

INTE 2014

# Knowledge management capability level assessment of the higher education institutions: Case study from Mongolia

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## Abstract

Main purpose of this study is to conduct an assessment of knowledge management (KM) capability and to determine the current position of the knowledge management maturity of one of the higher education institutions of Mongolia. This study utilizes the Kulkarni and Freeze's (2004) organizational knowledge capability areas and Knowledge Management Capability Assessment (KMCA) model for the assessment. The findings and context of this study indicates that, as a whole, the university's current knowledge management capability maturity falls on the Level 1 of the KM Maturity. The study shows that both organizational knowledge capability areas and KMCA model suggested by Kulkarni and Freeze (2004) are applicable to the higher education context.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Sakarya University

*Keywords:* Organizational knowledge areas; Knowledge Management; Knowledge Management Maturity; Knowledge Management Capability Assessment model; Higher education institutions.

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## 1. Introduction

As nowadays knowledge is considered as one of the key resource of production, a source of sustainable competitive advantage, value and wealth creation for organizations, scholars believe that it should be efficiently managed. Enkhbaigali (2004) defines knowledge management as “deliberate activities taken to handle organization's resources more efficiently in order to improve its performance.” Knowledge management helps companies to stimulate innovation, improve customer services, and achieve business excellence through the accumulation, improvement of availability and accessibility, and effective use of knowledge. Knowledge management is especially

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important to higher educational institutions in these hard times, when pressures and expectations of stakeholders such as government, foreign or local employers, and students are increasing.

If “higher education institutions are in the knowledge business since they are involved in knowledge creation, dissemination and learning” as stated Rowley (2000), they must be full of successful examples and best practices of advancing their learning and teaching, research and consultancy services by knowledge creation and application. However, in reality, there is a different picture, and higher education institutions are drawn fire for their poor education outcomes and quality from society. We believe that it is indicating that higher educational institutions are working more diligently on knowledge at the individual level, but not so diligently when it comes to the organizational level.

As organizational knowledge management is just emerging discipline, some educational researchers argue that applying it in education is a new concept and practice rather than routine discipline. Therefore, there are limited studies and discussions about how to use knowledge management strategically in education institutions and universities to improve organizational practice, curriculum implementation and the teaching and learning process (Fullan, 2001). The situation is just the same in Mongolian educational sector.

Higher education institutions always have to do their business with limited resources of financial and knowledgeable, experienced teachers. Researcher believes that in such internal and external constraints one of the best ways to provide “clients” or students with the lowest cost, but the best quality educational services and continuously improve training and research methods is improving of organizational knowledge management.

In order to improve knowledge management, the first of all, universities must understand what constitutes knowledge in other word what they should manage. Then they should evaluate the current situation of knowledge management and should be considered it a starting point. As Kulkarni & St. Louis (2003) highlighted “Assessment is the first step towards improvement; one can’t improve what one can’t measure – formally or informally”.

In this study, the researcher aim to assess the current knowledge sharing culture and knowledge management maturity level in various knowledge areas in higher education institutions for the first time and provide school administrators, teachers, and staff who are planning to improve or officially introduce knowledge management with the proper understanding and perception of where and what level expected to start up. In addition, to determine whether the assessment tool for this study selected by researcher is suitable for higher education institutions.

In this case study one of the top Mongolian universities has been selected. The university offers a choice of over 20 programs in business administration, business economics, finance, accounting and management information systems leading to a bachelor, master and PhD in. At the PhD program the course of innovation and knowledge management course is taught. The university and its bachelor and master programs are accredited by domestic and international education accreditation organizations. Teaching staff currently consists of 91 experienced full-time lecturers.

At the moment, although any knowledge management programs did not implemented yet officially at this university, some management and teaching staff recognize the importance of improvement or implementation of knowledge management.

## **2. Theoretical foundation**

Knowledge management theory has evolved on practical interest in managing the knowledge to the organization’s benefit rather than on universal understanding of knowledge (Alavi & Leidner, 2000) However, as Cook and Brown (1999) noted much “work on organizational knowledge, intellectual capital, knowledge-creating organizations, and knowledge work were based on a single, traditional understanding of the nature of knowledge” usually defined at the level of individual. Many researchers, including Cook and Brown (1999), highlighted that those traditional and common approaches to knowledge have created many challenges to management in their understanding, accepting and undertaking of organizational knowledge management.

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