Knowledge Sharing Barriers in Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions (HEIS)

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the barriers for sharing knowledge effectiveness in Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEIs). Data were analyzed and triangulated from interviews, and focus groups from different universities and from government and university websites. Three significant factors were identified: bureaucratic management causing a lack of autonomy in decision-making, poor knowledge management systems, and weak individual absorptive capacity. The results demonstrate these three factors as a significant influence on academic staff to share absorb and create new knowledge measured by journal publication output, and graduate quality. The research findings provide insights on the Vietnamese higher education landscape in the transition from a centralized economy to a market economy.

KEYWORDS
Autonomy, Decision-Making, Higher Education Institutions, Individual Absorptive Capacity

INTRODUCTION
Knowledge sharing and the management of that process is critically important for universities to sustain their competitive advantage (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Jones & Sallis, 2013; Rowley, 2000). Effective knowledge sharing helps universities improve trust between staff, and also to strengthen their research and teaching activities (Goh & Sandhu, 2013). Scholars have explored various aspects that can affect knowledge sharing in universities. Howell and Annansingh (2013) propose that institutional culture and path dependency are the key role in the willingness of sharing knowledge in institutions. In contrast, Cranfield and Taylor (2008) indicated that effective and efficient management and administration play important role in encouraging academic staff to share their knowledge. Management’s support, recognitions and rewards are also significant predictors for sharing knowledge and supporting innovation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Fidalgo-Blanco, Sein-Echaluce, & Garcia-Penalvo, 2014; Seonghee & Boryung, 2008; Sohail & Daud, 2009). Further, it has been found that technology especially social media and social networks have an increasing role in knowledge sharing effectiveness in HEIs (Brady, Holcomb, & Smith, 2010; Rachham & Firpo, 2011; Selwyn, 2012). However, there is limited rigorous research into factors that inhibit knowledge sharing effectiveness in HEIs in developing countries such as Vietnam, that measure current low levels of productivity (ILO, 2014) and very low output quantum of research publications (Worldbank, 2012).

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This paper investigates three previously unexplored factors that have critical impact on the knowledge sharing effectiveness in HEI’s in Vietnam that is a poor, developing country: bureaucratic management style, limited knowledge management systems, and individual absorptive capacity.

This research is of particular importance for developing countries as they emerge as active participants in the world economy, for both trade (Ali & Stancil, 2012) and as labor supply (Lowell & Findlay, 2001). It provides in-depth observation and analysis of the issues that HEIs in Vietnam face currently, and presents implications for that situation. Through this research, it is intended that learnings will inform and be a factor to enable remediation and the better development of Academe in developing countries. Further and importantly the outcomes of this research will help researchers from developed countries have a clearer understanding of their colleagues in developing countries.

This paper is organized as follows: the literature review presents relevant factors that influence knowledge sharing effectiveness. The following sections present both the qualitative research method and the research findings. The final sections discuss the findings and their implications for the effective development in this sector, draws conclusions from the research and comments on future research.

**BACKGROUND**

**Knowledge Sharing Effectiveness**

The prominent difference between HEIs in developing countries and HEIs in developed countries is level of autonomy and management (Thomson, 2008) specifically academic freedom (Zhou & Vaccaro, 2007). Additionally, unlike knowledge sharing in other sectors, knowledge in HEIs includes academic knowledge as both subject matter and new theoretical knowledge development, and organizational knowledge (Coukos-Semmel, 2003). Organizational knowledge, on other hand refers to the overall knowledge of a business or an institution, including its strengths and weaknesses, the market it serves, and the collaborative creativity critical to organizational success (Coukos-Semmel, 2003; Yeh, 2005).

Academic or scholarly knowledge development is the primary purpose of higher education. However, across the global academic sector groups and individuals closely guard their new knowledge from their peers until it has been published in peer-reviewed journals or presented at conferences. The development of new knowledge is an avenue of professional advancement and can therefore be a source of competition between colleagues (Carayol & Matt, 2006; Khalil & Shea, 2012). Hence, knowledge sharing for innovation in HEI’s is different to innovation drivers in other sectors.

Knowledge sharing effectiveness is difficult to measure due to many constraints and barriers (Casimir, Lee, & Loon, 2012; Riege, 2005; Cleveland & Ellis, 2015). Methods of measurement of success and effectiveness of knowledge sharing can vary considerably among organisations (Goldoni & Oliveira, 2010, Jennex, Smolnik, & Croasdell, 2014). Nonaka and Takeuchi, (1997) suggest knowledge sharing only is effective when new tacit knowledge is created through socialization, externalization, combination, and integration process. This new knowledge is available for testing and use by the organisation. Others argue that knowledge sharing effectiveness is measured based on the improvement of organisational behaviour and performance in the way that the organisation become more innovative and competitive (Yang, 2007; Zack, McKeen, & Singh, 2009). A set of metrics to quantify knowledge sharing, and thus knowledge sharing effectiveness can be evaluated easily (Bose, 2004; Ganguly, Mostashari, & Mansouri, 2012; Kankanhalli & Tan, 2004, 2005). Several basic metrics are commonly used: (1) the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) ; (2) Economic Value added; (3) the Skandia Navigator (Bose, 2004; Fairchild, 2002; Patton, 2007); (4) House of Quality (Hauser & Clausing, 1988); (5) American Productivity Centre (APQC) benchmarking approach (Kankanhalli & Tan, 2004; Rao, 2012); (6) Intellectual Capital Management Model (Buren, 1999; Edvinsson & Sullivan, 1996; Kok, 2007) and (7) the Knowledge Management Success Model (Jennex & Olfman, 2006).