



# Study of sharing knowledge resources in business schools

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to propose a common business school framework based on knowledge resources that are available in business schools. To support the arguments made based on review literature, the paper presents the holistic framework of knowledge resources in a business school and also provides a knowledge value chain in sharing the resources. The paper then applies the framework to study the provisions of knowledge resources in a business school to examine the effect of knowledge sharing.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Drawing on insights from review literature the paper starts from a broad view on knowledge sharing in business schools. Then the paper proposes a knowledge-sharing framework. To evaluate the framework, the paper investigates one of the business school's knowledge sharing tools. Wherever data were insufficient, logical interpretation is provided. The framework is compared with respect to business schools. Then it is analyzed with the business school's online knowledge sharing tool.

**Findings** – The paper finds that the rapid pace of change in knowledge resources is increasingly influencing the creation, publication and dissemination of educational materials and sharing information – thus, finally having an impact on learning. The paper finds that there is an urgent need to share all the knowledge resources in business schools for effective delivery. Some important general observations are argued for, while studying the online knowledge-sharing tool. First, effective information technology infrastructure for sharing knowledge resources is a must, and second, all the resources need to be shared online. The paper finds that the purpose of knowledge sharing in business schools would create value in the form of academic and personal value.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides useful suggestions for business schools to adopt knowledge-sharing tools. The framework proposed can be adopted by any business school worldwide to enhance their ratings and processes. The paper reveals through study that, business schools must actively explore the immense potential and the wide ramifications of the knowledge resources that are hidden in different academic domains rather than just waiting to adopt passively some tool at different academic domains. This paper sets out to inspire business school leaders to find out more on knowledge sharing tools. The chosen research strategy was to study business schools and analyze their content, looking for similarities and complementarities in their nature and their strategies with respect to knowledge sharing. First, the paper identified existing systems, examining available processes in the business school, and expanding them through more searches. This paper is based on reflections combined with inputs from informal discussions and interviews conducted with several management educators, management consultants, management students and managers, which had taken place at several meetings, seminars and conferences over the last few years.

**Keywords** Knowledge sharing, Education, Business schools, Admissions, Performance management

**Paper type** Research paper



## 1. Introduction

Business schools have been using information for years to improve the efficiency of academic services and effectiveness of academic programs. As more trustees,

administrators, faculty, parents, students have begun to seek better outcomes, and not surprisingly these schools are investing technology enabled knowledge resources. But the business schools are finding that technology implementation does not necessarily improve decision-making nor does it necessarily improve outcomes and decision-making. This paves way to recognize the urgent need for sharing knowledge resources, which is a key asset in an effective way.

A big and major crucial feature of business schools is that they are made up of a number of nested systems. In analytical terms, this can also be described as levels or units. These levels range from faculty, student, research, administration, academics and placement, etc. The reports in business schools are numerous as the requirement of reports from level to level is difficult. Analytical needs differ, but are present at every level of the system. A robust collection of knowledge resources that reflect the information needs of all levels in business schools is necessary. In particular, data must be gathered at all levels to the user in a fine-grained manner.

A review of any magazine or newspaper that covers Business schools lead anybody to conclude that the these institutions are under constant assault by industry, journalists, and academics alike (Sargenti *et al.*, 2006) to justify their existence, relevancy, and effectiveness, given the rapid rate of change in today's world.

Business schools are always challenged to stay relevant both in terms of education and research. Business schools generate information about students, courses, faculty and staff that include managerial systems, organizational personnel, lectures details, quality research and so on. This useful information, which serves as a strategic input, is very useful to for improving the quality of educational process. Research shows that technology implementations in educational institutions fail not because of technology but because of insufficient attention is paid to issues related to institution's culture (Levine, 2001; Friedman and Hoffman, 2001). Ranjan, 2008a), and Ranjan and Khalil, 2008, studied the role of knowledge management tools in business schools by providing institutional framework.

