

# KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE: A SURVEY

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**Abstract** *The study examined the extent to which academic staff are involved in knowledge sharing for their academic activities. A survey research design was used for the study. Two hundred and sixty seven respondents were randomly selected from the academic staff in the university for the purpose of the study. Questionnaire was used as the main instrument for gathering data. Some of the findings revealed that knowledge sharing assist the academic staff to keep abreast with the up-to-date information particularly in their chosen professions and it was discovered that internet service is the major medium that they use to share their knowledge with the outside world.*

*It also identified the following major constraints to the use of knowledge sharing among the academic staff: inadequate awareness about the importance of knowledge sharing in academic community and poor attitude of academic staff to ideal of sharing knowledge with one another.*

*The paper recommended amongst others, the adequate awareness about knowledge sharing and provision of internet facilities in all the academic staff offices.*

**Keyword:** *Knowledge Sharing, Academic Staff, Internet*

## INTRODUCTION

In the present world economy, knowledge has become a key resource and very vital for the development and growth of any society. As the modern world economy is increasingly becoming knowledge and information based, knowledge will inevitably serve as the driving force for enhanced productivity, economic growth and performance. It is important to note that data, information and knowledge go hand –in –hand. Data refers to the content or facts that we wish to process, while information refers to the data communicated or received. Knowledge goes beyond mere information in that information has now been interpreted and processed according to a point of view, preparing the receiver for appropriate actions (Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002). Ellen (2009) maintained that when information is combining with context and experience, with the introduction of human factor, it becomes knowledge. Knowledge is originated from intelligence of individuals and is visible in tasks, systems, procedures, norms and customs which are difficult to imitate. Academics are required to share their knowledge and expertise to maintain their place in this era of information age. Knowledge can be considered useful for the society once it is shared with others. Effective knowledge management strategies must emphasis the role of knowledge sharing to achieve maximum results for academic institutions particularly universities.

It is not a gain saying that academic staff plays an important role in higher education particularly in the area of research,

publishing teaching, providing consultation and other professional activities.

Knowledge can be classified as explicated or tacit. Polynamic cited by Nonaka (1994) defined explicit knowledge as knowledge that is formal, systematic and can be codified into records such as databases and libraries. Choi and Leed (2003) and Barth (2002) defined tacit knowledge as knowledge that exists in people’s mind and is quite difficult to transfer.

However, the role of knowledge sharing in Nigerian universities cannot be over emphasized. Knowledge sharing has increasingly become an invaluable asset in education, research, teaching and learning. Its roles in information dissemination cannot be over emphasized because it has transformed the conduct of research and teaching institutions by allowing academic staff a wide range of opportunities for accessing accurate and timely information as well as providing a medium for communication of their research findings. This study is related to the earlier work of Owolabi, Bamigboye, Agboola, and Lawal (2011) on Resource sharing in Nigerian University Libraries.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria was established in January, 1988. The University started with five colleges which were College of Agricultural Management, Rural Development and Consumer studies

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(COLAMRUCS); College of Animal Science and Livestock Production (COLANIM); College of Environmental Resources Management (COLERM); College of Plant Science and Crop Production (COPLANT) and College of Natural Sciences (COLNAS).

Two additional colleges were created in March 2002. These are College of Engineering (COLENG) and College of Veterinary Medicine (COLVET). During 2008/2009 session, the college of Agricultural Management Rural Development and Consumer Studies was split into two with two new colleges emerging as follows:

1. College of Food Science and Human Ecology (COLFHEC)
2. College of Agricultural Management and Rural Development (COLAMRUD)

