



How and What They Share? A Qualitative Study about Knowledge Sharing Practices of University Teachers

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Abstract *The current study is concerned with the knowledge sharing practices of university teachers in Pakistan. The prime purpose of this study was exploring the different types of knowledge, different channels used by teachers, and identification of different factors in knowledge sharing process. The semi structured interviews with 15 heads of different department were conducted. The researcher personally approached to respondents and collected the data. The main findings indicated that majority of respondents shared that although they considered technology as a powerful knowledge spreading. The study recommends that there is the dire need to provide the organizational support to these practices by developing a broad mechanism of knowledge sharing.*

Key Words: Knowledge Sharing, Higher education, Practices, University

Introduction

Knowledge sharing is a process in which individuals transfer and receive information from other individuals in understandable and applicable way to create new knowledge and expertise. According to Barr, Helm and D'Avray (2013), Knowledge sharing is the act of making knowledge available to others. There are two types of knowledge which is shared by the individuals; tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1991). Furthermore, it involves two way process; gaining of knowledge and receiving of knowledge. It has many advantages for the individual and the society as well.

Knowledge sharing is the process that urges to identify, locate, capture, share, organize, innovate, and add new knowledge. When individuals share their knowledge they become more competent. Knowledge sharing process makes the employees more confident and capable to do their jobs well. Through this process individuals update their knowledge and deliver the information that they have some important issues, topics, experiences and phenomena. Static knowledge cannot provide continuous benefit to the individual and the organization as compared to knowledge sharing. In knowledge intensive organizations knowledge sharing process remains in flow and dynamic. This flow of knowledge makes the employees more sustainable and incredible.

The problem concerned in this study is that knowledge sharing researches in university settings are limited in numbers. Knowledge sharing is considered a social phenomenon. So it is necessary to examine the place and process where it occurred. There are heavy about knowledge sharing in commercial sectors, which is disproportionate with university settings. Therefore, it is interesting to explore knowledge sharing practice in university settings. The main objectives of this study were to explore the different types of knowledge that teachers share with others, highlight the channels of communication teachers use to share the knowledge and, identify the contribution factors in knowledge sharing process.

Review of Related Literature

According to Saad and Haron (2013), knowledge sharing is a process used to exchange the knowledge with others. The aim of Knowledge sharing (KS) is creation of new knowledge by merging existing knowledge or

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exploration of current knowledge in new way (Antonova & Gourova, 2006). According to Nonaka (1995), knowledge sharing (KS) generates new knowledge, distributes it within the organizations and provides a spirit for new technological developments (Nonaka, 1995). It enhances the capacity of organizations in quality of work, decision making skill, problem solving ability and competency development (Saad & Haron, 2013).

In fact knowledge sharing is such an activity in which individuals, societies, and organizations exchange their knowledge with others which may be in different form i.e., information, skills or expertise (Ireson & Burel, 2010). KS process is not only helpful in developing new ideas but it also sharpens the existing skills and competencies of the members of organizations (Hakkarainen, Palonen, Paavola & Lehtinen, 2004).

Learning organizations captures and share knowledge and have the ability in creating, acquiring, and transferring the knowledge and modifying the behavior. It reflects new knowledge and insight (Garvin, 1993). These organizations also promote new knowledge, way of thinking, logical reasoning, listening, talking, reflecting, and making sense of experience for individuals to learn. This distribution occurs between the individuals, groups and organizations. Basically, Knowledge sharing is a type of communication which adopts different methods and techniques i.e., face to face communication, use of technology, by means of gestures and postures and it essentially adds something to the existing corpus of the knowledge (Jackson et al., 2006). In fact human beings are knowledge seekers and want to learn new things, competencies, skills and capabilities.

Types of Knowledge Sharing

Normally in organizations two types of knowledge is exhibited and shared; tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1991).

Tacit/ Implicit Knowledge

This knowledge is individual's personal property and based on one's experiences, values, beliefs and thoughts. Tacit knowledge is in people's minds and less concrete than explicit knowledge. It is understanding about something and more difficult to write and access. It often remains hidden and not known by others; even the people who possess this knowledge remain unaware about its presence and worth (Mulu, 2015). Tacit knowledge can be defined as "know what", "know how" and "know who" (Borgatti & Cross, 2003). This knowledge is something that people possess and express in the form of skills or complex cognitive skills of developing something new. The main problem with this knowledge is, it is difficult to codify, transfer and share to another person (Wellman, 2009).

