



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSING KNOWLEDGE SHARING OBSTACLES ON ACADEMIC STAFFS IN ASSOSA UNIVERSITY ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The basic objective of this research was identifying and discussing the obstacles that affect knowledge sharing among Assosa university academic staffs. Descriptive survey research design method was used to achieve the objective of the study. The target population of the research was all Assosa university academic staffs including faculty deans. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the academic staffs and interviews were also used to collect data from the faculty deans. Data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to analyze quantitative data. The study attempted to assess the knowledge sharing mechanisms and practices of ASUAS, knowledge sharing obstacles ASUAS and the models of KS. The results or findings of the study showed that there were obstacles that prevent knowledge sharing among academic staffs; such as lack of ICT infrastructures, lack of knowledge storage mechanisms, The lack of trust among academic staffs, lack of incentives or rewards for those who share knowledge for others, Lack of interaction between those who need knowledge and those who can provide knowledge among ASUAS, physical layout of work areas (office arrangement of staffs) and ASUAS culture.

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INTRODUCTION

A key enabler of KM is KS (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Alavi and Leidner, 2001). Sharing knowledge, many organizations assert is crucial to exploiting core competencies and to achieve sustained competitive advantage (Argote and Ingram, 2000; Gold *et al.*, 2001). Prahalad and Hamel (1990) observe that organization's core competencies are located in the collective learning of the organization be it production, marketing or technological capabilities, that are inimitable by the competitors. To allow collective learning and to grow knowledge assets, an organization must develop an effective KS process and encourage its employees and partners to share knowledge about customers, competitors, markets, products and so forth (Bock and Kim, 2002). The process of sharing in the tacit form of knowledge as the "tacit-process" and second, the process of sharing in the explicit form as the "explicit-process." In organizations, when individuals need certain knowledge possessed by others, they may need the knowledge owners to share the knowledge. First, they have to identify and locate the knowledge owners, and then, they establish contact with the knowledge owners and hope that the knowledge owners are willing to share.

If the sharing is of the "explicit-process," individuals can ask for the documents regarding the knowledge if the sharer has documented or plans to document the specific knowledge. On the contrary, if the sharing is of the "tacit-process," individuals must interact with the sharer through face-to-face communication for learning the knowledge (Ping *et al.*, 2006). So in this study, we were tries to see that the ways of sharing both tacit and explicit knowledge in Assosa university academic staff.

Background of the Study

Knowledge by itself is not worthy unless it is shared with friends, staff and the community at large. Knowledge sharing (KS) is a process where the individual exchanges his/her knowledge and ideas through discussions or communication to create new knowledge or ideas. Organizations or institutions which implement KS properly become successful and competent enough in this world. As a result, many organizations are encouraging the KS behavior among their employees in order to meet the organization's objective and goals. Since knowledge is used as source of economy, Knowledge management (KM) is popular and plays an important role in an organization to improve its performance and gain competitive advantage (Abdullah *et al.*, 2005). KM is the process that governs the creation, dissemination and

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utilization of knowledge to fulfill organizational objectives. It also refers to a range of practices used by organizations to identify, create, represent, and distribute knowledge for reuse, awareness, and learning across the organizations (Adhikari, 2010). To manage, retain, reuse and share knowledge, appropriate KM implementation plays a great role. However, the implementation of KM in most of the organizations in Ethiopia is very meager. For this reason, every organizations or institutions should give value for the proper implementation of KM, so as to meet organizations objectives and goals. Hansen, Nohria and Tierney (1999) mention two KM strategies that are commonly used by successful organizations to share knowledge: codification and personalization. Codification strategy presumes that knowledge can be disconnected from its source and as such deals with the capture and storage of knowledge representations in electronic repositories/databases, independent of the individual that generated it. The electronic repositories/databases, which contains organizational knowledge facilitates, knowledge transfer among the organizational members. For example, at the end of a project, a team may create best practices or lessons learned document based on their experiences of the project and store it in the repository. As part of the repository, this best practices or lessons learned document can be accessed by other teams resulting in the dissemination of knowledge across the organization.

