The Impact of Knowledge Management on Faculty Retention in Lebanese Private Higher Education Institutions during Uncertain Times

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Abstract: *During uncertain times (i.e., economic-financial crises, pandemic situation and political instability) effective knowledge management becomes crucial for the retention of faculty members in Lebanese Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Faculty knowledge is critical to (HEIs) since the value to the university is essentially intangible and not easily replicated, nevertheless, affects university image and reputation.*

Lebanese Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) make large investments on their faculty members for training, developing, maintaining and retaining them. Currently, financial constraints and absurd exchange rates make it sometimes impossible to compete with remunerations offerings from international competitors to retain talents. The knowledge lost from a departing employee is not a short-term problem; it's a long-term problem that breeds other problems and reduces organization's effectiveness.

This research aims to investigate the impact of knowledge management strategies on faculty retention during uncertain periods, providing valuable insights and practical recommendations for enhancing faculty retention through effective knowledge management. A quantitative research approach is adopted in this paper that will focus on the findings from the initial analyses of the responses to a survey applied to 348 academics from different private HEIs.

Keywords: *Knowledge Management, Retention, Uncertain Times, Higher education, Lebanon.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management (KM) is a popular concept among many disciplines in higher education institutions and has gained popularity since its discovery (Kimile & Bulitia, 2020). The management of knowledge provides the basis for others to get something to learn from and possibly develop and add new insights to it or build upon available knowledge. This is done to ensure the appropriate storing and easy access to the knowledge base in order to maximize efficiency and increase productivity while putting in efforts to retain every information or knowledge in the organization (Bhusry et al., 2012).Higher education institutions (HEIs) create and apply knowledge during their processes and activities. A competitive edge over others depends largely on the quality of KM that organizations are able to apply to their operations. KM plays an important role in the improvement of organizational competitive advantage through sharing of best practices, achieving better decision making, faster response to key institutional issues and improved people skills. To ensure continuity and effective management of an organization, strategies or actions should be taken towards knowledge creation and knowledge retention. A successful knowledge management strategy can be implemented and achieved if organizations or institutions understand the roles and functions of knowledge. The proper implementation ensures good outcome and provide the ultimate result in organizations (Ngoc-Tan & Gregar, 2018).

What happens to knowledge management when the knowledge holder leaves the organization?

Employee retention is still a very serious issue facing organizations. Several studies have tried to answer the question as to what determines people's intention to quit, however, it was notable that high turnover rates of skilled professionals can pose high risk to organization due to the loss of its human capital (i.e., skills, training and knowledge cost). Given the specialization of skilled professionals, these employees are likely to be reemployed within the same industry by a competitor (Lahkar Das & Baruah, 2013).

How does knowledge management influence faculty retention in Lebanese higher education institutions during uncertain times?What are the specific challenges and constraints faced by faculty members and institutions in Lebanon during uncertain times that impact their ability to effectively share knowledge and contribute to faculty retention?

This study aims to investigate the impact of knowledge management on faculty retention during uncertain periods, while providing valuable insights and practical recommendations for enhancing faculty retention through effective knowledge management practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researches investigated the impact of knowledge management on organizational sustainability, in addition to highlighting factorsimpacting employee retention. In this highly competitive and demandingenvironment, HEIs are finding themselves in a need to rely on knowledge management practices to create value and remain competitive.