This knowledge is very important because it provides base for context of people, places, ideas and experiences. To share this knowledge requires trust and extensive personal contact (Servin, 2005). Tacit knowledge cannot be openly observed. So, it is difficult to manage this type of knowledge because it is unconscious cognitive ability and completely personalized property (Hareya, 2011). It is purely personal and stores in peoples mind. It can build up through study and experience and develop through interaction with others. That is why it is context specified knowledge and difficult to formulize, record and articulate (Filemon & Uriarte, 2008).

Explicit Knowledge

Explicit knowledge can be classified in the form of words and numbers. It is transferable and shared in different shapes and means of texts, numbers and formulas (Wong, Tang & Mula, 2009). It is in the form of documents and databases. Instructional manuals, written procedures, learned lessons, research findings, rules and regulations are forms of explicit knowledge. This knowledge is easily accessible and available in written or oral forms. It is further divided into structured and unstructured knowledge. The documents and manuals information is organized, categorized and classified for future use and is possible to retrieve included in structured knowledge while the emails, images, training courses are examples of unstructured knowledge because information that they contain cannot be recovered and retrieved (Servin, 2005). Wong, Tang and Mula (2009) cited Nonaka about explicit knowledge in their work; according to it explicit knowledge can be shared in more systematic and formal ways. Types of knowledge are presented in a figure below.

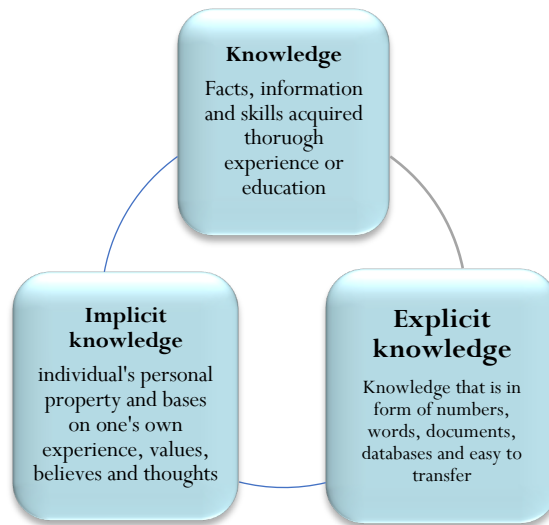


Figure 1: Types of knowledge

Knowledge sharing process involves two aspects; knowledge donating and knowledge absorbing (collecting). Knowledge donating means share ones' personal intellect capital with others and knowledge absorbing means connect with others to support and increase one's personal intellect assets (Van den Hooff & Van Weenen, 2004). Ardichvili, Page and Wentling (2003) considered the knowledge sharing as both activities i.e., supply of knowledge and demand for knowledge.

Moreover, within knowledge intensive organizations the role of the universities is credible. University level is considered the most important level in the educational life of an individual and society as well. Universities have the responsibility of production, distribution and application of knowledge to equip the individuals to response efficiently with the changing environment. In Higher Education institutions (HEIs) employees are knowledge workers. These workers have expertise, experience and high degrees of education and they engage themselves in creation, distribution and application of knowledge (Davenport, 2005; Sohail & Daud, 2009). Highly knowledgeable, competent, committed and skillful faculty can lead the individuals and the nations towards the top of the global ranking. Academics implicit knowledge constitute the store house of an educational institute that needs to manage to make it accessible for others. According to Yang and Ismail (2008) faculty of HEIs should not only provide knowledge to students but also be able to manage and combine their existing knowledge for next generation.

Faculty of higher education institutions (HEI's) required to understand and respond according to the knowledge based economy where knowledge serves as a key weapon for the development of the faculty (Yang & Ismail, 2008). Therefore, higher education institutions (HEI's) have the responsibility not only to acquire the knowledge but also apply it speedily. To complete this task knowledge sharing is important for all the members of HEI's (Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004). One should be aware that it is the time to share the knowledge and experiences rather than hoarding the knowledge.