Statement of the Problem

Currently, many organizations are dealing with the concept of sharing and some believe that sharing what you have is important, but most individuals especially in developing countries like Ethiopia do not agree with this idea, because there is fear of losing their power position, incentive and respect if they allow their knowledge to be used by others (Wen, 2005). The problem of KS may also arise from the culture, infrastructure and management problems of organizations. Assosa University is an institution that needs KM implementation i.e. creating, sharing and utilization of knowledge, because knowledge world enable Assosa university to provide quality services for users. KS is the most important part of KM, but employees are not voluntary to share what is in their mind. Therefore, every time a new employee joins the organization, he/she may face difficulties to be familiar with the tasks that they are responsible for. Because most of the time there is no well documented knowledge of how activities are performed in the organization and also there is no well-organized KS culture and KS mechanism to inform the new employer. This also minimizes the performance of the organization or institution.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What obstacles prevent KS in ASU?
- What type KS model can be used by ASU academic staffs?

Objective of the Study

- To identify obstacles that prevent knowledge sharing in Assosa university

- To suggest a model of knowledge sharing mechanisms for Assosa university academic staff

Scope of the Study

The study was limited on ASUAS to investigate the factors that affect knowledge sharing; specifically to find out the obstacle that that prevent KS among academic staffs and give suggestions on models for knowledge sharing at ASU.

Significance of the Study

This studies would help to identify the obstacles that prevent affect KS among ASU academic staff. The study helped to design better KS mechanisms within the university, employees will benefit in acquiring knowledge of how things are done in the university.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in ASU; it is one of the nine newly established universities which were established in 2003 E.C. It is found in the regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz located in Assosa town in the western part of Ethiopia. The university is 2.5 km in the west with the North of Assosa Town.

Research design

For this study, descriptive research design was used through quantitative and qualitative research method in order to find out the awareness of academic staffs about the knowledge sharing and its benefits, to identify knowledge sharing mechanisms and practices among ASUAS, to identify the obstacles that prevent knowledge sharing in Assosa University.

Population of the Study

The study was conducted in Assosa University to identify and discuss the obstacles that prevent knowledge sharing among academic staffs. The study populations were all Assosa university academics staffs, around 300-400 ASUAS during the study was under taken; out of theses there were 96 ASUAS were participated for response of questionnaire and interview.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

To see KS among Assosa university academic staff, staff members were purposely selected to find out the awareness of KS, KS mechanisms, and the factors that affect KS among ASUAS. The researchers were taking the whole population in ASUAS who have any qualification in any field of study with any experience from the whole department.

Data Source and Data Type

The data was collected from ASUAS by interviewing; like faculty deans and others. Secondary data was collected from available reports, records, published and unpublished documents from the concerned offices mainly from the learning-teaching director office. Internet was also used to search research related works and documents required to this study.

Method of Data Collection

The data collection was conducted by the enumerator with the presence and supervision of the researcher. The questionnaire was made; pretested and necessary modifications were made before the actual data collection was takes place. The whole data collection procedure was closely supervised by the researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents include gender (sex), age, educational level, working experience, working department and their job familiarity. More than two hundred questionnaires were prepared and distributed but ninety six questionnaires were returned. Therefore, the analysis and interpretation were made on the basis of the frequency of responses given by those 96 respondents. The general demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown below.

Knowledge Sharing Obstacles of ASUAS

The main aim of this research was to identify the obstacles that prevent knowledge sharing between Assosa University academic staffs. Pinpointing the obstacle of experience/knowledge sharing is important for Assosa university academic staff in order to develop better method to perform their task effectively and efficiently to accomplish the mission of the university. The following statements were given to find out the idea of staffs regarding with obstacles of knowledge or experience sharing. Each statement was given value by ASUAS based on a five level Likert scale as a value of 1 was assigned to 'Strongly disagree', 2 'Disagree', 3 'Neutral', 4 'Agree', and 5 'Strongly agree'

Statement 1: There is shortage of time to share knowledge with colleagues of ASUAS

ASUAS respondents' point of agreement/disagreement toward this statement is abridged in the following table.