Business schools use information technology based tools for admissions, registrations, timetable processing, and performance evaluations of their faculty, students, staff and administrations. The knowledge generated from these would be useful for staying abreast of all.

## 2. Related research and motivation

High quality research work is done on knowledge management in academia (Bernborn, 1999; Kallick and Wilson, 2000; Kidwell *et al.*, 2000; Petrides and Guiney, 2002; Petrides, 2002; Serban and Luan, 2002). But few studies are devoted to institutional learning using knowledge practices. (Corbitt *et al.*, 2005) gives various factors influencing the use of knowledge-based tools in higher education. But few studies are devoted to institutional learning and sharing knowledge resources using knowledge management principles and practices. This is the motivation of the paper.

According to (Brown and Duguid, 2000), profound changes in competition have made institutions think like business. The business schools behave like educational markets and are becoming global to benchmark and internationalize their curricula. Business schools also have to adjust themselves and develop strategies to respond rapidly to the changes in technologies and increasing demands of stakeholders (Canen and Canen, 2002) discussed ways for fostering innovation management and innovation

in management education sensitive to cultural diversity. They explored strands in the literature concerning cross-cultural awareness and argued that logistics could help in understanding, sensitizing and taking into account cultural diversity in business schools.

If we look at some recent studies, Lytras *et al.* (2007) has shown how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) provide a wide range of solutions for several critical issues related to the management of education. Laha (2002) has researched the various business school surveys that were conducted in India regarding the quality of management education. He expressed that rating parameters cannot be compared from one business school to another. Muniapan (2008) studied Malaysian management education and explored various issues in the effectiveness of management education.

There are several studies conducted on knowledge management based principles and strategies towards organizational learning (Earl, 2001; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Grant, 1996; Hansen *et al.*, 1999; Bieber *et al.*, 2002; Duffy, 2000; Levine, 2001).

The possible problem with business schools is that, knowledge is held tacitly by individuals, and it becomes very much difficult to share it institution-wide.

In the next section the paper presents the academic framework for the adoption of knowledge resources in business schools.

### 3. Knowledge resources in business schools

The business schools have been making substantial investments into information technologies to meet their goals to increase the effectiveness of operations. All business schools are using the information about their students to gain insights into bigger issues like students' performance, placements, students' admissions and students' successes. The regulatory bodies, accreditation bodies are seeking more information to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the business schools (this process is often termed as rating).

Unfortunately the business schools are giving less importance to institutional structure, process and culture. However the rapid growth of emerging and cutting edge technologies coupled with knowledge management systems have led to the increased adoption of new applications that includes ranking the business schools, assessing the quality of lecture delivery, assessing the programs and courses, measuring the performance of students and faculty, tracking research and developments and enhancing faculty development. The integration of previously mentioned applications, enable the sharing of knowledge that is necessary for any business school. Knowledge resources' sharing ensures effective allocation of resources and staff, increases productivity without increasing the cost.

Knowledge can be defined as (Awad and Ghaziri, 2004) the understanding that is obtained through the process of experience or appropriate study. The Knowledge principles if applied to business schools will enhance the quality of academic learning process. The term "Knowledge Management" (KM) is used to describe everything from the application of new technology to the harnessing of the intellectual capital of an organization (Sallis and Jones, 2002).

In the recent years a wide range of business techniques, including performance management, quality assurance and total quality management, have had a direct or indirect impact on business schools, thanks to the accreditation processes all over the world. Each business schools would either have to perform and sustain further

development or go low ranked. Most business schools realized that they would improve performance if their staff, faculty and all resources work together. However, building collaboration among people is not an easy task. Techniques such as meetings, forums and discussions are used extensively to create knowledge through the processes of social interaction and collaboration. Tools such as e-mail, video conferencing, use of interactive white boards, blogs and wikis, discussion forums, chat services and intranets are also used to encourage active collaboration among people in management institutions.