Methods and Procedures

This was a qualitative study in nature and rely upon the data collected through semi-structured interviews. Sample of the study was selected through simple random sampling technique. 15 head of different departments were selected from 05 universities of Punjab. From each university 03 head of departments were selected randomly.

A semi-structured interview was administered for head of departments. This interview having questions about knowledge sharing status (what they mostly share), channels of communication, contributing factors in

knowledge sharing methods and those methods that used by teachers in their departments mostly. They were also asked about the motivating factors and knowledge sharing acceleration techniques. Summary regarding knowledge sharing is shown in figure 03 in the form of word tree. Word tree also provided the glance about the responses of the respondents.

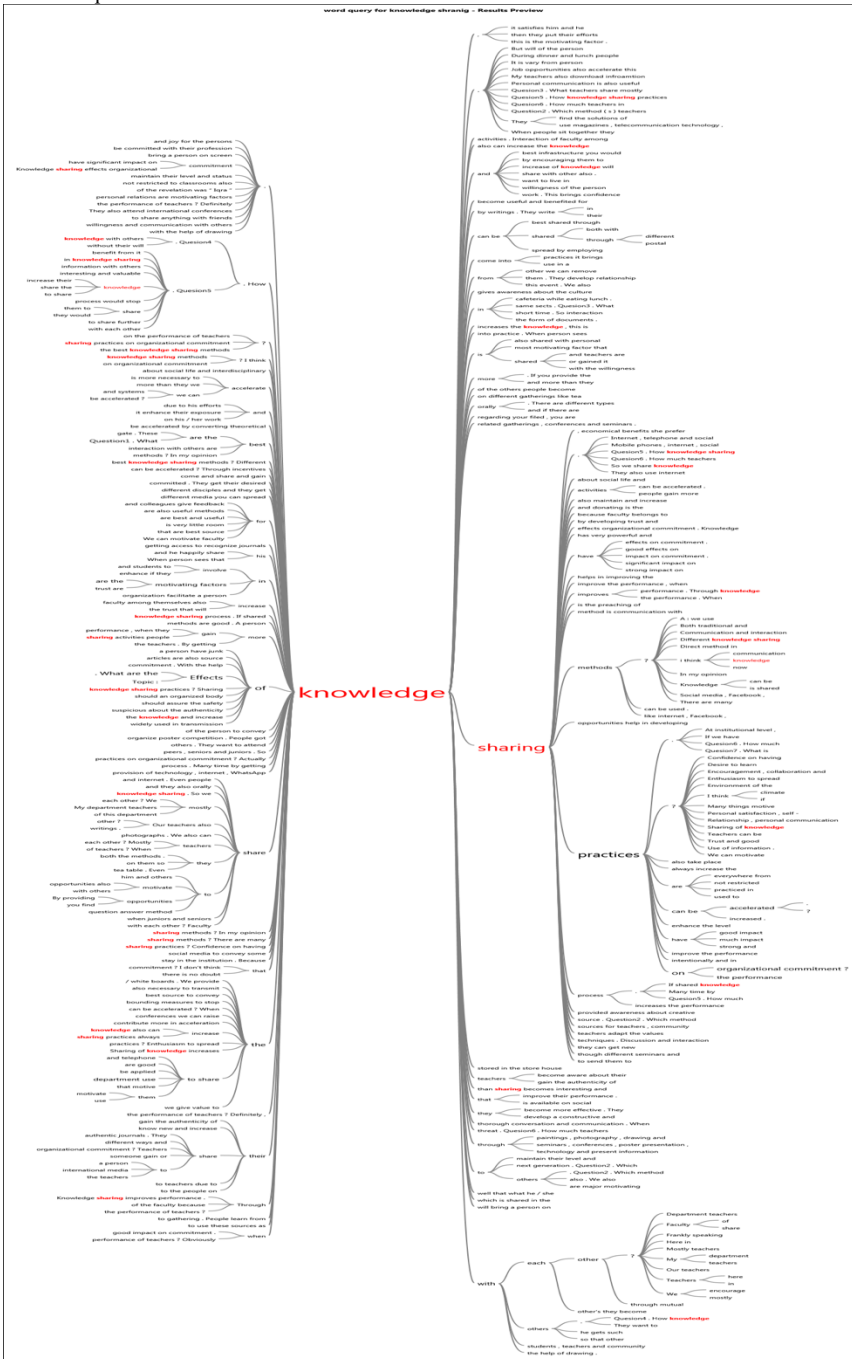


Figure 03: Word tree about knowledge sharing

Table 2: Themes, Patterns and Discrepancies: Knowledge sharing, Organizational Commitment and Performance of Faculty.