2.1. Knowledge Management and Strategies

Knowledge Management (KM) in educational institutions can be defined as the organized and systematic process of generating and disseminating information, selecting and deploying explicit and tacit knowledge to create unique value that can be used to strengthen teaching learning environment (Raj Adhikari, 2010). Tacit knowledge is a non-codified, intangible knowhow that is acquired through the informal take-up of learned behavior and procedures; and learning in an unstructured or semi structured way is a key process within tacit knowledge transfer and acquisition (Howells, 1996). Tacit knowledge is automatic, requires little or no time and helps determine how organizations make decisions and influence the collective behavior of their individuals(Smith, 2001). Meanwhile, explicit knowledge is technical and described in formal language, like manuals, mathematical expressions, copyrights and patents. This "know-what" or systematic knowledge is readily communicated and shared through print, electronic methods and other formal means; and it's carefully codified, stored in databases and is accessed with high quality, reliable, fast information retrieval systems (Ellis & Roever, 2021). Unless management of organizations clearly states expectations for sharing knowledge, employees are likely to share only explicit knowledge because it's easier to code, document and transfer (Raj Adhikari, 2010). KM in higher education has three objectives: first, developing tasks for better quality and effectiveness; second, developing human resources in all operating levels, third, developing knowledge bases of organizations towards the enhanced knowledge investment of the organization(Nilsook & Sriwongkol, 2009).

Different KM strategies have been proposed to be adequate for different types of knowledge, however, it's essential to know that the selection of a suitable KM strategy depends not only on the type of knowledge to be shared but also on the environment the organization is operating (Mukrimaa et al., 2016). Two different strategies have been discussed in the literature of sharing tacit and explicit knowledge: the codification strategy and personalized strategy. The codification strategy has the objective to collect knowledge, store it in databases, and provide the available knowledge in an explicit and codified form, and such reuse can save time and money. In contrast, the focus of the personalization strategy is to use information technology to help people communicate their knowledge; and the purpose of it is to transfer, communicate, and exchange knowledge through knowledge networks such as discussion forums (Greiner et al., 2007). The cognitive flexibility theory (CFT) describes the development of the ability to spontaneously restructure one's knowledge in adaptation to changing situational demands. The most common application of the theory is the presentation of mini-cases to learners that illustrate a particular concept from varying points of view (Jacobson & Spiro, 1995). In times of uncertainty, knowledge-sharing culture, trust, and motivations are considered vital enablers for knowledge management within organization (Al-Kurdi Ramzi ; Eldabi, Tillal, 2017). Therefore, creating the appropriate environment and culture to share knowledge

freely among faculty members is vital to the success of HEIs.Based on the literature review treated, we hypothesize:

H1a: Knowledge management strategies have a positive impact on HEIs' survival during uncertain times.

H1b: Knowledge sharing has a positive impact on HEIs' survival during uncertain times.

2.2. Faculty Retention and Knowledge Management

Societies expect contributions to the development of nations from higher education systems, but little they know that this development depends heavily on qualified and competent faculty members (Akhtar et al., 2015). Retaining these competent human resources is of utmost importance for higher educational institutions. However, these institutions are finding it hard to retain skillful faculty in the face of competition from the industry(Bessen, 2014).Previous researchers agree on the notion that successful organizations share a fundamental philosophy of appreciation and investment in their employees (Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). Employee retention can be defined as the efforts provided by employers to keep desirable employees in order to meet organizational objectives, in other words, it's the efforts that organizations invest in to prevent the loss of proficient employees from leaving (Dessler et al., 2019). According to Human Capital Theory, competent employees are being regarded as human capital because their knowledge, skills and experience has the higher economic value to organizations and are considered as high worth productive asset (Prabhu, 2011). Findings of a study performed states that on average organizations loses around \$1 million with every 10 managerial and professional employees who leave the organization; combined with direct and indirect cost the total turnover cost associated with one employee ranges from a minimum of one year's pay and benefits of two years (Sigler, 1999). These facts highlight the significant financial impact on organization when employees quit their jobs. One of the reasons for such impact could be the knowledge and skills of the employees leaving the organization which is vital to the organization's ability to be competitive (Olubunmi, 2015). Several measures can be taken to ensure retention. These includes availability of skill development and career progression opportunities for individual employees; ensuring that the work is as interesting as possible; ensuring that new workers have realistic job expectations and sufficient training during their induction programs, putting consultative bodies in place to ensure that employees have a voice; maximizing job security; and evaluating commitment based on results achieved rather than hours worked (Pandita & Ray, 2018). The management of talent can be defined as an organizational procedures related to analyzing, identifying, selecting, training, developing and maintaining performance while keeping the highest potential of employees to achieve the goals and strategy (Valverde et al., 2013). Talent management has a close connection with employee retention (Banuari et al., 2021) (Banuari et al., 2021) (Banuari et al., 2021)(Banuari et al., 2021) (Banuari et al., 2021). This means that higher talents' management will increase employee retention, and the lower talents' management practices, the decreased amount of employee retention (Banuari et al., 2021). As organizations grow and evolve while rendering services, their employees gain experience and knowledge related to their field and the competitive environment. As this body of knowledge grows, it becomes more valuable, and develop the characteristics of an assets, which needs to be developed and employed (MASKELL, 2001). Organizations that value this asset tend to be more successful than those who do not recognize the value of knowledge. In uncertain times, this could reflect a scenario of either survival or failure of the organization. Given that companies and organizations are increasingly gaining competitive advantage from intellectual assets, rather than physical assets, organizations that do not implement effective KM strategies faces difficulties especially when their employees leave. In a job environment where knowledge sharing is not the norm, employees can become the sole owners of field knowledge; meaning that the organization will bear the risk of losing valuable knowledge when employees resign (Muthuveloo et al., 2017). According to the Social Exchange Theory (SET), when organizations take care of the employees, exchange relationships evolve;this leads to positive reciprocation from employees, leading to beneficial consequences (Delamater, 2006). Applying SET implies that when organizations invest in its employees in terms of providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills, and emphasizing on employee development, the latter may perform well, as well as, develop a positive attitudes toward the organization which may show as commitment and staying intentions (Narayanan et al., 2019). Based on the literature treated, we hypothesize:

H2: Knowledge management has positive and significant effect on employee retention during uncertain times.

2.3. KM Challenges and Constraints during Uncertain Times

During uncertain times, organizations of all sizes are required to be prepared to make necessary changes. Access to knowledge that is relevant and up-to-date is critical in meeting challenges (North & Varvakis, 2016). Knowledge management from the perspective of HEIs has been identified as a process where institutions formulate ways in an attempt to recognize and archive assets from within that are derived from the employees and /or academics of various departments or faculties (Ramachandran et al., 2009). Despite the benefit of KM, there are several issues that make KM implementation a challenge across HEIs. First, rather than considering knowledge as an asset that increases in value when shared, many faculty members consider knowledge as proprietary and something that is not shared freely (V Nair & Munusami, 2020). Given the nature of academia and the emphasis placed on conducting research, it's not surprising that some faculty members view knowledge as a possible source of differentiation or power and thus defer sharing certain aspects of their knowledge. When knowledge is viewed as a source of power it acts as a separator between faculty members in terms of being an expert/ professional, and it affects the quality of education being provided , thus affecting promotional opportunities(Houston & Paewai, 2013). When knowledge holders leave the organization, their knowledge goes with them, no matter how much they've shared. The major challenge of managing knowledge is not in its creation, but rather in its capture and integration(Massingham, 2014). Universities are knowledge intensive environment and play a central role in knowledge creation through research and in knowledge dissemination through publications (Fullwood et al., 2013). Knowledge acquisition, storing, retrieving and sharing processes should be seen as crucial and core by knowledge intensive organizations. However, in practice, organizations are still very reluctant in taking KM principles in their strategic thinking and daily routines(Oluikpe, 2012). The ability to integrate and apply specialized knowledge of organizational members is fundamental to a firm's ability to create and sustain competitive advantage(Ahmady et al., 2016).

There has been considerable debate regarding the role of culturein universities regarding knowledge management sharing (Fullwood et al., 2013). Organizational culture represents the set of values, symbols, and ceremonies that makes the identity of an organization (Hofstetter & Harpaz, 2015). For knowledge to be shared, organizations have to create an environment to share, transmit and confront it among members to teach them conceptualization of their interact (Ahmady et al., 2016). Accordingly, present culture in an organization is vital for success of knowledge management, and creating the appropriate and flexible organizational culture would allow organization to use knowledge management as a competitive advantage. Based on this literature we hypothesize:

H3: Challenges faced by Faculty members in HEIs has a negative impact on implementing knowledge management practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a non-experimental research with a descriptive purpose where we study the impact of knowledge management on faculty retention during uncertain periodsin Lebanese private HEIs. This study was based on the fundamental principles ofcognitive flexibility theory (CFT), and the implications of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). Cross sectional research design was adopted to collect dataduring the period of October – November 2023.