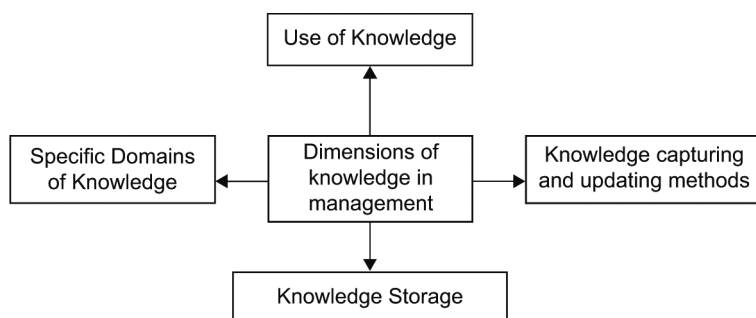
The success of any business school can be judged by analyzing the acceptance of its students in the companies and firm and their work done to enhance the research and developments (Chou and Tsai, 2004) stress on the importance of organizational knowledge for creating activities rather than individual knowledge for creating activities. Figure 1 presents the dimensions of knowledge in business school. It is necessary to capture, store and analyze knowledge.

Specific domains of knowledge in business school can be faculty, research, students, courses, training and developments, seminars and conferences, administrations, where in enormous flow of knowledge occurs. If the knowledge is captured in each and every domain and updated regulated, it would enhance the quality of business school programs and also the students. Interaction, transfer and sharing of knowledge are very much critical to success of any business school.

#### 4. Business schools framework based on knowledge resources

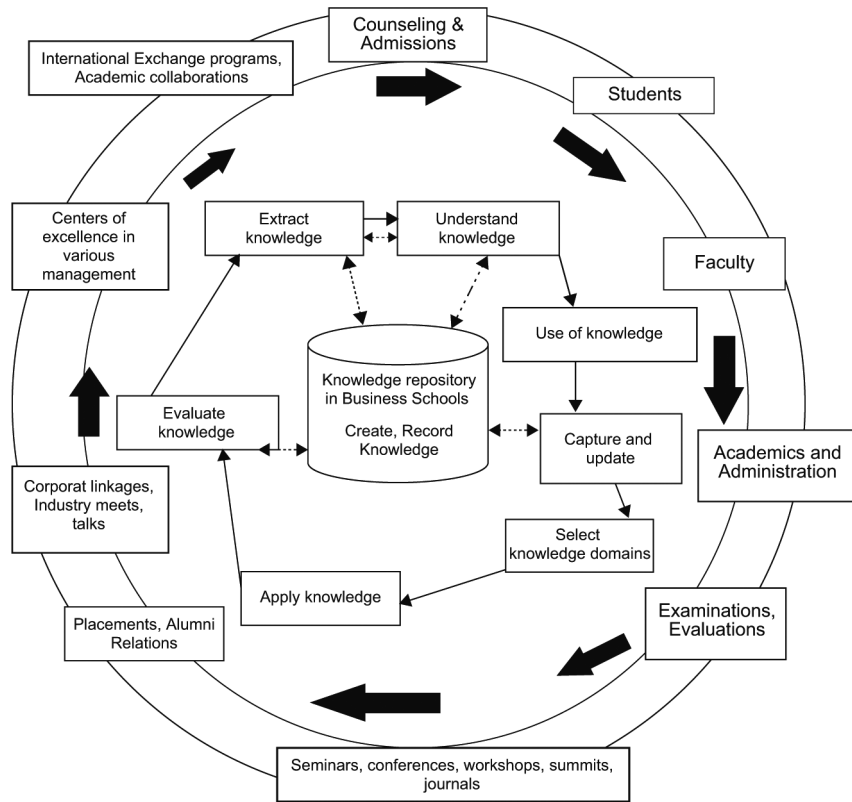
Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of knowledge resources in any business school. Students acquire knowledge through their interactions with faculty, in side and outside of classrooms. Faculty share knowledge with students and administration domain improves the interactions. The administration process shares the knowledge with key stakeholders. There should be more cohesive processing in all the entities. The whole process can be seen as a cycle where each activity will have the impact on the other activity such as placements and bagging university ranks in any business school will facilitate impact on admissions, etc.