Theme	Pattern	Discrepancy
Best knowledge sharing methods/ channels.	1. Traditional methods Face to face communication Seminars Conferences Symposiums Formal and informal gatherings 2. Technological methods Print media (Magazine, Journals) Electronic media (Internet, E-mails social media, Multimedia)	White board/ Black Board, Paper and Pencil. Sculpture, Paintings and Drawing
Commonly used Knowledge sharing methods/channels	1. Conventional Methods Face to face communication Oral presentations Seminars Conferences Symposiums Formal and informal gatherings 2. Technology based methods. Print media (Magazine, Journals) Electronic media (Internet, E-mails social media, Multimedia)	
Types of knowledge teachers share with their colleagues	1. Implicit knowledge Experience Thought/Ideas Liking/ Disliking Patents Skills 2. Explicit knowledge Articles/ Researches Journals Websites Reports	Syllabus and teaching material
Factors contribute in knowledge sharing practices	Will of person Interaction with others Trust	Encouragement Time factor
Motivational factors for knowledge sharing	Arrangement of seminars and conferences. Availability of technology Interaction with others Trust Obligation form ALLAH	Recognition

From semi-structured interview following themes, patterns and discrepancies emerged.

Best Knowledge Sharing Methods

It was asked from the heads of the departments that which methods they considered best that would be used to share the knowledge with others. Almost all the respondents answered that they considered communication and

face to face interaction as best methods to convey the knowledge to others. Respondents were not agree about single method of communication, this communication and interaction can be through technology or face to face communication. Some respondents were in favour of technology and some in face to face communication. Some respondents said that both print and electronic media were best to share knowledge. Respondent 12 said, *“All the world has shifted from traditional to global methods. Print media, electronic media and telecommunication are bet methods to transmit the knowledge to others.”* Respondent 10 further strengthen it by saying, *“In my opinion knowledge can be shared both with the help of technology and traditionally. Both methods are best and useful for knowledge sharing. Mobile phones, internet, social media are emerging trends but seminars, conferences, paper presentations, journal articles are also source of knowledge sharing”*. According to the respondents both methods are useful in knowledge sharing process. They consider mobile phones, social media, and e-mails as technological method for knowledge sharing and other face to face communication methods categorizes as traditional methods of knowledge sharing. Teachers also use traditional ways to share the knowledge. They go to the seminars, conferences, symposiums and other educational gatherings. They like these channels to share their knowledge with others. As respondent no. 3 replied, *“I think knowledge can be best shared through conferences, seminars. Publication are useful methods for knowledge sharing. Internet, telephone and social media are also useful but people have doubt in their minds about the authenticity of the material which is available on this media”*. According to these respondents traditional ways are authenticated and people can trust on the knowledge which is shared by the person who owned specific knowledge. In some institutions people still preferred to conventional black/white board techniques to deliver and gain the knowledge. Respondent 15 told, *“We use the black boards/ white boards and if there are some complicated diagrams than we take support from multimedia”*. Another respondent (Respondent 1) strengthen it, he said, *“Although postal letters, telephones, magazines, journals and internet are used to share the knowledge but we can share knowledge in informal gatherings like tea clubs, parties and cafeteria”*. Respondent 11 said that we can share knowledge in best way by presenting our work to others. She said *“Knowledge can be best shared through sculpture, paintings, drawings and photographs. Than it can be spread to others with the help of technology”*. She presented a different way of knowledge communication. According to her people take interest in visionary knowledge. When someone visually present their knowledge in innovative way, people capture more than orally presentations and if audio video presentation are combined it become more effective and useful. Due to the expansion of technological changes people now going to change the trends of communication and knowledge transfer. Respondent 9 responded, *“Now a days, media like WhatsApp, Facebook, twitter, emails and video conferencing are also best source to convey the knowledge.* It was also clear that our teaching community mostly prefer to traditional methods of communication rather than innovative and new trends in communication technology. Although they considered technology as a power full knowledge spreading and communicating agent but they were not adopting it in their lives for knowledge sharing.

