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CHALLENGE IN SHARING TACIT KNOWLEDGE: ACADEMICIANS' BEHAVIOR TOWARDS DEVELOPING A WEB PORTAL FOR SHARING RESEARCH IDEAS

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Abstract

Academics' collective memories soft information, such as research ideas, expertise, experiences, academic skills, know-what, know-how and know-why which inevitably it is considered should be made accessible. The Higher Education Institution needs to identify, collect, classify, verbalize and diffuse the academics' soft information specifically research ideas present in the university for knowledge enrichment. This can be implemented by the academics actively sharing their research ideas with others. Actively sharing research ideas by academics will have great impact on the enrichment of their intellectual capability as most of the valuable knowledge resides in one's brain. However, as there is no specific medium to bring their research ideas into the surface and be visible to others, the precious research ideas still remain in the academics' brains. Therefore, the objective of the study is to explore academics' behavior toward the development of a sharing research ideas web portal at private university colleges in Malaysia. This study used the qualitative method that is a multiple cases study. The study refers to four private university colleges in Malaysia. In-depth interview, focus group discussion and document analysis were formed the data collection for this study. The theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991) was used to determine academics' behavior. This study showed that the academics' attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control towards developing a web portal for sharing research ideas all affect their intention to share their research ideas with others.

Keywords: Academician, Sharing Research Idea, Attitude, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioral Control, Intention

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, in line with globalization changes in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), the role of private universities has been scrutinized and challenged by society. To face the challenges, the academicians in the private universities should actively undertake research as part of their job function to share the latest developments, insights and expertise with society and produce high quality findings which will serve as motivation for learning and commercialization. Hence, research is the road to discovery with a proven worldwide acceptance that research contributes positively to society economically. Generally, research process starts with developing knowledge which resides in the minds of the academicians. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), this type of knowledge is known as tacit knowledge that is knowledge which is rooted in action, experience and involvement in a specific context. Tacit knowledge is comprised of cognitive and technical elements. Nevertheless, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) acknowledged that tacit knowledge is almost impossible to be shared without the active participation and cooperation of the knower. As noted, it is commonly known that one of the platforms that enable the knower to share ideas is through information communication technology such as the web portal. Hence, the academicians need specific web portal to capture knowledgeable research ideas and share their research ideas with interested parties, and next, help them to implement research works efficiently and commercialize their research findings successfully.

2. Web Portal and Higher Education Institution

A web portal is an online tool to aggregate information in one location in an organized manner for dissemination. The most recent application of portals in HEI has been to create a point of access for administrative functions for students, such as registration, financial aid, and academic records, or for staff, such as time sheets, leave balances. Therefore, the use of portals maximizes the efficient use of staff and students' time (Rajalakshmi *et al.* 2010). Today's portals are increasingly secured applications designated to give users simple, quick, secure access to relevant organizations and personal data. The portal is a place for HEI's members with common interest on any matters to meet and chat virtually. It is a source of information and knowledge to be shared among the HEI members. The portal through its functions allows the HEI members to share ideas and information and helps them to get to know each other. As a collaboration tool, the portal helps HEI in promoting activities for mutual benefits.

3. Knowledge Sharing and Higher Education Institution

Knowledge sharing is considered as the foundation of learning and research at HEIs. In the context of higher education, Ali (2010) defines knowledge sharing as the process of exchanging and acquiring knowledge that is needed through informal and formal technical facilities channels. Scholars and practitioners have emphatically argued that a large part of knowledge in organizations is tacit. Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge essentially resides in the minds of the knower. Thus, it has been determined that knowledge sharing becomes a major focus area in knowledge management as knowledge sharing serves as a link between the strata of individual knowledge, where the knowledge resides and the strata of the organization where knowledge generates its economic and competitive gains. However, the study in 2005 which involved all the 17 public universities in Malaysia found that the existence of a knowledge sharing culture in Malaysian public HEIs was still very low. Only 29.4% of the staff of Malaysian public HEIs has positive culture in their routine work. The study implies that as academicians show a positive attitude and tremendous feeling of enjoyment in their working environment, their self-efficacy and knowledge sharing levels improve.