An online evaluation system is necessary in any business school to adopt the previous framework to have cohesive integrated approach. The knowledge that is generated from faculty and courses can be tabulated in context of data, information and knowledge and their relevance. Regardless of the reasons, the business schools are



Source: Adapted from Jayanthi and Saani (2007)

**Figure 1.**  
The dimensions of  
knowledge in business  
school



**Figure 2.**  
Knowledge resources  
framework in business  
schools

faced with rapid change and increased call for more effective use of knowledge and resources. Developing an online model that allows for the successful adoption of sharing knowledge resources can be critical to the success of any business school. Business schools to sustain in the continuous knowledge flow. Knowledge sharing increases the ability of the business schools to learn from its environment and incorporate knowledge into the academic processes by adapting to new tools and technologies. Sharing of knowledge resources will help examine the overlapping and ongoing relationships among faculty, students, course, and programs in any business school.

While it is generally understood that a robust technological infrastructure plays a crucial role in helping business schools gather and analyze knowledge to share among all stakeholders and improve outcomes, the barriers to successful technology implementation in educational institutions can be attributed to a narrow understanding of just how these technologies manifest themselves within.

The cycled processes in Figure 2 essentially look at the methods to manage the academic interactions better.

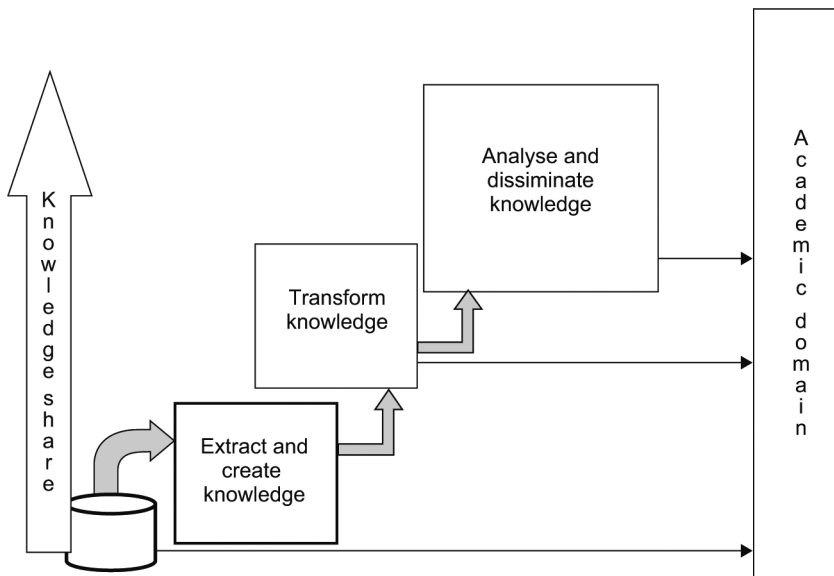
Knowledge sharing approach is conscious integration of all human resources involved, all the academic processes and the technological advancements involved

in designing, capturing and implementing the intellectual infrastructure in a business school. The approach supports in shaping and managing the academic rigor to learn by balancing among various entities in an academic environment examines the issues on engaging the individual in any approach at sharing knowledge as the notion of knowledge cannot be separated from the user. However the emphasis has to be on knowledge sharing at the institutional level, apart from the individual level.