Table 1. Shortage of time to share knowledge with colleagues of ASUAS

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	28	29.2
Disagree	13	13.5
Neutral	22	22.9
Agree	20	20.8
Strongly agree	13	13.5
Total	96	100.0

Source: own survey

As shown in the above table 5, 13 (13.5%) of the ASUAS respondents chose strongly agree, 20 (20.8%) respondents chose agree on the statement one but 13 (1.5%) respondents chose disagree and 28 (29.2%) respondents chose strongly disagree and also 22 (22.9%) of the respondents had chosen to be neutral. Moreover, during observation or at the time of taking check lists from each department there is no enough office for staffs to perform their task, and also there is no any means which is ready for the worker to exchange their knowhow or experience each other.

Statement 2: There is lack of interaction between those who need knowledge and those who can provide knowledge among ASUAS

As exemplified in the following table 5, 26 (27.1%) of the ASUAS respondents were strongly agreed, 39 (40.6%) respondents were agreed on this statement and 17 (17.7%) of respondents were chosen neutral but the remaining 10 (10.4%) respondents were disagreed and 4 (4.2 %) respondents were strongly disagreed.

Table 2. Lack of interaction between those who need knowledge and those who can provide knowledge among ASUAS

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	4	10	17	39	26	96
Percentage	4.2	10.4	17.7	40.6	27.1	100.0

Source: own survey

Statement 3: lack of trust among colleagues of ASUAS

Trust is basic for each individual in their working environment to perform their task freely with in the institutions what they serve. Else there may be bug or glitch on their working activity. As shown in the following figure 1, 15 (15.6%) of ASUAS respondents were chosen strongly disagree, 12 (12.5%) respondents were chosen disagree on this statement and 32 (33.2%) of the respondents preferred neutral, but 24 (25%) of the respondents were chosen agree and also 13 (13.5%) respondents were chosen strongly agree. As academic professional there should be trust, but this study indicates that there is a barrier of reliance with each other. Therefore each department or working section should work on this to make their staff more confident and collaborative.

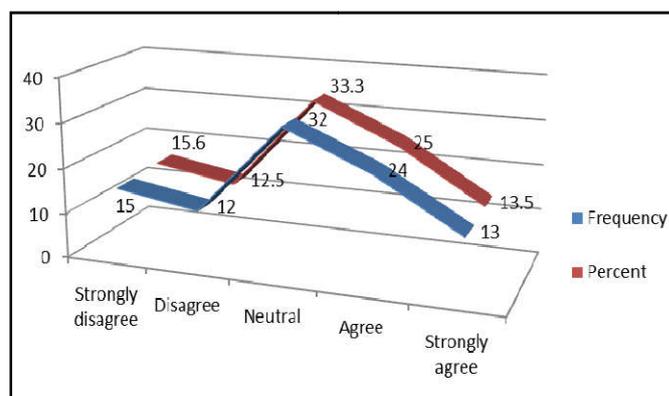


Figure 1. The lack of trust among colleagues of ASUAS

Statement 4: There are no incentives or rewards for knowledge sharing for ASUAS in the university

As shown on table 7 below 4 (4.2%) of ASUAS respondents had chosen strongly disagree and 11 (11.5%) respondents had chosen disagree on this statement but unpredictably 20 (20.8%) respondents were agreed and 38 (39.6%) respondents were strongly agreed and also the remaining 23 (24%) respondents had chosen to be neutral. Here most of the respondents are agreed on this statement, Therefore Assosa University medium and top managers should take this assignment and try to prepare reward like 'thank you' to create motivation for ASUAS.

Table 4. There are no incentives or rewards for knowledge sharing for ASUAS in the university

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	4	11	23	20	38	96
Percentage	4.2	11.5	24	20.8	39.6	100.0

Statement 5: Concern that sharing knowledge will reduce one’s own value, prestige or recognition in working environment

As shown on table 8 below 37 (38.5%) of ASUAS respondents strongly disagreed and 10 (10.4%) of respondents disagreed on this statement. Moreover, 14 (14.6%) of the respondents agreed and 10 (10.4%) of respondents strongly agreed and also 25 (26%) of the respondents were neutral. This indicates that there are ASUAS who consider about experience or knowledge is the key for them to increase their value, prestige or recognition instead of sharing for others. Therefore, each department should create awareness for those colleagues’ sharing what they know is increasing their value or prestige instead of reducing.

