spatial barriers between knowledge workers and improving access to information about knowledge. IT facilitates rapid collection, storage and exchange of knowledge in a scale not possible up to recent times, thus fully supporting the knowledge sharing process (Roberts, 2000). Proper use of IT and/or ICT help(s) KS a lot. Effective use of IT results in quick access and exchange of knowledge, and technology plays an essential part in knowledge sharing (Nishimoto & Matsuda, 2007). ICTs are blessing for KS practices. The use of ICTs makes KS more efficient, faster and more convenient (Ruikar, Anumba, & Egbu, 2007).

3. Research methodology

The study employs the quantitative approach and a survey method. The survey was conducted using a short and pre-structured questionnaire. We selected 50 professionals from different professions in urban areas of Bangladesh using the systematic random sampling, 40 responses were received for a response rate 80%, including Nine journalists, Twelve library professionals, Eight bank professionals, Seven corporate executives, and Four IT professionals. The respondents answered the open-ended question using 'yes' or 'no'. The responses to close-ended questions on 7-point Likert scale (from 1 representing strongly disagree to 7 representing strongly agree) were analyzed using the descriptive analysis techniques.

4. Data analysis and findings

The following data analysis will reflect the respondents' profiles, justification of suitable environment for KS, frequency of KS, types of knowledge they share, problems in KS, exploring the capability for KS, the use of ICT for sharing knowledge. In addition, this section will examine the respondent perceptions in terms of willingness, enjoyment, and use of ICTs for KS practices.

4.1. Profile of the respondents

Among the 40 respondents 65% of the respondents were male, and 35% were female. Fig. 1 shows that the respondents include Library Professionals (30%), Journalist (22%), Bank Professionals (20%), Corporate Executives (18%), and IT Professionals (10%).

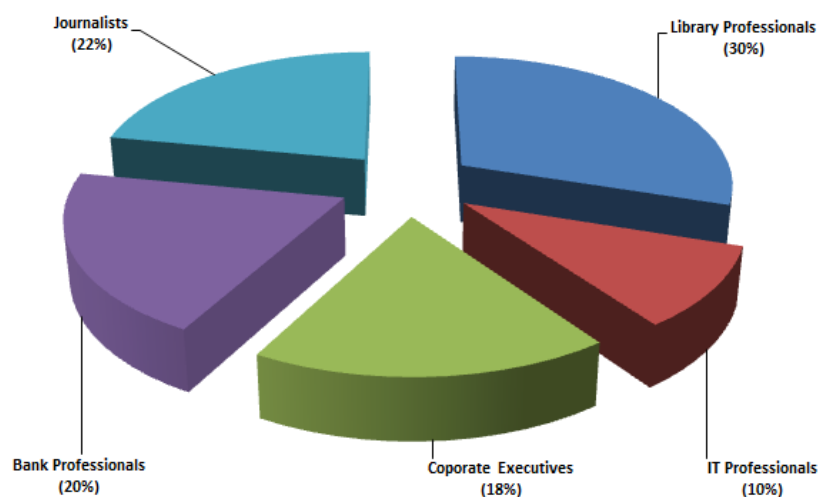


Fig. 1. Distribution of the respondent professions

Fig. 2 indicates that 15% of the respondents have a Master degree in ICT; 2% have an Undergraduate degree in ICT; 48% have received a certificate in ICT; and 35% don't have any ICT skills.