4. Theory of Planned Behavior and Knowledge Sharing

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a widely accepted model and is used in finding factors influencing behavior as this theory is a general model of behavior specific that can predict a range of behavior. TPB assumes that individuals' behavior is determined by behavioral intention and perceived behavioral control. Attitude toward behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control determine the behavioral intention. TPB proposed by Ajzen (1991), explained that behavioral intentions are motivational factors that show to what extent people are prepared to perform a behavior. Attitude has been regarded as influencing behavioral intention. Bock, Kim and Lee (Bock *et. al.* 2005) found that an individual's intention to share knowledge is driven primarily by attitude towards knowledge sharing. Subjective norm indicates that behavior is directed by one's desire to act as an important referent to how others act or think one ought to act. When applied to the focal behavior, subjective norm echoes the participant's perceptions of whether the behavior is accepted, encouraged, and implemented by the participant's spheres of influence. Subjective norm is also considered as an outcome of beliefs that specific individual's approve or disapprove of performing the behavior. Perceived behavioral control factors are individual natural factors and include the extent of information a person has, together with the skills, abilities, emotions, and needs of that person regarding a specific behavior. It concerns the degree to which an individual thinks that performance or nonperformance of the behavior in question is under his or her free control.

5. Problem Statement

The research ideas of private university academicians' are important in producing a knowledge society and helping Malaysia to become knowledge based economy country. However, some of the precious research ideas remain in the academicians' brains as there is no specific web portal to bring their research ideas into the open to be visible to others. At present, available web portals are becoming an increasingly important tool to help private university colleges to gather intellectual resources. Nevertheless, there is no specific web portal for the academicians to capture and share their research ideas with interested parties and next, help them to implement and commercialize their research findings efficiently. In addition, currently, there is no specific web portal that enables the management of private university colleges to identify what is required by academicians to carry out research works and to offer appropriate rewards or incentives as appreciation for the research ideas most contributed and the research ideas most referred to.

6. Research Question and Research Objective

The research question of the study is: What is the behavior of private university college academicians' towards developing web portal for sharing research ideas?

The research objective is to investigate the behavior of private university college academicians' towards developing a web portal for sharing research ideas.

7. Study's Significances

The study's findings enable the private university colleges in Malaysia to:

- Indicate the academicians' behavior toward developing a web portal for sharing research ideas.
- Justify developing the web portal for sharing research ideas as a robust virtual platform for the motivated academicians or other interested parties to acquire and share the research ideas that resides in one's brain.

- Clarify that the web portal is a platform for the academicians who lack experience in researching works to acquire knowledgeable research ideas from other experience parties and then implement their research works.
- Justify that web portal is a platform for the private university colleges' management to identify the research instruments required by the academicians and other interested parties.
- Justify that the web portal is a platform for the management of private university colleges to appreciate the research ideas most contributed and most referred to.
- Determine that the web portal for sharing research idea is an aid to private University colleges' management to improve their reputation and enhance the productivity through producing high quality research.

8. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. The study's conceptual framework explains that the academicians' attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control influenced their intention to use the web portal for sharing research ideas. Next, the intention either to use or not to use the developing web portal for sharing research ideas will affect the academicians' actual behavior towards the web portal for sharing research ideas by private university colleges' management.