Table 5. Sharing knowledge will reduce one’s own value, prestige or recognition

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	10	25	14	10	96
Percentage	38.5	10.4	26	14.6	10.4	100.0

Source: own survey

Statement 6: Academic staffs do not share knowledge because of poor communication skill

As illustrated in figure 2, 21 (21.9%) of the ASUAS respondents strongly disagreed and 25 (26%) respondents disagreed on this statement but 11 (11.5%) respondents agreed and 17 (17.7%) strongly agreed and also the remaining 22 (22.9%) of respondents had chosen neutral.

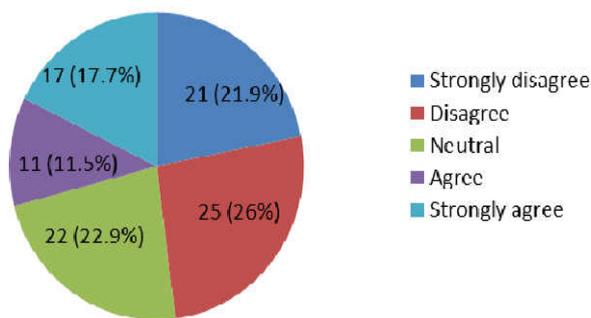


Figure 2. Academic staffs do not share knowledge because of poor communication skill

Statement 7: Lack of ICT infrastructures in the university to share knowledge

Information Communication and Technology (ICT) is one tool to share experience or knowledge among academic staffs in Assosa University. As shown in Figure 3, 37 (38.5%) of ASUAS respondents were strongly agreed and 28 (29.2%) respondents were agreed on this statement contrariwise 10 (10.4%) respondents disagreed and 7 (7.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed and also 27 (17.8%) of the respondents had

chosen neutral. This indicate that more than half of the respondents were agreed on this statement. Hence the university should solve it as soon as possible.

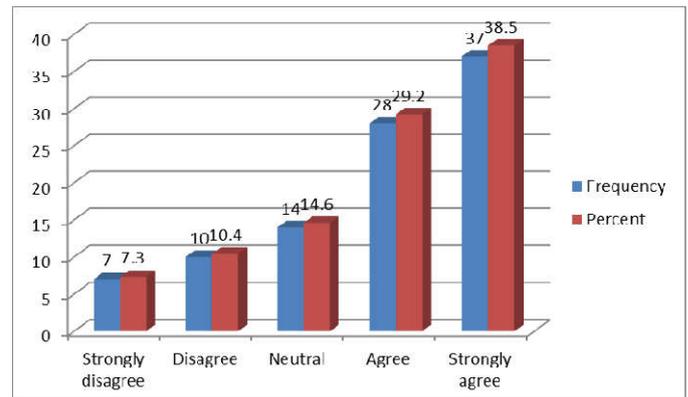


Figure 3. Lack of ICT infrastructures in the library to share knowledge

Statement 8: Internet is not user friendly and it is messy for ASUAS

As indicated on table 9, 14 (14.6%) of ASUAS respondents strongly disagreed and 16 (16.7%) of respondents disagreed on this statement, farther 24 (25%) respondents agreed and 22 (22.9%) respondents strongly agreed and also 20 (20.8%) respondents chose neutral. Here more of the respondents are familiar with internet but there also other ASUAS who are not familiar with internet, thus ASU should prepare training to increase their knowhow to use internet.

Table 9. Internet is not user friendly and it is messy

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	14	16	20	24	22	96
Percentage	14.6	16.7	20.8	25	22.9	100.0

Source: own survey

Statement 9: Physical layout of work areas in the university restrict effective knowledge sharing among ASUAS within each department

The office arrangement or physical layout of the department staff is important for each ASUAS to share experience or knowledge among colleagues. As shown in the table 10, 21 (21.9%) respondents strongly agreed and 39 (40.6%) respondents agreed on this statement while 10 (10.4%) respondents disagreed and 8 (8.3%) respondents strongly disagreed and also 18 (18.8%) respondents had chosen neutral. According to the ASUAS respondents response the office arrangement is not comfortable to share experience or knowledge among colleagues; therefore each department or faculty or top manager should take the task and prepare a method for this problem.