Figure 3 defines the knowledge value chain in sharing the resources in academic domain. The proposed framework will enable business schools to quickly respond to its goals and objectives and in some cases pre-empt staff and faculty demands and needs. To build and develop a robust and thriving environment, the business schools need to look beyond technology and develop the overall culture of accessing, sharing and managing knowledge. The framework provides identification of the skills, knowledge, behavior, and capabilities needed to meet current and future personnel selection needs, in alignment with the differentiations in strategies and institutional priorities in integrated manner. This can focus the individual and group development plans to eliminate the gap between the industry and academia. The major critical success factors that can be identified from the academic framework are executive support, key investments in IT (both hardware and software), support staff, collaborative culture, sense of empowerment, understanding of student and faculty needs, well defined process, pilot testing, faculty initiative, IT department support, developmental funding.

### 5. Applying the framework in business school: a study

There are many reasons for studying the knowledge resources in business schools. All business schools possess a state of the art modern information infrastructure. Sharing



**Figure 3.**  
The knowledge value  
chain in sharing the  
resources

knowledge among faculty, staff, students, course, programs, placements and administration is the normal process in all business schools. The academic environment in general is considered trustful in the sense that no one is hesitating nor being afraid of publishing knowledge. Any business schools will look forward for its abreast strategic position in their continuous ratings by various rating bodies for competitive advantage. Each institute wants its internal documentation management and the level of information and knowledge sharing to improve. This claim by author would be justified in the next section.

This paper studied the provisions focusing on business schools in which knowledge creation and sharing are essential elements by taking a specific example of one of top ten business schools in India imparting business school education for more than 30 years. The institution's name is masked in order to maintain confidentiality.

At this school, data about the students like exams marks, evaluations, demographics, attendance, grades, etc. are collected. The school also collects the data pertaining faculty, courses, their research work, conferences attended, papers published, text books written, case studies written, books edited, articles written, academic administrative roles played, mentoring, etc. The data gets collected and is stored in databases. An online knowledge sharing software is developed to share the amount of knowledge generated from all domains (refer Figure 2, for academic domains). The most basic common unit of analysis should drive data-collection efforts and processes. This means that data should be gathered at the source. If all data from all academic domains of Figure 2 are collected and stored without any redundancy or discrepancy then there is room to share these resources, analyze these huge volumes of data. One can understand the data that will be used to measure the academic learning. Even in the most centralized business school system, the outcome of instruction comes at the individual level. Data on student, faculty, student program participation, teacher professional development activities and test scores need to be available at the lowest level for aggregation to any meaningful unit.

This business school felt that it is vital that the system be transparent in order to combat efforts to cheat or otherwise tamper with the data. The data at the student or classroom level was aggregated and fed upwards to higher levels of the educational accountability structure to inform system decisions made at those levels. Then an online knowledge sharing software was developed.

A system without proper security in place could be subject to manipulation by any business school-level actors. Again, this is not an argument for or against centralization. Rather, one must recognize that there are knowledge management decisions that are appropriate and possible at each level of an organization. Knowledge sharing tools should reflect this reality. Hence the business school ensured that the access control mechanisms of data, reports, and grades varied from students to faculty to administrators. First, it attempted its management decision support by introducing a web based intranet application that can share knowledge resources regarding courses, programs, research, all academic related information between faculty, students and administration. The Online Knowledge Sharing Tool (OKST) integrates all the modules like academic, fee, hostel and administration, research, seminars, placements, international exchanges, alumni relations, and other important stakeholders. It provides a means for faculty, students, academic program officers,



administrators, and accounts managers to access and develop online resources to enhance learning and teaching.

From OKST, students can query for the marks subject wise or program wise in a term. Students can submit faculty feedback, select the elective courses for various terms or take online quiz. Students submit assignments online to their faculty directly or submit to academic program office. Students can verify attendance records for any course or program. Students can access timetables, course outlines term to term. Students' handbook, notices, circulars are available through this interface. Faculties can assign marks and award grades to students. Grades are visualized by line, pie and bar charts. Faculty build questions bank to design and conduct on line quizzes. Quiz is evaluated automatically and marks are submitted. Notices regarding schedule of quizzes are mentioned. Faculties check the feedback for their respective courses. Students and faculty can view complete reports pertaining to subject marks, term marks, program marks year wise, course wise, term/semester wise. Faculty teaching guidelines, course outlines, lecture notes and lecture materials are available. Students can verify subject credits and topics of subjects. The invigilation guidelines for examinations are available in the OKST. The facility of messengers and group mailing system is available between staff, students and faculty. This application is integrated with campus intranet.