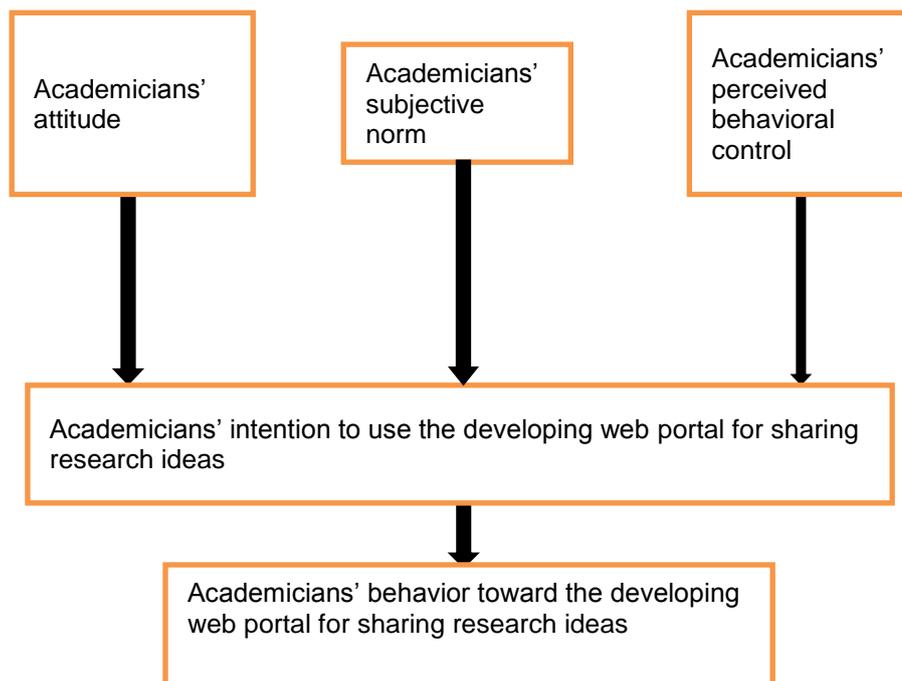


Figure 1. The study's conceptual framework

9. Developing the Web Portal for Sharing Research Ideas

This section describes the development of the web portal for sharing research ideas.. Specifically, the functions of developing a web portal for sharing research ideas is to help academicians or other interested people to share and determine the research ideas needed and to transform those ideas into a web-based knowledge bank. This makes the research ideas available to interested people at the right time, connects people and builds relationships across various educational or other interested institutions. Next, the sharing research ideas process through the application of the sharing research ideas web portal enables the academicians or

other interested parties to implement their research works efficiently. Apart from that, through developing the sharing research ideas web portal, the university management is able to determine the requirements of academicians or other people relating to research works or commercialization. It also functions as a motivational tool by identifying appropriate rewards or attractive incentives to the contributors of the most research ideas and the most research ideas referred to. Figure 2 shows the entity relationship for the developing the sharing research ideas web portal.