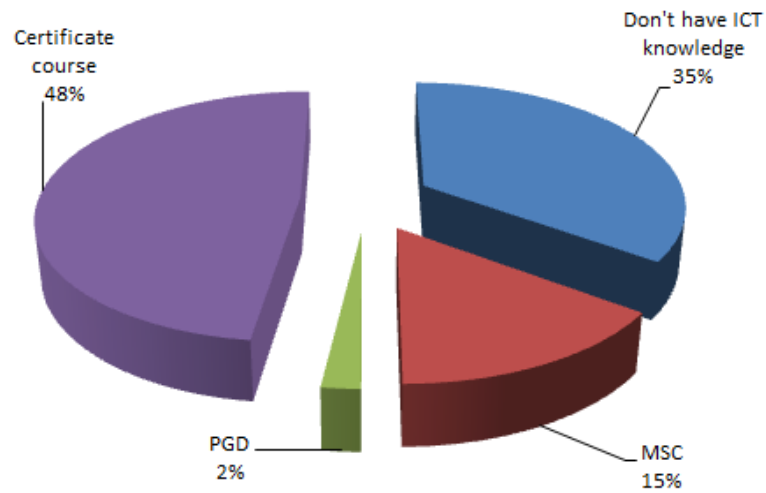


Fig. 2. ICT skills of the respondents

4.2. Environment for KS

Interpersonal trust or trust between co-workers is an extremely essential attribute in organizational culture, which is believed to have a strong influence over KS. Interpersonal trust is known as an individual or a group's expectancy in the reliability of the promise or actions of other individuals or groups (Politis, 2003). The result indicates that 97% of the respondents have suitable environment for KS in their organization, while only 3% of the respondents don't have suitable environment for KS in their organization.

4.3. Behaviour pattern in KS practice

Frequency of KS

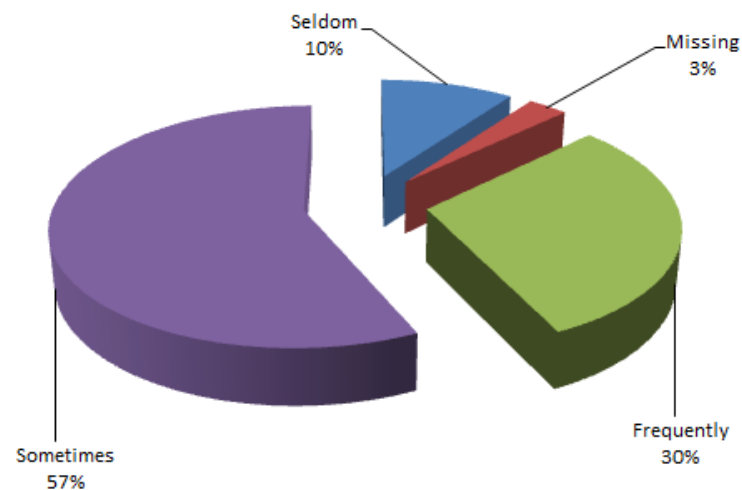


Fig. 3. Frequency of KS in respondent's organization

Fig. 3 illustrates that 57% of the respondents share knowledge sometimes in their organization, and 30% share knowledge frequently in their organization. It also shows that 10% of the respondents seldom share knowledge in their organization and only 3% don't have any KS practices in their organization.

Types of knowledge shared

The result shows that 50% of the respondents share explicit knowledge, while other 50% of them share tacit knowledge in their organization.

Problems in KS practices

Fig. 4 indicates that 58% of the respondents don't face any problem, while sharing knowledge; 27% face technological problem and 15% face communication problem in sharing knowledge.