Only students, faculty, academic program officers, administrators and accounts-managers use this application. Online counseling information regarding registration like number of seats filled, number of seats available, etc. can be enabled. Students pay mess, hostel fees, term fees and tuition fees to accounts-managers. Sharing of research interests and sharing of research results among faculty is possible. Faculty can participate in online discussions with other colleagues on the internships of students, research project proposals thus facilitating interdisciplinary opportunities. Faculty also consults and share research interdisciplinary areas for various publications, monographs and books. The benefits include increased competitiveness, reduced turn around time for research, improved internal and external services and effectiveness. Sharing of information regarding budgeting and accounting among policy makers and accountants is done through OKST. Details regarding purchasing details, payroll, and accounts payable, FAQs monitoring of monthly events pertaining to admissions, courses, alumni, course development, seminars and conferences are available. The feedback experience of people at this business school is positive and satisfactory.

### 5.1 Discussion

In the earlier sections the paper made optimistic claims and views concerning the business schools were given. The claim, that business schools possess a state of the art modern information infrastructure may be true. The recording of computer usages by students at labs, security control systems at main entrance for incoming/out going of vehicles, registration forms for various courses, salary slips generation for faculty and staff and intra and inter department circulars and notices are based on paper document with Information Technology (IT) support. But the paper strongly believes that a good IT infrastructure is an inevitable precondition for any successful introduction of such knowledge-sharing tool. A workflow system for electronic preparation, sharing, storing and intelligent retrieval of relevant business school documents was



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implemented and available in electronic form. This addresses user groups with a stronger focus on management, faculty and staff as a permanent workforce. Table I provides the for the major knowledge support mechanisms for the framework to effectively be implemented.

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It may be true with regard to other claim that domain knowledge is transferred in lectures, seminars, etc. by faculty this dissemination of knowledge can be viewed as a positive feature and can be considered optimistically. However valuable knowledge can also be found in the experiences related to research grants/projects proposals, research and publication, writing of well structured research papers, reviewing and discussing new courses, new research areas, organizing international events and recording the same, etc. Generally it is assumed that dissemination of knowledge would eliminate “competitive advantage” of faculty member. Compare this situation with other types of business organizations where experts are encouraged and motivated to contribute their expert knowledge to the organizational memory with the goal (mission) to make knowledge accessible for others. The mindset of people from “my knowledge” should change to “our knowledge”. As a matter of fact, sharing knowledge in business schools is easier than in business organizations. Here the paper recommends that a strong mentoring (counseling) system will enhance knowledge sharing. The essence of business school teaching lies in creating an insatiable love for

Academic domain	Infrastructure/equipments	Access/usage
Communications	Telephone Voicemails Messengers Blogs Online teaching and learning tools Interactive white boards E-mails Video conferencing	List servers Web sites Notices Electronic addresses
Research	Network connections State of the art labs Plug in classrooms Amphitheatre classrooms Paperless notices and information Online sharing and knowledge	Groupware tools Graphical software Knowledge management tools
Administration/ faculty/students	Opportunities Courses Departments Research Seminars Conferences	High-level network connectivity for creating, sharing and transforming information
Libraries/collections	File servers, high-level connections, electronic digital libraries, online subscription to journals, new papers and magazines. Provision for electronic references	Search/retrieval/office/classroom

**Table I.**  
Knowledge support  
mechanisms in a business  
school

**Source:** Adapted from Ranjan, 2008b

knowledge in the students, a love for knowledge that will not die when they leave, but will continue to influence them till the end.