A quantitative approach was implemented and all data collected was analyzed using statistical tools mainly the SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) to examine the characteristics of the study population, differences and association between the different variables.

3.1. Sample Population and Survey Instrument

The population consisted of faculty members (full timers and part timers) from different private universities established in Lebanon (AUB, LAU, USJ, NDU, RHU, USEK, AUCE, AUL, BAU, ULS, LIU, MUBS, MUC, in addition to other private higher education institutions). A confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% led to the need for 278 fully filled surveys.Nevertheless, we were

able to reach 348 respondents.A questionnaire was emailed to targeted population and collected answers, using Likert 5 scale, to well-defined and closes ended research questions that included 31 questions, divided into several sections.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results provide valuable perspectives on the relationship between KM, faculty satisfaction, institutional resilience, and employee retention.

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Demographics

Participants span diverse institutions, with the Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ) having the highest representation (22%).Gender distribution shows 55% male and 45% female respondents.

The majority (76%) fall within the 26-50 age range. Predominantly, participants hold a Ph.D. (63%) and serve as Assistant Professors (31%).

Knowledge Management Familiarity

A substantial 86% of respondents are familiar with KM.

University Knowledge Management

Respondents believe universities should record and identify knowledge (99%). With a 99% of respondents agreeing that knowledge created by faculty should be documented for future use.A notable 75% express concerns about universities' transparency with KM during uncertain times.

Institutional Knowledge Management

A significant majority (77%) perceive KM as very important for institutional success during uncertain times.Effectiveness of KM strategies in retaining faculty shows a varied response, with 21% finding it effective and 58% somewhat effective.Opinions on how well institutions capture faculty knowledge range from excellent (17%) to poor (3%).Half of respondents (53%) believe that knowledge sharing among faculty is somewhat encouraged.Dissatisfaction (52%) is expressed regarding training opportunities for enhancing knowledge and skills.

Knowledge Management during Uncertain Times

77% of respondents believe KM strategies contribute significantly to the survival of institutions during uncertain times.Participation in KM activities varies, with 61% rarely or never participating.A 65% of respondents view knowledge sharing as very important for institutional survival.Evaluation of how well institutions address challenges in implementing KM practices varies among respondents.66% of respondents believe that effective knowledge sharing significantly contributes to institutional resilience and 48% are dissatisfied with the support provided to overcome challenges in KM implementation.

Employee Retention

62% of respondentsstated that their institution has not implemented KM strategies for faculty retention and 75%have considered leaving their current institution for other opportunities.

Recognition of contributions varies, with 66% expressing a neutral stance.Job security is deemed very important by 71% for staying at the current institution.Dissatisfaction (61%) is expressed with the level of institutional support.Recognition and rewards are perceived as low by 60%.A substantial 70% believe KM practices significantly enhance job satisfaction and employee retention.Recommendations are mixed, with 62% neutral about recommending their institution as a workplace.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

The investigation employs various statistical tests and logistic regression models to discern the impact of KM across different dimensions, including its influence on faculty, institutions, and uncertainty, and its implications for various aspects of faculty retention.

The tests for normality, namely Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk, unveil substantial deviations from normal distributions in the examined variables as (shown in the table 1). This prompts consideration for non-parametric or robust statistical methods in subsequent analyses.Accordingly, the ordinal regression analysis was adopted and not the linear regression analysis since they are not normally distributed.