Table 10. Physical layout of work areas in the university restrict effective knowledge sharing among ASUAS within each department

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	8	10	18	39	21	96
Percentage	8.3	10.4	18.6	40.6	21.9	100.0

Source: own survey

Statement 10: Academic staffs do not share knowledge because they think knowledge is power for them

As illustrated in figure 4, 10 (10.4%) of the ASUAS respondents strongly agreed and 17 (17.7%) respondents agreed on this statement. On the other hand 21 (21.9%) respondents disagreed and 28 (29.2%) respondents strongly disagreed and also 20 (20.8%) respondents chosen neutral.

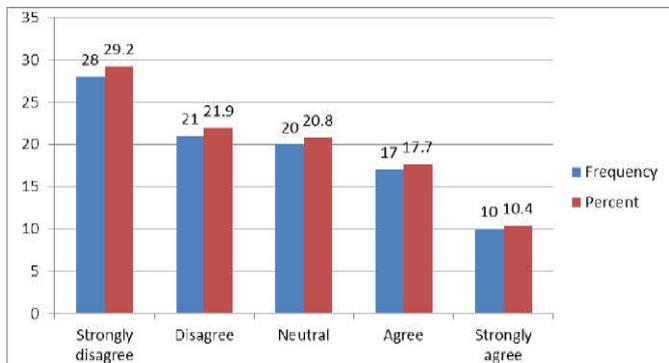


Figure 4. Academic staffs do not share knowledge because they think knowledge is power for them

Statement 11: Department heads encourage staffs to share knowledge with their colleagues

Academic unit heads or department heads should encourage experience or knowledge sharing between staffs to increase knowhow of these who are new for the academic unit or department and to develop the service of each academic unit or department for the satisfaction of the customers. As shown in table 11, 13 (13.5%) of the ASUAS respondents had chosen strongly disagree and 15 (15.6%) respondents had chosen disagree on this statement while 30 (31.3%) respondents agreed and 14 (14.6%) respondents strongly agreed and also 24 (25.0%) respondents were selected neutral. Here more than half of the respondents were agreed on this statement but it needs more attention and each department should make amendment on their plan about staff development.

Table 11. Department heads encourage staffs to share knowledge with their colleagues

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	13	15	24	30	14	96
Percentage	13.5	15.6	25.0	31.3	14.6	100.0

Source: own survey

Statement 12: The ASUAS culture does not provide sufficient support for knowledge sharing

Institutional culture or staff culture is considered as a set of rules, values, and beliefs that are shared by each academic staff. According to Alavi et al, 2005 in institutional or staff culture deals about ideologies, beliefs, basic assumptions of behavior, or shared values, although other more observable elements such as rules and organizational practices, symbols, language, rituals, myths, and ceremonies have also been included as being related to culture. As shown or summarized on table 12, 22 (22.9%) of respondents had chosen strongly agree and 28 (29.2%) respondents had chosen agree on this statement. Whereas 18 (18.8%) respondents had chosen disagree and 10 (10.4%) respondents had chosen strongly disagree and also 18 (18.8%) of respondents selected neutral.

Table 12. The ASUAS culture does not provide sufficient support for knowledge sharing

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	10	18	18	28	22	96
Percentage	10.4	18.8	18.8	29.2	22.9	100.0

To acquire further information on this the researchers sought information from faculty deans. Therefore, the following information is about the obstacles that prevent knowledge sharing gained from the faculty deans through interview. The obstacles raised by the faculty deans that prevent knowledge sharing among ASUAS are: lack of commitment, lack of incentive in terms of finance for reward, time constraint, lack of confidence, lack of materials, there is no sufficient internet access, restricted ability to use new technologies, poor habit of this system, attitudinal problems and others. In general, according to the deans response about the obstacles or factors that affect knowledge sharing among Assosa University academic staffs are known and the university should be committed to solve these obstacles to become more generous institution in Ethiopia.

Models of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge is the most strategically significant resource of the academic institutions or for any organization, and the assimilation of individuals' specialized organizational capability is vital to the development and sustainability of competitive advantages. It is clear that knowledge which exists in human brains is owned by human beings. Knowledge owned by human beings exists in human brains. Knowledge can be categorized as: explicit and tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge is easy to encode and transmit in systematic language whereas tacit knowledge is difficult to formalize encode which is gained through experience and keep in human mind. In institutions like Assosa university or other organizations, when individuals need knowledge owned by others, they may need the knowledge owners to get the knowledge. First, they have to identify and locate the knowledge owners and the type of knowledge, and then, they establish contact with the knowledge owners and hope that the knowledge owners are willing to share. If the sharing is explicit process individuals may ask for the documents regarding the knowledge if the knowledge owner has documented or plans to document the specific knowledge. On the contrary, if the sharing is tacit-process individuals must interact with the sharer through face-to-face communication for learning the knowledge (Ping et al., 2006).