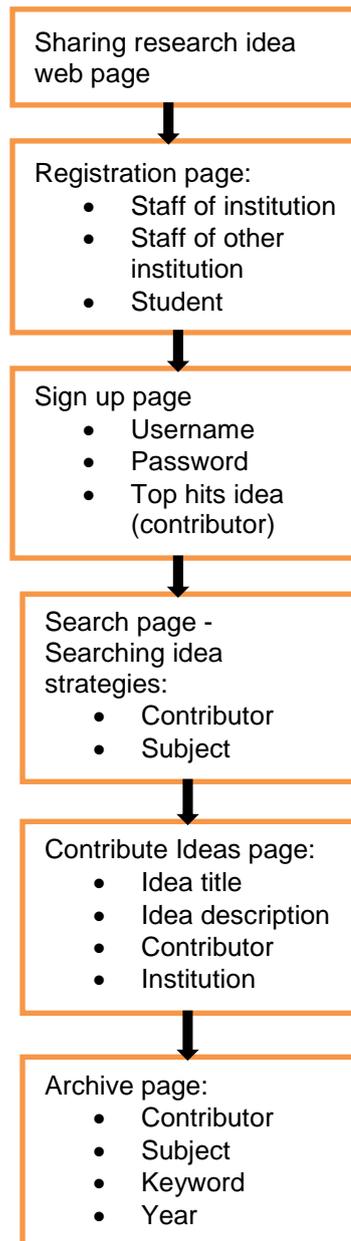


Figure 2. Entity relationship for the sharing research ideas web portal

10. Research Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives mentioned above, this study used a qualitative research method. This method focuses on understanding the point of view, experience and interpretation of the private university colleges' academicians. Hence, in this study, the qualitative research design used is multiple cases study. In this study, it refers to four main cases (four private university colleges in Malaysia) where it is a valuable and useful in the exploratory and descriptive and early stages of research regarding academicians' behavior toward developing a sharing research ideas web portal. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis were the data collection for this study. Based on the case study methodology of the research adapted from Yin (1994), the initial step in the study involved the development of a conceptual framework on the influence of academicians' behavior on the developing sharing research idea web portal. This step was then followed by the selection of the pilot case study and four main case studies (the data collection sites) and the design of the data collection protocol. Following the case selection and data collection steps, the individual case reports were developed. A cross-case analysis of the findings was then undertaken. This analysis provided the basis for the discussions and implications presented in the final section of the article. Figure 3 shows the case study methodology of this study adapted from Yin (1994).

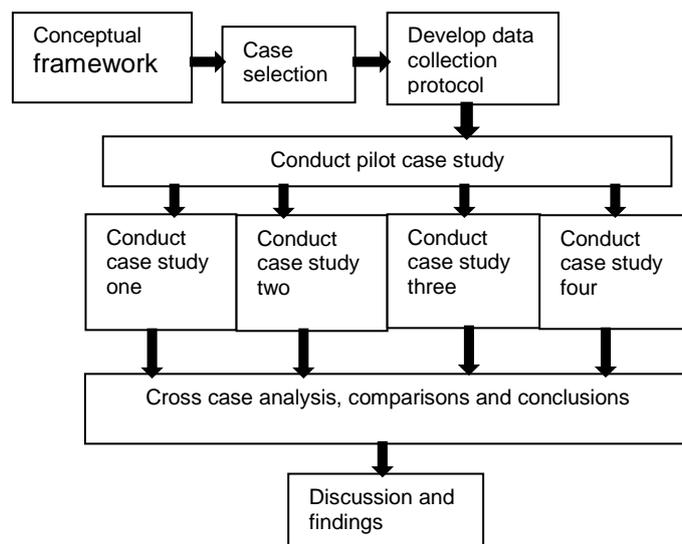


Figure 3. The case study methodology adapted from Yin (1994)

11. Research Design

The research design started with a literature review which discusses the literature from numerous sources in order to exhibit an in-depth knowledge of the research problem. A well-defined research problem is required before the researcher can commence the process of research design and subsequent data collection (Yin, 1994). After reviewing previous literature, research problems of this study were obtained. The development of the conceptual framework is derived from the literature review discussion and research objective. Next questions for in-depth and focus group interviews were developed. The constructs in in-depth and focus group interview related to academicians' behavior were based on the Theory of Planned Behavior model by Ajzen (1991). Next, the sample design was developed. Both samples for the pilot interview and main case study interview consist of academicians from four private university colleges in Malaysia. The sample of academicians for this study was selected by using purposive sampling and chosen by the four private university colleges' management. In this

study the samples of the main case study consist of forty four academicians. They are from social science and science faculties, the length of working experience as academicians is more than one year, they hold a Master Degree or PhD degree and they had designations as head of program and senior academician. The in-depth interview consists of twenty academicians and the focus group consists of four groups of academicians with six academicians per group. Next, five pilot interviews were conducted to improve the data collection processes before the main case studies commenced. This phase represents the final preparation for data collection which is used more formatively to assist the researcher to develop relevant lines of questioning as well as provide some conceptual clarification for the research design. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the private university colleges' management. After obtaining approval, the requested lists of academicians were taken from the private university colleges' management. Then, the researcher send a letter to each of the academicians selected to inform them about the research and the date that the interview would take place. Each letter clearly explained the objective of the study. In addition, the academicians were informed about the importance of the interview, the confidentiality of their responses and that the data would only be utilized for the purpose of the study. Once the interviews had been conducted, recorded and transcribed, the information was analyzed and interpreted in order to produce the findings. Findings were inducted from the data.