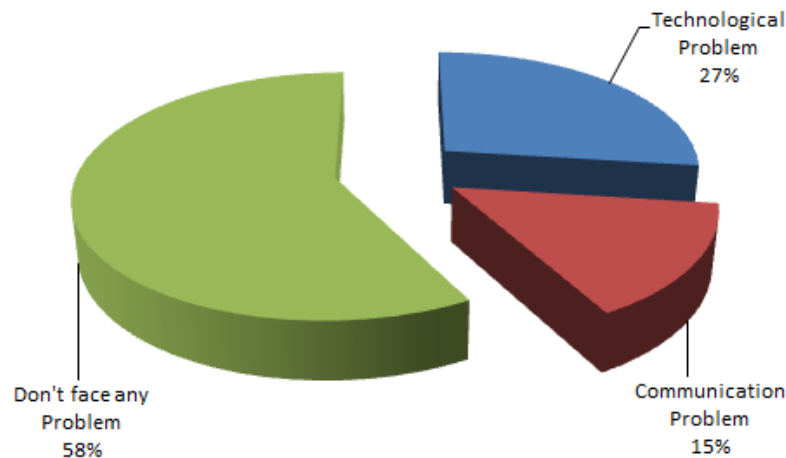


Fig. 4. Problems in sharing knowledge

Capacity for KS

The result shows that 97% of the respondents assume that they have the capacity for sharing knowledge, while only 3% express that they don't have any capacity for sharing knowledge.

Reasons for KS

At the organizational level, the organizational climate, culture, structure, procedures, and resources are among the cited factors as determinants of knowledge transfer in education (Alexander, 2000; Ben-Peretz, 1994; Bickel & Cooley, 1985; Huberman, 1990). The result shows that 90% of the respondents were confident that they have enough academic qualification for KS practices; 75% thought that they have enough professional skill to share knowledge; 70% expressed that they have good communication skill to share knowledge; 50% claimed that they have information literacy for sharing knowledge; 37.5% told that they have clear idea about KS practices, and 32.5% expressed that they have excellent IT knowledge for KS practices.

Reward types for KS practices

Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland (2004) argued that KS prospers with structures that support ease of information flow with fewer boundaries between divisions. Fig. 5 indicates that 40% of the respondents got motivation for KS practices in their organization; 25% got recognition for KS practices from their organization; 25% didn't give any answer, and only 10% got promotion facility for sharing knowledge in their organization.

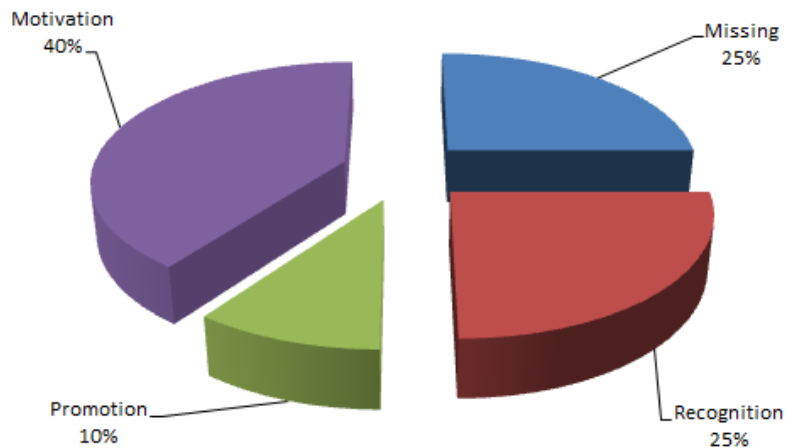


Fig. 5. Reward types for KS practices

KS for increasing professional efficiency

The result shows that 97% of the respondents believed that KS practices would increase their professional efficiency whereas only 3% don't believe that KS practices would increase their professional efficiency.

How KS practices increase professional efficiency

The result indicates that 87.5% of the respondents believed that KS practices enrich their professional skill; 70% were confident that KS practices enrich their communication skill; 67.5% claimed that KS practices improve their work efficiency; and 45% believed that KS practices improve their professional performance.

Use of ICTs for sharing knowledge

Human interaction is greatly enhanced by the existence of social networking and relevant tools in the workplace. This form of communication is fundamental in encouraging knowledge transfer (Smith & Rupp, 2002). The result shows that 82.5% of the respondents use e-mail for sharing knowledge; 55% use website for KS; 50% use social networking tools (like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) for sharing knowledge; 25% use mobile for sharing knowledge; and only 15% use blog for KS.