Methods/ Channels University Teachers use to Share the Knowledge

It was asked from the head of departments that in your department which methods and channels were used to share the knowledge with others. According to the answers of the respondents it was concluded that almost all the department’s teachers use both latest methods and traditional methods to share their knowledge. They select methods according to the demand of the subject, topic and respondents. As respondent 08 said, *“Here in the department my teachers use both the methods. They share knowledge through technology and present information to others orally or in written ways”*. From the responses of the respondents it was also analyzed that university teachers mostly prefer conventional and traditional methods. They prefer to communicate and conversation with other to share somethings. They liked to go to conferences and seminars for knowledge sharing and communication. They also preferred formal and informal gatherings for sharing their knowledge. As respondent 07 said, *“Mostly teachers share knowledge thorough conversation and communication. When we sit together on different occasions senior and juniors discuss many things. Teachers of this department also attend seminars, conferences and symposiums”*. It was further strengthen by respondent 02. He said, *“Mostly, people preferred personal communication and mutual interaction for knowledge sharing”*. This situation shows that our teachers still focus on conventional methods of knowledge transfer and sharing. Although they use technology to communicate with each other but they prefer face to face meetings more than technology. It was also find out that they consider all type of information in the field of knowledge. According to them informal information was also bits of knowledge. As respondent 04 said, *“We*

encourage our teacher to discuss and interactively communicate with others and present information for others. In my department we organize seminar, conferences and meetings frequently". Teachers also use technology to convey and obtain knowledge but this use of technology was not as common as other traditional channels. Respondent 15 said, "Teachers in my department mostly use conventional methods. They present the material through talking and chalking. They also use technology, mobile phones, internet and multimedia when required". Teachers also use writing to share the knowledge. Respondent one said, "Our teachers also share knowledge by writings. They write in different HEC recognizes journals and other journals and magazines". Some other respondents also preferred writing to share their knowledge. This analysis showed that although teachers use both traditional and technology based methods for knowledge sharing but most of the teachers prefer seminars, conferences and symposiums to share their knowledge with others.

Types of Knowledge Shared by Teachers

It was asked from heads of departments that what their teachers share mostly with their colleagues regarding the field of education. From their responses two themes emerged about the types of knowledge sharing i.e., explicit knowledge sharing and implicit knowledge sharing. They told in the interview that their faculty share both types of knowledge. As respondent 08 told, "My teachers share almost all the things. They share their experiences, their thoughts, their liking and disliking, reports and news. They also share about articles, researches, journals, different web sites". It was analyzed from their interviews that nature of knowledge depends on the requirement of the persons. If they need explicit knowledge they asked about it and if they required implicit knowledge they search about it. But it come in front that teachers depends on the both types of knowledge. Respondent 02 said, "My teachers share about different types of syllabus and lectures about education. They also share best pieces of work, personal experiences and information". In their response respondents also explained different types of explicit knowledge that teachers share in their departments. As respondent 05 said, "Publications, conference reports, websites, articles, journals, lectures, data regarding instrument are all part of our education system so faculty share almost all these things with their colleagues and friends". About the sharing of explicit knowledge respondent 14 said, "Generally, our faculty share their publications and articles. Our teacher mostly focus on research and publications". Respondents explained different types of implicit knowledge that university teachers share with their friends and fellows. In this type of knowledge their include patents, skills and personal thoughts also. Respondent 01 said, "Here in this department teachers share their novels, fictions (afšana), poetry and literary essays. They share the modern approaches, techniques and methods related to literature and linguistics. They also share the reports of meetings and event of literary societies and clubs. Another respondent responded about it. Respondent 11 said, "Our teachers share mostly their art work, their unique designing, creative art. They also visually present their creative work. Teachers also share their research work, techniques and new invention in different conferences and seminars". Implicit knowledge sharing was further supported by respondent 13. Teachers also share their innovative ideas with their fellows as respondent 13 told, "Mostly faculty share innovative ideas, new researches because most of the faculty are foreign qualified. They also go to abroad to participate in symposium, conference and seminar. So they share that reports with their friends and fellows". It showed that university teachers share theories, reports, books, syllabus, thoughts, experiences, skills, news and views.

