Islamic Conceptualisation of Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to address "The Fundamental Theory of Knowledge Management" from Islamic point of views, to draw the notion of "Islamic Worldview" of knowledge, especially in terms of understanding its nature in the reality of knowledge society. Thus, with the assumption that once knowledge is managed, then it is possible to look at its behaviours, functions, and process of development in the form of scientific realm. Hypothetically, if there were no single theory formulated to identify the nature of knowledge, then how can it be managed and achieve its goals?

Keywords
Knowledge, Management, Function, and Cultural

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The issue of knowledge is very fundamental in Islamic teaching and practice. Based on the present situation and development, this paper aims to explore and review the current literature on knowledge management (KM), its conceptualisation, application and implication output on individual development and organisational structure, particularly in relation to the humanistic survival and morality, in order to map out the rationale modelling strategies and objectives of KM application and practice. In other words, this paper focuses on KM conceptualisation, particularly on how Islamic Knowledge Management (IKM) approaches add value to KM modelling and practice.

2.0 KNOWLEDGE IN NATURE

The philosophy of knowledge is an old discipline. However, where does it stand today? In general, it can be understood loosely as the source of economy, power and prosperity. Focusing on the philosophy of knowledge and comparing its traditional sense with modern practice might lead us to discover some ways in which knowledge should be realised, managed and applied.

Obviously, the issue of criteria that determines what constitutes knowledge is indeed crucial. For that reason, the term used here is defined as a general concept that refers to the act of understanding any factual information wisely for any consideration of its truth or falsehood.

2.1 Knowledge, Sciences and Information

Due to some reasons, the terms "knowledge", "sciences" and "information" have been used synonymously or interchangeably in many contexts. They might be referred to a specific understanding (theoretical or practical) or skill acquired by a person through experience or education and so on, i.e. there is no single agreed definition about them since the days of Plato up to the present time. The source of knowledge creation and its types, for instance, might be among the leading factors of defining redundancy and calamity.

As a concept, the term "information", on the other hand, has many meanings, from everyday usage to technical settings, in which it can be defined as closely related to the notions of having data of something and its representation. In this sense, it defers to "knowledge" as a concept referring to the ability in exploring and identifying the fact and figure of an information. Knowing the law of "clean air" as a gifted system that everybody has to take care of is a knowledge. Compare this to a person who becomes aware of "clean air" system after being informed by someone. In other words, knowledge is lucid information gained through the process of reason applied to reality or a successful evaluation of one's perceptions that lead to the use of reasoning objectively in drawing a valid and wise conclusion about the world (Goldman, 2006).

Here, we have to consider the fact that the meanings of words, sentences, and texts can change with time or cultural and even emotional conditions, i.e. space and span. The consequence of this fact is that a true logical proposition in one relationship can be false in another (Vamos 1990). Obviously, the issue of criteria that determines what constitutes knowledge is indeed crucial. For that reason, the term used here is defined as a general concept that refers to a wise understanding of factual information. Classical theories of knowledge however, would only recognise two categories of knowledge: true or false.

As symbolised by Peter Drucker (born in 1909 and known as the Father of Management), the source of wealth is something specifically referred to as human knowledge. If

we apply knowledge to tasks that we obviously know how to do, we call it productivity. If we apply knowledge to tasks that are new and different, we call it innovation. Only knowledge allows us to achieve those two goals after it is organised and applied. Therefore, a successful organisation is the one which is successful in creating and sharing information and knowledge, as it leads to systematic organisational behaviours and strategies, i.e. Knowledge Management, as it was originally construed, focuses on the acquisition, structuring, retention, and dissemination of that knowledge.

2.1.1 Knowledge Management (KM)

What is knowledge management? As an introductory step it is useful to distinguish here between raw information and knowledge. Raw information may be considered as widely available in users' hand, but only some users will be able to convert the information into relevant knowledge and to apply this knowledge to achieve their aims objectively. The processes by which they do this are known as KM strategies (Edwards, 1994).

KM, as a natural phenomenon, is not a new issue in human history and practice. Consequently, there are various terminologies and definitions for it, starting from the broad process of locating, organizing and transferring, up to the information usage in sharing and networking. However, for our purpose of conceptualisation here, KM is regarded as similar to "information management formulation" where the notion of systematic strategy of collecting, documenting and distributing knowledge (whether explicit or tacit) are included. As stated by Osman Bakar (2008), "knowledge disorganized is life disorganized". In this sense, KM is not a new idea. It is a key element in a long strategy toward progress and success.