Table1. *The table provides results from tests of normality using two different statistical tests (the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test)*

Tests of Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
KM.FAC(KM of Faculty)	.444	348	.000	.554	348	.000
KM.INST(KM of Institution)	.263	348	.000	.848	348	.000
KM.UNST(KM in uncertainty)	.279	348	.000	.860	348	.000
RET.FAC(Retention of Faculty)	.365	348	.000	.761	348	.000
RET.INST(Retention in Institution)	.347	348	.000	.761	348	.000
RET.KM(Retention of KM)	.416	348	.000	.626	348	.000
RET.REC(Retention due to university recognition)	.358	348	.000	.759	348	.000
RET.LEAVE(Retention and intention to leave the University)	.469	348	.000	.536	348	.000
RET.UNC(retention in uncertainty)	.421	348	.000	.594	348	.000
RET.UNC.KM(retention and uncertainty affecting KM)	.406	348	.000	.613	348	.000
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The logistic regression models" test was run. The findings offer insights into the relationship between KM and faculty retention at different levels. Notably, KM.FAC emerges as a negative influence on faculty retention, while KM.INST and KM.UNST positively impact it. The threshold estimates provide critical values for understanding the impact of KM on faculty retention.

Examining institutional retention, the analysis indicates that KM.FAC negatively influences this aspect, while KM.INST positively and significantly contributes to institutional retentionas shown in table 2. Threshold estimates further elucidate critical values associated with different levels of institutional retention.

Table2. *This model explores the influence of Knowledge Management (KM) on faculty retention (RET) with different levels of retention (RET.REC)*

Parameter Estimates		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[RET.REC = 1]	-.747	1.157	.417	1	.519	-3.015	1.521
	[RET.REC = 2]	.046	1.109	.002	1	.967	-2.128	2.221
	[RET.REC = 3]	5.445	1.102	24.438	1	.000	3.286	7.604
	[RET.REC = 4]	7.686	1.163	43.638	1	.000	5.405	9.966
Location	KM.FAC	-1.138	.245	21.565	1	.000	-1.618	-.658
	KM.INST	1.518	.237	40.907	1	.000	1.053	1.984
	KM.UNST	1.247	.350	12.706	1	.000	.561	1.932
Link function: Logit.								

Additional test was run that presents parameter estimates from a logistic regression model investigating the influence of Knowledge Management (KM) on faculty retention (RET) with different levels of institutional retention (RET.INST). The model also considers the location of KM in faculty (KM.FAC), institutions (KM.INST), and uncertainty (KM.UNST).This model suggests that KM plays a significant role in influencing institutional retention with different levels of retention. The effects vary based on the location of KM (faculty, institutions, uncertainty). The threshold estimates provide information about the critical points at which institutional retention is significantly influenced

by KM. Specifically, KM in institutions (KM.INST) has a strong positive impact on institutional retention, while KM in faculty (KM.FAC) has a negative impact.

Another test was run that provides parameter estimates from a logistic regression model examining the influence of Knowledge Management (KM) on a binary outcome related to faculty retention (RET.KM). The model also includes the location of KM in faculty (KM.FAC), institutions (KM.INST), and uncertainty (KM.UNST).This model suggests that KM plays a significant role in influencing faculty retention. The estimates for KM.FAC, KM.INST, and KM.UNST provide information about their respective influences on the odds of faculty retention. Specifically, KM.FAC positively affects the odds of faculty retention, while KM.INST negatively affects the odds. KM.UNST positively affects the odds of faculty retention. The threshold estimates offer insights into the critical values for different levels of faculty retention.

Additional exploration for uncertainty alongside KM, the study reveals that KM.FAC and KM.UNST positively influence a binary outcome related to uncertainty and faculty retention, whereas KM.INST shows no significant impact. Similarly, the examination of faculty leave underlines the positive influence of KM.FAC and the negative impact of KM.INST, with KM.UNST demonstrating no statistically significant impact.

Furthermore, the logistic regression model related to uncertainty and institutional retention suggests a positive influence of KM.FAC, a negative influence of KM.INST, and no significant impact from KM.UNST as shown in table 3.