The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta has 21 undergraduate courses, 19 post graduate diploma programmed, 39 Masters Courses and 38 PhD programmed in the fields of Agriculture, Communication, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Natural Science and Veterinary Medicines. The university has 567 academic staff (University Statistical Digest, 2011).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Knowledge sharing is widely acknowledged to be a panacea for meeting academic needs in the face of dwindling resources, there is no evidence that academic staff in Nigerian university of Agriculture are taking its usage seriously. The academic staff usually complains that they are not aware of knowledge sharing as tools for enhanced research and scholarly publishing. Sharing of vital research data and information, collaborative research among the academic staff in different part of the world is necessary in academic environment. Therefore, the study examined the extent to which academic staffs are involved in knowledge sharing for their academic development.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the frequency of knowledge sharing among academic staff
2. To ascertain the importance of knowledge sharing in academic environment
3. To find out barriers militating to knowledge sharing
4. To identify ways in which academic staff share knowledge
5. To find out the strategies to promote knowledge sharing among academic staff

## LITERATURE REVIEW

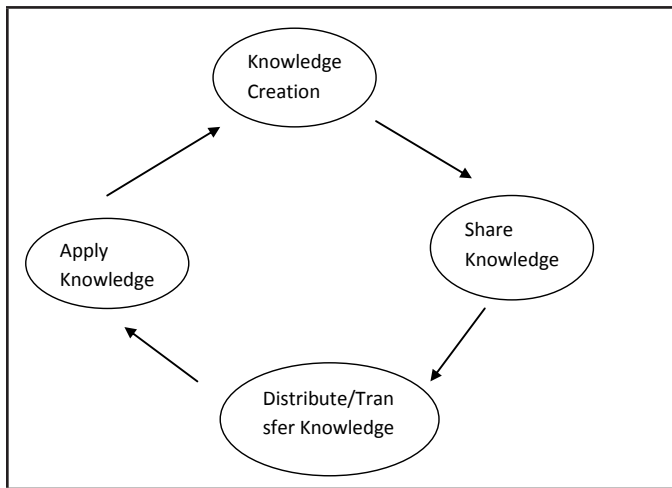
Knowledge sharing in academic environments has become a popular subject of discussion. Matins and Marion (2005) maintained that universities work as the basis for researches, teaching and learning, as a result there is need for constant knowledge sharing among the faculty members because the academic staff are the major player in the knowledge based society. There is no single universal definition for Knowledge sharing; various scholars look at Knowledge Sharing from different angles based on their professional background. Also the scope of Knowledge Sharing is also a factor in defining it. That is, whether knowledge is shared internally with the organization or externally outside the organization. A review of the literature revealed that there is no well-defined Knowledge sharing theories. Most of the views on Knowledge Sharing are in knowledge management theories (Sharrat and Usoro, 2003). Most of the writing on knowledge is rooted in various disciplines under different names such as knowledge based by Jain, Sandhu, Sindu and Gurvinder (2006) and Communication theories (Cummings, 2003). Knowledge sharing (KS) has been defined as the extent to which knowledge is being shared (Shapira, Youtie, Yogeessvaran and Jaafar, 2005). Wilem (2003) defined knowledge sharing as the exchange between two parties in a reciprocal process allowing reshape and sense making of the knowledge. Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee (2003) cited by Anasi, Akpan, and Adedokun (2012) described knowledge sharing as voluntary activities of transferring or disseminating knowledge between people or groups in an organization. However, knowledge sharing can be described as a process in which knowledge and information skills is been exchanged. Cheng, Ho, and Lau (2009) identified two approaches to knowledge sharing among academic staff which are; Close network model which is person to person knowledge sharing and Open network sharing that is sharing through an open repository.

However, there is a need to make distinction between knowledge sharing and resource sharing, Walden (1999) defines resource sharing as “a term used to describe organized attempt by libraries to share materials and services cooperatively so as to provide one another with resources that might otherwise not be available to an individual institution. It represents an attempt to expand the availability of specialized, expensive, or just plain not-owned resources beyond the bounds of a single institution”. Also the Provincial Resource Sharing Network Policy for Alberta Public Library Boards (2009) defined resource sharing as “the common use by two or more libraries of each other’s assets, whether they are equipment, staff, knowledge and expertise, materials facilities, and/or information resources”. From this resource sharing is a subset to knowledge sharing.