2.1.2 KM's Component

KM as defined above can be observed as an existing process and application throughout human history with the exception of volume and structure, in which it composes of three important pillars:
a) Knowledge that should be developed through exploration and searching;
b) Methodologies in which knowledge can be easily used, distributed and shared; and
c) Effective users of knowledge as agents of change toward progress and success.

Indeed, KM as proven by its pillars is not something that can be neglected by the entire human life. It is in fact, part and parcel of our growth and development, up to the extent that every individual should become an effective user of knowledge both in terms of planning ahead toward a bright future and also in terms of evaluating the past with the intention of securing future success or inspecting all aspects of current knowledge to conform with up to date requirements.

2.1.3 KM's Functional Criteria

In principle, the interest and awareness of KM's functional behaviours in contemporary human development have gained ground in several aspects of individual achievement, societal stability and maturity throughout human history, in which KM has been observed as having a specific role in the context of spatial modelling of life and stochastic reservoir modelling human life activities. Increasingly, these models go beyond the focus of a single data type and integrate numerous pieces of multi-disciplinary data each with their own complexity, and often only fully understood by discipline specialists. For instance, the KM process base is usually used as a project specific vehicle for documentation, collaboration, and creation of a quality assurance and quality control audit trail. Actually, the central obvious role for any KM system is to serve as the primary repository for project documentation and application of any kind of information (Michael, 1998; King, 2005). Therefore, the functions of KM can be observed in many ways. However, there are three important conditional functions of constructing any KM modelling; they are:

a) Identification of body knowledge, its categorisation and types – knowledge should be searched and developed. The first task of KM is searching and identifying information that can help users get their jobs done, achieves their life objectives and activities.
b) Simplification of knowledge description and application – collection of information will be meaningless without good management methodologies in simplifying all types of knowledge for complete understanding and easy application on the real ground of usage practicalities.
c) Utilisation of knowledge resources and its functional impact – user satisfaction should be the concern of any KM modelling and application. It can only be achieved by fulfilling user needs and tranquilities. In principle, the aim of knowledge discovery is for it users. In fact, people use information due to the fact that it can help them solve their problems, i.e. not keep them in trouble.

In other words, what these pillars are intended to represent here is that KM is really able to enhance knowledge, and also disseminate it among users, in which it leads them to become successful people. This model of conditional function for KM can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 1 describes the application of KM operational function in helping users achieve development goals and success in their life activities and productivities. Each of the elements represents a sub-process of KM that occurs when two (or more individuals) exchange knowledge, in order to move closer towards each other in the meaning they ascribe their success to knowledge function in making the events become workout and successful. In

other words, KM can be used as a tool to store, retrieve, disseminate and manage information related to user needs.
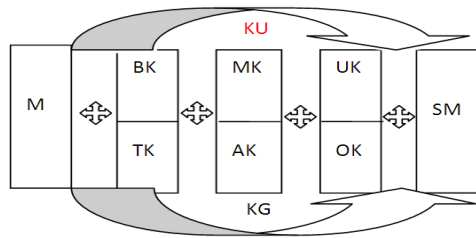
(M=Man;   BK=Body   Knowledge;   TK=Type; MK=Methodology;   AK=Application;   UK=Users; OK=Output;   KG=Knowledge   Growth; KU=Understanding; SM=Successful Manager)

Figure 1: KM Functional Model

3.0 ISLAMIC CONCEPTUALISATION

The notion of *Islam* as a "manner of submission" to God the Creator is a useful reference point to begin a discussion on the Islamic conceptualisation of KM. It is logical to assume that the Islamic notion of KM is related to and continuous with its notion of *'ilm* (knowledge) as the fundamental principle of conducts and practices. In Islam, the definition of knowledge is not confined to only epistemological concerns but also includes ethical truthfulness and other dimensions of objectivities (Q, 2: 239).

3.1   Islam and Knowledge
Islam is a religion of knowledge. All Muslim regard knowledge as God-given to Mankind to be used as a point of reference and guidance for every theoretical endeavours to elaborate an Islamic paradigm, and intrinsically related to the fundamental concept of obligation (*taklif*) as drafted by the Quran and the Prophetic traditions in structuring the Muslims' worldview toward all aspects of individual belief, societal behaviour and cultural domain (Quran, 2: 30-33, Sardar, 1993: 43). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged the acquisition of knowledge by saying "Verily, the men of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets". The value of a man is the value of his knowledge.