Table3. *A model investigating the influence of Knowledge Management (KM) on a binary outcome related to faculty leave (RET.LEAVE)*

Parameter Estimates								
		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[RET.LEAVE = 0]	-2.678	1.273	4.426	1	.035	-5.172	-.183
Location	KM.FAC	1.463	.309	22.447	1	.000	.858	2.068
	KM.INST	-1.405	.294	22.914	1	.000	-1.981	-.830
	KM.UNST	-.619	.389	2.529	1	.112	-1.382	.144
Link function: Logit.								

As an answer to the three hypotheses in this research:

H1a: Knowledge management strategies have a positive impact on HEIs' survival during uncertain times.

Evidence from the analysis indicates that 77% of respondents believe KM strategies significantly contribute to the survival of institutions during uncertain times. Additionally, there is a support (99%) for the belief that universities should record and identify knowledge, suggesting that effective KM strategies are perceived as essential for institutional survival.

H1b: Knowledge sharing has a positive impact on HEIs' survival during uncertain times.

The analysis reveals that a majority (65%) views knowledge sharing as very important for institutional survival. This indicates recognition of the importance of knowledge sharing in ensuring the resilience and survival of higher education institutions (HEIs) during uncertain times.

H2: Knowledge management has a positive and significant effect on employee retention during uncertain times.

The hypothesis testing results support this assertion, with logistic regression models indicating a significant positive impact of Knowledge Management (KM) on employee retention. Specifically, KM.FAC, KM.INST, and KM.UNST were found to have varying effects on employee retention, highlighting the multifaceted nature of KM's influence on this aspect.

H3: Challenges faced by Faculty members in HEIs have a negative impact on implementing knowledge management practices.

The study highlights several challenges faced by faculty members in HEIs, including concerns about transparency, effectiveness of KM strategies, knowledge capture, training opportunities, and institutional support. These challenges can hinder the effective implementation of KM practices, suggesting a negative impact on KM implementation due to the constraints faced by faculty members.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Findings offer an understanding of faculty perceptions and experiences with KM in Lebanese higher education institutions during uncertain times. It emphasizes the need for approaches to KM implementation, faculty retention initiatives, and the cultivation of resilient institutions.The variations in KM's impact across different contexts emphasize the importance of tailored strategies for effective knowledge management in promoting faculty satisfaction, institutional resilience, and ultimately, faculty retention within private Lebanese higher education institutions.

The identified critical values and significant predictors offer valuable guidance for administrators and policymakers seeking to optimize knowledge management practices. These insights are crucial in navigating the challenges of uncertain times and fostering an environment conducive to the long-term success of both faculty and institutions in the higher education landscape.

Lebanese higher education institutions can create a resilient knowledge-sharing ecosystem, enhance faculty retention, and effectively navigate the challenges posed by uncertain timesby adopting of the following innovative knowledge management approaches and best practices:

1. **Enhanced Transparency:** ensuring clear communication about how knowledge is managed and utilized within the institution. This can build trust among faculty members and foster a collaborative knowledge-sharing culture.

2. **Tailored Training Programs:** developing training programs to address the specific needs and challenges identified by faculty members. This can include upskilling in digital technologies, crisis management, and effective communication strategies to navigate uncertain times.

3. **Collaborative Platforms:** establishing digital platforms that facilitate knowledge sharing among faculty membersthatcan serve as virtual spaces for collaborative projects, idea exchange, and the dissemination of best practices, fostering a sense of community.

4. **Reward systems:** implementing effective reward systems to acknowledge faculty contributions for knowledge sharing, innovative teaching methods, and research excellence, creating a positive environment that encourages faculty retention.

5. **Mentorship Programs:** introducing mentorship programs to facilitate knowledge transfer. This can provide valuable insights, guidance, and support, particularly during uncertain times, strengthening the institutional knowledge base.

6. **Flexibility in Work Models:** offering work models that accommodate the diverse needs of faculty members, such as hybrid teaching arrangements, remote work options, and adaptable schedules, promoting a healthy work-life balance and job satisfaction.

7. **Continuous Feedback Mechanisms:** establishing continuous feedback mechanisms to gather insights on different KMpractices implemented by institutions. This ensures ongoing improvement and adaptation to changing circumstances.

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