Factors Contributing in Knowledge Sharing Practices

From the interview of the respondents, patterns related to contributing factors in knowledge sharing were developed. Respondents were asked about the motivating factors towards knowledge sharing. Form their responses different factors were identified which motivate them to participate in knowledge sharing practices. It was identified that interaction among faculty members and their willingness to share motivate to participate in knowledge sharing activities. Respondent 15 said, "To do progress and interaction with others motivate to share knowledge. But at the same time will of the person count more. You cannot force people to share their experiences and other information without their will. Time factor also contribute more in acceleration the knowledge sharing practices". Willingness of the person is necessary to share the knowledge. If a person is not ready to share knowledge would stop to himself only. Respondent 06 further supported it by saying, "Confidence on having knowledge and willingness of the person to convey knowledge to others are major motivating factors. If person don't want to share than this process would stop". Interaction among faculty is also an important source to motivate the teachers to involve in knowledge sharing

practices. About the interaction of faculty respondent 14 said, *“We can motivate faculty for knowledge sharing to send them to participate in different conferences, seminars and workshops. When they interact with others they learn more”*. Respondents also considered the trust as an important factor for knowledge sharing. A respondent 01 said, *“When people sit together they trust on each other and share many things with each other”*. Respondent 08 said in this favour, *“I think climate and trust because I see most of the things can be shared with friends only”*. About the trust as a motivating factor for knowledge sharing respondent 04 said, *“Encouragement, collaboration and trust are motivating factors in knowledge sharing”*. Regarding the trust respondent 10 said, *“Trust and good relationships are the most important factors that motive to share the knowledge”*. Another contributing factors come in front was enthusiasm of person to share, sense of happiness and satisfaction when ones’ knowledge come into practice and provision of opportunities to share.

Methods to Accelerate Knowledge Sharing Practices

When respondents were asked that how knowledge sharing practices can be accelerated? They showed different viewpoints in this regard. As respondent 06 said that knowledge sharing process can be accelerate by providing the opportunities to share. He said, *“By conducting workshop, seminars, purchasing books for library, by getting access to recognize journals knowledge sharing practices can be increased”*. Opportunities for sharing can also enhance participation of faculty in knowledge sharing practices as respondents 12 said, *“If opportunities are provided to the teachers to share their knowledge more and more than we can accelerate knowledge sharing process”*. Some respondents considered the provision of latest technological facilities as an important source to quicken knowledge sharing practices. Respondent 02 said, *“Provision of technology, internet, WhatsApp can accelerate knowledge sharing activities”*. Some respondents said that knowledge sharing practices can be accelerated by developing trust and good relationships. As respondent 04 said, *“if you are working with other faculty and you are behaving in good way and respect the idea of other and do not steal the idea of other it will develop the trust that will increase knowledge sharing practices”*. Respondent 03 said that if we follow the message of Islam regarding the knowledge than we can motivate persons to involve in knowledge sharing activates because Islam has ordered to spread the light of knowledge to all. He said, *“Knowledge sharing is the preaching of our Holy Prophet (SAW) so we should teach these preaching to motivate them to share”*. Another respondent said, *“First word of the revelation was “Iqra”. Knowledge sharing and donating is the religious order for the Muslims”*. Respondent 09 considered recognition as a factor that can accelerate knowledge sharing practices. According to him’ *“When you recognize a person due to his efforts and knowledge, it satisfies him and he happily share his knowledge more. Respondents said that motivation and incentives can also accelerate knowledge sharing practices.*

Recommendations

In Pakistan knowledge sharing practices occurred at individual level frequently. There is the dire need to provide the organizational support to these practices by developing a broad mechanism of knowledge sharing among employees, communities and departments of the universities with the help of technology to stimulate this process.

1. Educational organizations should encourage their employees to interact with one and others by providing them opportunities of collaborative knowledge construction and creation through meetings, trainings and workshops within institutions and outside the institutions.
2. To promote the knowledge sharing process, institutions should provide technological access to teachers so that they can receive and distribute the knowledge at global level.
3. To promote knowledge sharing culture and eluding the thought of considering knowledge as power, there is a need to design an effective knowledge management system for knowledge storing, creation, representation and further sharing.
4. Institutions should provide sufficient free time to faculty so that they may involve in research activities that are the sole source of new knowledge creation and better performance.

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