Therefore, knowledge is not just a particular cultural production, neither an empty wisdom of an individual's experiences to include every single way of looking at things and acting accordingly, i.e. every way of life is based on a body of knowledge of a particular person and the universe he lives in and that knowledge determines his attitude towards his own self (*anfus*) and the universe (*afaq*) in general, besides setting norms to which his thoughts and actions must conform. All beliefs, ideals and values - sacred or secular - spring from the worldview that emerges from the fund of knowledge at the disposal of a

community. This is to say that knowledge is the root of culture and culture is the fruit of knowledge. Culture is like the knowledge on which it is based. Its value can be judged by the type of individuals it produces and of the society it establishes. It is not enough for Man to be born physically. One is made human through a cultural birth, through the inculcation of knowledge along with the belief, ideals and values it carries with it. The primary fact about Man is that he is not only a social but a cultural being. It is culture that gives meaning to what the Quran calls the divine trusteeship (*amanah*) as vicegerent (*khilafah*) and makes Man worthy of the exalted position as moral agents of God on earth (Quran, 2: 29).

Just as knowledge is a means of attaining virtue, of gaining power over one's own self, so it is a tool for gaining power over nature (*afaq*) and harnessing its stupendous forces in the service of Man. But it is not the same knowledge that leads to self-conquest and to the conquest of nature. Knowledge of what is morally good for Man, and knowledge of what is materially useful for him are two different kinds of knowledge. The former is the prerogative of religion, the product of revelation; the latter is the privilege of science, the product of inductive intellect which, as Iqbal (1986: 101) is convinced, is made self-conscious by the recurrent appeal of the Quran to reason and experience. Since the knowledge of what is materially useful is as essential for Man as the knowledge of what is morally good, he needs both science and religion for steering through life in this world. What he needs is not science without religion, but science structured by religion. Conversely, what he requires is not religion without science and philosophy, but religion given intellectual content, wherever possible, by science as well as philosophy, without doing violence to its spiritual framework.

According to the Quran (96:1-5), human beings are ordered to read as a mechanism in seeking knowledge. It should be done in the Name of Lord, the Creator, the Most Generous who has taught by the Pen, and has taught Man that which he knew not. The command here is not just to collect knowledge and information, but also direct man to organise, plan and manage properly the knowledge given to him. This concept of knowledge is illustrated in Figure 2:

The Figure 2 describes that Muslims believe that knowledge originates from God and then is transferred to Mankind by various channels such as revelation, sense perception, reason, and intuition as affirmed by Muslim epistemologists. This in turn implies that both induction from observation and deductive reasoning are valid methods of knowledge acquisition (Al-Attas, 1990: 1). In other words, knowledge is an existing phenomenon that Man has to explore and investigate. Once knowledge is known to a person, it becomes information to him, in which it becomes a science after it is applied by him and taught to others. In his position as God's vicegerent on earth, he has to fulfil his task in investigating knowledge

and developing its application as God created all those knowledge for him to be used and applied (Quran, 2: 29-33). Although some of the Quranic verses in this regard refer to Islamic knowledge, they are general in their meaning and thus can be used to refer to learning in general.
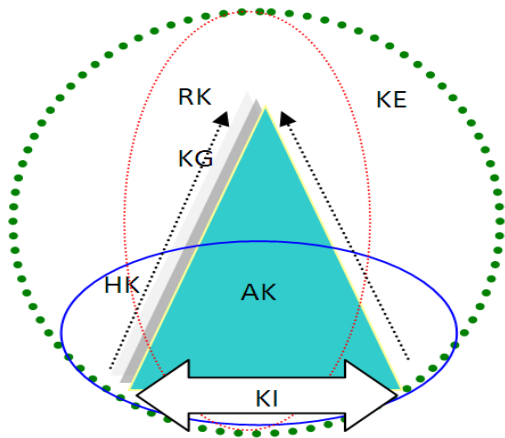
(KE=Knowledge Existence; KG=Growth; KM= Management; RK=Revelation Knowledge; AK= Acquired Knowledge; HK=Human Knowledge; KI=Knowledge Investigation)

Figure 2: Islamic Conceptualization of knowledge

The output of an Islamic educational process will lead a learner to be a well-informed person who acts in accordance to the principles available at hand. This conception of knowledge regards education not merely as the acquisition of information or the capacity for explanation and analysis but also connects these processes to the command of God, to be an ethical being in carrying out the duty of a vicegerent on earth. With this view, it is hoped that it can serve as a step for the construction of a framework for an Islamic Knowledge Management Theory (IKMT).

Indeed, how humans view knowledge, its management and function, is a question imposed in the foundation of any ethical system. Some common views deny the existence of any purpose of knowledge other than those which create its role function in usage and application. Due to this behaviour, they become different from other beings. These opinions basically view Mankind as an evolving animal (physically and mentally).