In addition, Knowledge sharing is the process where individuals mutually exchange their implicit and explicit knowledge and jointly create new knowledge (Van den Hoff and de Ridder, 2004). Knowledge sharing is also the most important ingredient of innovation (Bhirud et al, 2005). Any knowledge sharing process consists of two parts – donating and collecting. Knowledge donating can be defined as ‘communicating to others what one’s personal one’s intellectual capital’, whereas knowledge collecting is defined as ‘consulting colleagues in order to get them share their intellectual capital (Van den Hoff and de Ridder, 2004).

Many studies on knowledge sharing treat the subject from the organizational perspectives. Kristina (2006) on her research on KS among Multinational Corporations also found that perceived interpersonal trust and shared cognitive ground are important determinants of cross border KS. Number of studies conducted by the researchers like Majid and Lim (2007), Hung and Chuang (2007), Kim and Lee (2006), Koch et al. (2006), So and Bolloju (2005), Bock et al. (2005), Chen et al. (2009), Sun and Scott (2005), and Shah et al. (2009) have examined the influence of various factor that effects the knowledge sharing in the production and service sector environments.

Knowledge sharing process was illustrated by Sethumadhavan



**Figure 1: Knowledge Sharing Process (source: Sethumadhavan, R, 2007),**

Anasi, Akpan and Adedokun (2012) highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing among the academic staff which include;

1. Sharing information about relevant documents,
2. Sharing relevant documents,
3. Sharing information about the content of relevant documents
4. Sharing information about novel and effective ways of finding relevant documents and information sources.

Acknowledging the roles of librarianship in knowledge sharing, firstly, librarianship has been defined as the discipline and profession that is concerned with helping individuals obtain reliable information to increase their knowledge in all spheres of their lives from the recorded information store house of mankind (Choy Fatty Cheong, 2008). It is in support of this that Lee, Hwa-Wee (2005) identified the roles of libraries in knowledge sharing, which are:

- Resource sharing and networking
- Information technology development
- User services
- Human resource management
- Knowledge resources management
- Information resource organization

From the forgoing, Upendra (2010) opined that efficient knowledge sharing in libraries promotes connections of professionals across platforms, standardizing professional practices, avoiding mistakes, leveraging best practices, reducing time to talent, building reputation and taking on stewardship for strategic capabilities.

Acknowledging the important of role of Knowledge Sharing in academic environments, Igun (2005) maintained that academic staff cannot do without Knowledge Sharing particularly in this era of the information superhighway.

Resource sharing as a means of academic empowerment and development has been acknowledged by Owolabi, Bamigboye, Agboola and Lawal (2011), and Cheng and Lau (2005) while Nwalo and Oguniyi (2012) maintained that resource sharing as an instrument for research and communication has opened up numerous possibilities for sharing information at local and global levels and access to information on latest research findings.

With the coming of Information and Communication Technology, it has made knowledge sharing easier among the academic staff. This was supported by Owolabi and Attama (2007) that internet resource is an invaluable tool for Knowledge Sharing because it allows for collaborative research among academic staff. In the same view Oketunji (2001) opined that the functions of ICT has been to provide a way for academic staff to have better access to each other and as a tool to facilitate research. He went further to say that the internet is the world’s most efficient means of communication when compared to other sources. Olalude (2007) reported that the internet is a powerful and efficient tool for sharing, searching, retrieving and disseminating information among academic staff.

Contributing to this, Kent (1996) maintained that professional skills of academic staff can be improved through knowledge sharing both within and outside. Some specific investigations on the usefulness of resource sharing among academic staff will be of relevance to this study. Lou,

Yang and Shih(2007) studied the behavior of academic staff from information management departments with regard to knowledge sharing at technological universities . The influence of self-motivation and incentive mechanism on academic staff individual knowledge sharing and obstacles encountered while knowledge sharing were investigated in this study. The results showed that information management staff encounters some problems when sharing knowledge with others; they showed negative consensus on issues such as individual job security, academic promotion and intellectual property rights, making colleagues unwilling to share knowledge. The relationship among colleagues is very distant and the head of the department is not taking it serious. In addition, Mapoya (2004) conducted a study to establish the ways in which academic staff of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg could add value to their service by engaging in knowledge management .He identified knowledge sharing as a crucial aspect of knowledge management. Talja (2002) developed a conceptual framework for the description of the types and levels of knowledge sharing in academic communities.