Willingness to share knowledge

Knowledge sharing practices are affected by people's willingness to share knowledge (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Shin, Ramayah, & Jahani, 2008). This study explored

the respondents' perceptions about the willingness to share knowledge, as summarized in Table 1 using 7-point Likert Scales.

Table 1
Perceived willingness to share knowledge

Willingness to share knowledge	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Share my professional skills with my colleagues	40	3.07	7.00	6.17	.95
Discuss my professional ideas with others	40	4.00	7.00	5.65	.94
Share professionals knowledge with others	40	5.00	7.00	5.85	.86
Colleagues also share their skills	40	1.00	7.00	5.37	1.05
Colleagues also share their professional knowledge	40	1.00	7.00	5.35	1.14

The result indicates that respondents are willing to share knowledge and skills with others, while they also receive the sharing of knowledge and skills from others.

Perceived enjoyment of KS practices

This study explored the respondent perceptions about the enjoyment of KS practices. As shown in Table 2, the respondents have a positive perception about enjoyment in KS practice; they also feel that sharing knowledge with others is necessary and good practice.

Table 2
Perceived enjoyment of KS practices

Enjoyment of KS practices	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I enjoy sharing knowledge with colleagues	40	4.00	7.00	5.60	.90
Sharing my knowledge with others is necessary	40	3.00	7.00	5.55	1.01
Sharing knowledge with other organizational members is unnecessary	40	1.00	6.00	3.05	1.25
Sharing knowledge with colleagues is a good experience	40	3.00	7.00	5.30	1.01
Sharing knowledge with my colleagues is a wise move	40	4.00	7.00	5.45	.95

4.4. Use of ICTs in KS practice

Perceptions of using ICTs for KS practices

The rapidly growing use of ICTs in academia is changing the way in which knowledge is created, organized, stored, managed, and disseminated. This study examined the professionals' perceptions of using ICTs for KS practices.

Table 3

Perceptions of using ICTs for KS practices

Using ICTs for KS practices	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Easy access to ICTs for KS	40	3.00	7.00	5.42	1.12
Easy to use ICTs to share knowledge	40	4.00	7.00	5.70	.96
ICTs for sharing knowledge are reliable	40	3.00	7.00	5.62	.95
Satisfied of the Overall quality of ICTs for sharing knowledge	40	4.00	7.00	5.50	.93
Hesitate to use ICTs to avoid making mistakes.	40	1.00	6.00	3.07	1.16

A main reason for ICT implementation in organizations is KS as in modern economies knowledge is considered to be a factor of outstanding strategic importance for organizational development (Huysman & De Wit, 2000; Malhotra, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senge, 1992). Table 3 shows that the respondents can easily access ICTs for sharing knowledge and they find ICTs easy to use. Moreover, the respondents reflect that the ICTs are reliable. They feel satisfied with the tools, and have no hesitation to use them.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to explore the present status of KS practices among the selected professionals in Bangladesh. The findings indicate that most of the professionals reported, they have got the suitable environment of KS practices, and they have positive attitude for sharing knowledge. Also they are willing to engage in KS practices. It was found that most of the respondents use ICT for sharing knowledge and they find ICT tools reliable. The professionals also satisfied with the quality of ICT tools and technologies. Simultaneously, the professionals faced technological problems, communication problems and social problems in sharing knowledge. But KS practices increase professional efficiency that can be helpful for resolving the existing problems of KS in the organizations. Therefore, the institutions and the organizations could develop a KS policy for the overall development of their professional staff, and could easily make strategies to overcome the problems of sharing knowledge in their organizations. After all, the results of this study offered a scenario of KS practices among selected professionals in Bangladesh through using different ICT tools and technologies. Hence, other developing countries could introduce KS practices acquiring knowledge from this research.

This study has some limitations as well. It could not cover all professionals and the whole regions of Bangladesh due to time constraints. It included only the urban areas

of Bangladesh. Therefore, this study provides a direction that further research could be conducted to address these limitations.

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