3.1.1 Islamic Knowledge Management

As knowledge in Islam is intimately related to belief, knowledge, therefore, is part of faith. It is obligatory for all Muslims to pursue knowledge, to cultivate the various branches of knowledge and then to construct a suitable model of knowledge management in helping Mankind to become effective users of knowledge. Islam, in this regard, looks toward IKM's construction and application

as important vision and mission for human development and survival as vicegerents of God, in which it should be bound by its intellectual wisdom, spiritual strength, mental ability, and even socio-cultural conditions of scientific creativity.

3.1.2 IKM's Functional Criteria

As discussed in 2.1.2, KM is composed of three elements: body of knowledge (BK), methodology (MK) and users (UK). IKM however, has another additional element that is the knowledge source (KS). In this case, knowledge is considered as co-existing with Mankind. Therefore, their duty is to search and develop that knowledge according to their needs, urgencies and suitability. This approach is meant as a straightforward manner of looking into KS which is brought to light through interpretation based on an expert's specialisation or collective constructive finding which is known as *Ijtihad*. The output of this process should be valuable and convincing enough to appeal to the rational mind that inevitably appreciates their worth to practically apply them to enhance the effectiveness of productivities and achievements.

These elements and their functional criteria of IKM can be illustrated in Figure 3.
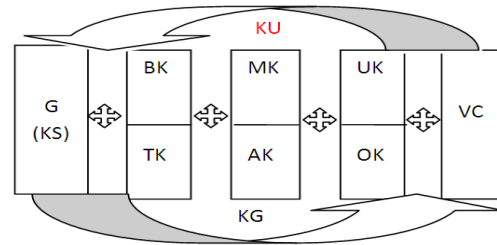
(G=God; KS=Knowledge Source; BK=Body Knowledge; TK=Types; MK=Methodology; AK=Application; UK=Users; OK=Output; KG=Knowledge Growth; KU=Knowledge Understanding; VC=Vicegerent).
Figure 3: IKM Functional Model

The figure above describes the application of IKM and its operational function in helping users achieve the success as vicegerents of God. The hypothesis here is when human beings are able to manage knowledge for themselves as structured by IKM, they will be able to recognise the greatness of Allah, the Creator of the universe (Quran, 39: 38; 41: 53).

Finally, some holistic principles of IKM application can be listed from the above discussion:
1. IKM conceptualisation as drafted in this paper is an attempt toward knowledge realisation from an Islamic perspective.
2. IKM users have an optimistic view upon knowledge existence, its boundaries, categories and types. Consequently, they deal with knowledge as part and parcel of their life activities and routine.
3. IKM users should not have to choose between knowing a little about a lot or a lot about a little. They should be able to concentrate mostly on what they need to know and when it is needed to identify

any related additional condition in which it requires another inspection of the environment designed for its usage. On this basis, Quranic verses have been revealed in staged process, and not in one whole package.

4. (Besides satisfaction,) utilisation of IKM also focuses on users' safety. This is a fact of Mankind, that he will remain forgetful and careless by which his nature intuitively knows whether he is able in managing his own knowledge well or otherwise, and leads him to achieving the status of vicegerent of God successfully.

5. Mankind is always facing problem after problem in all stages of his life. For this reason, he searches for solution and evaluation as an integrated approach and up-to-date investigation.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This research is an attempt to investigate the concept of KM as a step approaching IKM conceptualisation, to identify their components and functional behaviours. In comparison, we observe that the penetration of KM movement strategies starts with users and ends with users (internal or external), i.e. its functional modelling is taking more user-centric base behaviours in many multi-disciplinary management efforts. IKM, on the contrary, starts with knowledge recourses for the purpose of user development and then ends up again with the source of knowledge as user evaluation and confirmation in searching effective usage and application, i.e. its functional modelling is more toward recourse-centric base behaviours where all knowledge understanding (KU) and output (OK) should be a reflection of knowledge source (KS) representation (physically or hermeneutically constructed). Therefore, the need for IKM is paramount to ensure:

• Inclusion of all types of knowledge, including abstract (or revelation) knowledge reflected in conformities within the modelling process.

• Defining a modelling process that comprehensively covers the reservoir issues humanistic in nature while leading to "fit-for-purpose" results in a defined time space and span.

• Storing knowledge generated force during the modelling process to ensure adequate and efficient model adoption and adjustment to suit specific workflow.

Finally, it is obvious that managing knowledge requires an appropriate tool. Each and every tool has its own function and objectives. Therefore, IKM is very fundamental for a Muslim manager in achieving his managerial function, progress and productivities.

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