Shinn, Ramayah and Jahami (2008) tried to explain intention to share knowledge among academics by using Theory of Reason Action. The study was done in governmental institution of higher learning and target respondents were academic staff from the position of instructors to the professors. The results showed that there was a strong positive relationship between attitude towards sharing and the intention to share knowledge.

Coming back home, Osunnade, Philips and Ojo (2007) investigated the limitations to knowledge sharing among academic staff in Nigeria. The study attempted to evaluate the Internet information .The study was limited as far as knowledge sharing is concerned in that it examined only academic skills in conventional web pages search which are very elementary in research information sourcing. Also Anasi, Akpan, and Adedokun (2012) conducted another study on academic staff in Nigeria universities and they identified various problems militating against knowledge sharing.

Lawal, Bassey, and Okon (2010) identified notable effort being made by African universities in promoting Knowledge Sharing among their academic staff and libraries through the support of the Association of African Universities (AAU), and the support of International Development Research Center (IDRC)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a pure quantitative method. A survey design was chosen in the conduct of the study because it had been used in earlier related studies ( Anasi, Akpan and Adedokun,

2012). The target population of the study comprised the entire academic staff of the university numbering 527. A simple random technique was used to select 267 academic staff in 9 colleges and 5 academic support units.

A self designed questionnaire was used for the collection of data items. The instrument was reviewed by two experts to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire. It was administered to fifty academic staff from other universities. A test –re-test reliability of the questionnaire method of two weeks interval was employed and responses collected were subjected to Cronbach alpha. The overall reliability of the questionnaire returned an  $r = 0.85$  which exceed the minimum standard of 0.80 suggested for basic research (Wang and Tang, 2003).

Descriptive statistics which include percentage and frequency count were used for the analysis of the data.

## ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

**Table 1: Frequency of Knowledge Sharing Among the Academic Staff**

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage	Ranking
Daily	127	48	1
Weekly	70	26.2	2
Monthly	62	23.2	3
Not At All	8	3	4
Total	267	100	10

Table 1 sought to identify frequency in which academic staff shares knowledge. It was revealed that majority of academic staff confirmed that they share knowledge daily particularly with their students. This was supported with 127(48%) while 70(26%) admitted that they share knowledge weekly.

Table 2 revealed the importance of knowledge sharing. 73(27.3%) maintained that the most important of sharing knowledge is that it keeps them abreast with up-to-date information particularly in their fields, and 63(24%) agreed that knowledge sharing aid them to expedite research competence.

Table 3 discussed the ways in which academic staff shares knowledge 251(15.14%) agreed that they share knowledge through the use of internet while 247(14.90%) agreed that they share knowledge by attending conferences.

Table 4 examined the barrier militating against the development of knowledge sharing , it was revealed that many academic staff admitted that many of them do not like to share knowledge due to prejudice this was represented by 54(20.22%) and 50(18.72% ) reported that there is no adequate awareness about the need for knowledge sharing in the libraries.

**Table 2: Importance of Knowledge Sharing**

Importance	Respondents	Percentage	Ranking
Expedite The Research Competence	64	24	2
Abreast With Up To Date Information Particularly In Their Fields	73	27.3	1
Use To Improve Professional Competence	52	19.4	3
For Educational Purposes	41	15.3	4
Facilities Collaborating Learning	37	14	5
Total	267	100	15

**Table 3: Ways of Sharing Knowledge Among Academic Staff**

Ways of Sharing Knowledge	Respondents	Percentage
Through Research Findings In Journals	212	12.79
Electronic Meeting	173	10.43
Common Room Discussion	83	5.01
Departmental Meeting	200	12.06
Conference	247	14.90
Seminar	182	10.98
Workshop	130	7.47
Mobile Phone	82	4.95
Notice Board	40	2.41
Text Books	57	3.44
Internet	251	15.14
Total	1658	100

Note: N >267 because respondents were allowed to pick more than one option

Table 5 sought to identify the frequency of knowledge sharing among the academic staff, it was discovered that the majority of the academic staff admitted that they shared resources daily this was represented by 96(35.95%)while 89(33.33%) respondents admitted that they shared resources on monthly basis.