Explicit knowledge comes in a wide range of media such as computer files, e-mails, videotapes, CD-ROMs, digital libraries and textbooks. It can be the result of the work of individuals or project groups, recorded and stored within any type of media so that it can be accessed and used when needed. This type of knowledge is very common but is still important in learning (Scheepers and Rose, 2001) discuss the role of intranets and the role of people sharing information through the intranets. However, tacit knowledge is equally valuable. Tacit knowledge is personal and deeply rooted in an individual's experiences, values and cultures, thus making it difficult to capture, codify, store, and share to other people. Although this type of knowledge is intangible, it must not be overlooked as it is regarded as central to innovation in learning.

The main academic advantage with respect to the business school that is discussed here is that information is uniquely stored and metadata comprising of faculty, students, administration, alumni, international linkages, admissions, courses, research and placements, etc. are integrated. The major benefits of this framework includes increased speed in sharing the information among all previously mentioned domains, reduced time in retrieving information from one source to other source, accuracy in maintaining the records as academic meta data are stored as a single database repository, adaptability, effective data evaluation and retrieval, easy of reach to all domains (with the use of IT enabled tools). The business school's main vision and mission plays a very critical role in its transformation to management effectiveness.

This framework adopted in this school plays a vital role in every process. The role is to connect each domain of business school through the organizational metadata. This reduces inconsistency, redundancy and non-integrity. It provides a complete, clear and realistic view of all academic processes. It helps to avoid short-term perspective and ensure that the system focuses on the right thing rather than the latest things. This plays an important role in keeping people and organizations focused on the skills, knowledge and the characteristics for effective job performance. This also helps people better assess their current capabilities and determine the need to improve. Since the framework offers transparency it would definitely lead to no-conflict culture and healthy comparisons among each domain with out biasing.

### *5.2 Future directions and limitations*

As per the author's believe, though the paper is interesting, as knowledge resources always enhance teaching and learning process, more future work is needed. One needs to study the tool further and how analytics can be applied in future. Also the same tool needs to be applied to various business schools and the experiences and cases need to be recorded and compared.

The future initiatives may include some updates and analysis like online discussion forums, online debating forums for students and faculty with robust information systems infrastructure. Provision for blogs and wikis with interactive whiteboard connectivity for lectures can be considered. If the chat room sessions are introduced care need to be taken for security and type of knowledge dissemination. Features like cross functional decision making, rewards and incentives based on performance evaluations, increased responsiveness to student needs and interdisciplinary research

initiatives are planned. In future, one can search for trends and patterns of data and share with others.

On the other hand, OKST make create less social opportunities for people to engage in face-to-face meeting; it may also involve social, cultural and language differences. There is some amount of loss of contextual cues between teachers and students. These problems may result in a lack of trust, making people unwilling and hesitating to share knowledge and collaborate with others in contrast to the earlier generation of sharing knowledge between faculty and student communities. Business schools are not of uniform quality or size and there are huge gaps among the different levels of schools that we find. Some schools are primary government owned and private trust owned. Disclosure of financial figures is not transparent nor is it complete which may lead to difficulties in computation of revenue, and expenditure flows severely.

## 6. Conclusion

For developing strategic internal alliances the business schools have to more effectively use their resources and infrastructure to reap more benefit from their investments in both people and technology. The framework proposed will enable business schools to quickly respond to its goals and objectives and in some cases pre-empt staff and faculty demands and needs. To build and develop a robust and thriving knowledge environment in business schools need to look beyond technology and develop the overall culture of accessing, sharing and managing knowledge.

In this paper, a conceptual framework of how knowledge resources are shared by different academic entities in any business school is discussed and presented. The paper concludes that every institutional initiative requires time, money, energy and resources so that it may mature and suit to the business schools.

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