12. Data Analysis

In this study, the information gathered from in-depth interview and focus group interviews was recorded into audiotape and converted into text data. Then, the researcher carried out the transcription process and coding. In analyzing the transcripts of textual data from the in-depth interview and focus groups, the four attributes in TPB that is attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and intention were used as umbrella categories for the coding of data. They provided a useful sorting device for sub themes relevant to these four TPB attributes.

After completing the transcription process, the researcher performed the coding process which aims to derive meaning out of the text data, by dividing it into text and labeling the segments with codes. The coding process also serves to avoid overlap and redundancy. The researcher needed to compile the list of themes, cluster similar topics together, create categories and subcategories. An iterative, inductive process was used in the coding and analysis of data. Thereafter, in-depth interviews and focus groups interviews, transcribed from audiotape were thematically coded by content analysis, using a coding system devised by the researcher.

In order to manage the data efficiently, the researcher used the qualitative data analysis software tool NVivo9. NVivo9 is a computer program which allows one to import and code textual data, edit the text; retrieve, review and recode coded data; search for combinations of words in the text or pattern in the coding and import from or export data to other quantitative analysis software. Specifically, NVivo9 is designed to facilitate the construction of relational networks identifying the content and structure of respondents' opinions. NVivo9 involves the development of a tree-like structure of relationships between elements referred to as nodes.

13. Study's Findings

13.1. Academicians' Attitude

All the academicians from four private university colleges in Malaysia supported the development of a web portal for sharing research ideas. They admitted that the sharing research idea web portal would help them to identify required information and knowledge to complete their research process. The academicians said that through the sharing research ideas web portal, they would be able to build up teamwork and relationships with people interested in their research works and in addition, help them in the commercialization process. At the same time, the academicians agreed that developing the sharing research idea web

portal is the appropriate platform for them to communicate with others regarding research matters.

13.2. Academicians' Subjective Norm

The people around academicians, specifically their superiors, colleagues and friends encourage them to use the sharing research ideas web portal. According to those people, the sharing research ideas web portal will help to produce innovative and creative academic entrepreneurs in future. This is evident from the encouragement given by the university management through rewarding active and innovative research ideas contributors. These people admitted that when the academicians actively commercialize their findings, indirectly, the university achieves a good reputation and gathers better profit.

13.3. Academicians' Perceived Behavioral Control

As known, the academicians justified that the sharing research ideas web portal gives benefit to their research works. Therefore, they admitted that the application of developing the sharing research ideas web portal enables them to enhance their skill, knowledge and experience.

13.4. Academicians' Intention

The academicians' attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control towards developing the sharing research idea webs portal are encouraging, thus, all of them have the intention of using the sharing research ideas web portal.

13.5. Academicians' Behavior

As all of the academicians have the intention of using the sharing research idea web portal, their behavior is towards applying themselves to the development of the sharing research ideas web portal.

14. Conclusion

The private university colleges' academicians' behavior towards developing the sharing research idea web portal is encouraging. They identify that the functions of the sharing research ideas web portal will enable them to achieve their mission that is to produce high quality commercialize research findings. Apart from that, they clarify that through the sharing research ideas web portal, they are also able to collaborate with relevant parties and build up relationships with other people who are actively and interested in the research works. As for recommendation, in future, the private university colleges in Malaysia should establish the knowledge sharing center and equip it with the appropriate and efficient information communication technology which supports communication via technology. Efficient communication technological facilities will encourage the academicians to share their research ideas through technology. In addition, the private university colleges' management should upgrade the sharing research idea web portal to be accessible to other institutions abroad.

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