Table 6 discussed the strategy for promoting knowledge sharing 50(18.7%) admitted that there is a need for the mass awareness about the importance of knowledge sharing in academic environment. 39 admitted that there is a need for appropriate rewards system

## DISCUSS OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study have far reaching implications for academic staff development in Nigeria because of the need for academic staff to be current and be at par with their colleagues in other part of the world. It is important that academic staff engage in knowledge sharing particularly in this era of information age. It is very encouraging that many of the academic staff agreed that they share knowledge every day; this supported the viewed of Napoya (2004) that academic staff can add value to their teaching by engaging in knowledge sharing in order to improve professional

competence. Sharing of vital research data and information, collaborative research among academic staff operating in different geographical locations are some of the benefits of knowledge sharing discovered in the findings of the study.

This supported the submission of Kent (1996) and Anasi, Akpan and Adedokun (2012). It was also discovered that internet is the major way in which academic staff share their knowledge with the outside world. With the emergence of laptop compatible modem, academic staff can access and share information with the whole world. Olalunde (2007) and Owolabi (2003) opined that Knowledge Sharing is a power tool for resource sharing particularly among academic staff.

Another finding revealed that there is very low awareness about the importance of resource sharing among academic staff. This contradicts the findings of Jau, Sandhu and Sidhu (2007) that lack of communication skills, social networks, lack of time and lack of trust were some of the problems militating against development of knowledge sharing among academic staff.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on knowledge sharing among the academic staff. From the findings of the study, it revealed

**Table 4: Barriers Militating To Knowledge Sharing**

Barriers	Respondents	Percentage
Lack Of Relevant Ict Skills	18	6.74
Lack Of Awareness About Knowledge Sharing In Libraries	50	18.72
Poor Reward Systems That Motivate People To Share Their Knowledge	33	12.36
Non-Cordial Work Relationships Among Staff	40	14.98
Reluctance To Share Knowledge Due To Prejudice	54	20.22
Lack Of Adequate Ict Facilities	32	11.99
Lack Of Formal Foral That Encourage Knowledge Sharing	40	14.98
Total	267	100

**Table 5: Frequency of Knowledge Sharing**

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Daily	96	35.95
Weekly	52	19.48
Monthly	89	33.33
Never Share	30	11.24
Total	267	100

**Table 6: Strategies for Promoting Knowledge Sharing**

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Need For Adequate Ict	37	13.85
Academic Staff Need To Publish Their Research Findings On The University Website	28	10.49
The University Needs To Create Awareness About The Importance Of Knowledge Sharing	50	18.73
University Should Create Knowledge Repository In Libraries	35	13.11
Establishing Appropriate Reward System Which Encourages Knowledge Sharing	39	14.61
Adequate Dissemination Of Information	27	10.11
Employment Of More Knowledge Officers In The University	25	9.36
Cultivating Right Attitude And Willingness To Work	26	9.74
Total	267	100

that majority of academic staff were aware of knowledge sharing. High number of them maintained that knowledge sharing make them to be current and abreast with the latest information in their various professional areas. However, internet plays a very significant role in promoting knowledge sharing among academic staff in Nigeria. Lack of awareness about the importance of it is the main obstacle hindering the promotion of knowledge sharing among academic staff.

The following recommendations are made:

1. The university management should create massive campaigns about the need for academic staff to embrace knowledge sharing among the academic staff. This can be done through training, conferences, and seminars etc on the need for knowledge sharing among them.
2. Academic staff should be encouraged in publishing their research findings in the institution repository in order for others to have access to them.
3. There is need for adequate Information and communication technology resource in the university because the role of ICT in knowledge sharing cannot be over emphasized.
4. University management should encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among academic staff by providing an enabling environment.

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