Knowledge sharing relates with the competitive and cooperative connection among academicians in the institution. Knowledge sharing model is used to solve for the conditions that determine the knowledge sharing mechanisms and practices of academic staffs in Assosa University. Mainly, everyone should know when knowledge sharing is possible and when it is impossible, whether the knowledge sharing needs any incentives provided by the institution (S. Ping et al., 2006). The implications for knowledge sharing will be derived from the model. Knowledge sharing among ASUAS is for the purpose of knowledge transfer among staffs to perform their duty effectively to achieve the goals of the university. In Assosa University, there was not any knowledge sharing models or guide that is used to share knowledge among academic staffs during the study was undertaken. There are

two different dimensions of knowledge-sharing models/guides or knowledge sharing mechanisms among individuals (Boh, 2007). These are personalization versus codification and individualization versus institutionalization. Among these none of the two models exists in Assosa University to share knowledge among academic staffs under study. Therefore, the researchers propose these models for the university to facilitate knowledge sharing among ASUAS. Codification versus personalization, codification knowledge sharing model can be a good mechanism and practice to store large amounts of knowledge and to create a knowledge database, from which all academic staffs can easily access and use knowledge; however during codification knowledge should be carefully codified and stored in databases or documents. And also in personalization of knowledge sharing mechanism/model, knowledge is closely tied to the person who developed it and shared mainly through direct person-to-person contacts. It is used for the academicians to find a solution for a problem that has no clear solution at an outset. Therefore this model allows them to engage colleagues in discussions to seek a highly customized solution to each unique problem and used to transfer tacit knowledge (Boh, 2007).

In the case of institutionalization versus individualization, institutionalization knowledge sharing mechanisms or practices help each department or academic unit or in general the university to facilitate knowledge sharing in large among academic staffs. Assosa University is the new and growing institution, therefore institutionalization knowledge sharing model might be effective in for the success of departments and faculty. On the other hand individualization knowledge sharing mechanism is a mechanism used to carry out knowledge sharing at the individual level in the library. Correspondingly, the researchers wrote the following from the faculty deans during the interview. There is no knowledge sharing model or guide used by the academic staff members but in some extent it happened in meeting. In general, ASUAS did not have any knowledge sharing model or guide to share knowledge among academicians. Therefore, ASU may develop for ASUAS from these knowledge sharing models according to their working situation. Institutionalization, individualization, codification and personalization are knowledge sharing mechanisms which are very important for effective knowledge sharing among ASUAS.

Conclusion

In general, based on the findings most of Assosa university academic staffs have mindfulness about the concept of knowledge sharing and its benefits. Online communication (through e-mail, social sites), documentation and person to person contacts were known knowledge sharing mechanisms and practices of ASUAS. And also lack of ICT infrastructures, lack of knowledge storage mechanisms, lack of trust among colleagues, lack of incentives or rewards for those who contribute for knowledge sharing, lack of interaction between those who need knowledge and who provide knowledge, physical layout of work areas (office arrangement of staffs) and ASU culture are the obstacles that affect knowledge sharing in the university.

Knowledge sharing model or guide is very important for knowledge sharing among academic staffs in the university. Therefore, the study proposes personalization versus codification and individualization versus institutionalization knowledge sharing models for proper implementation of knowledge sharing among academic staffs in the university.

Recommendations

The findings of the research showed that there were a number of obstacles to share knowledge among academic staffs to perform their task effectively for the success of the university mission. Therefore, the following recommendations are given:

- Assosa University should encourage academic staffs to share their knowhow with colleagues for this: department heads, faculty deans or top managers should implement certain mechanism like rewards and recognitions.
- Assosa University should implement the suggested models by supporting these models with computer applications. Because, it inspires knowledge sharing among academicians in the university.
- Further research or project on this area is recommended in governmental and private educational institutions or organizations.

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