

# **UGSM-Monarch Business School Doctoral Dissertation Proposal**

The Influence of Collectivism-Individualism Culture on Knowledge  
Sharing In Public Sector Organizations in Bahrain

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Shared knowledge is known as the organized combination of ideas, rules, procedures and information that could either be subjective or objective; explicit or tacit (Bhatt, 2000; Gao, Li & Clarke, 2008). Its importance to the organization has been stressed enough by existing literatures as an updated and well-managed knowledge system may lead to competitive advantage over its competitors (Drucker; Bhatt; Gao, Li & Clarke). Competitive advantage is achieved as identifying, exploiting, transferring and applying existing and accessible knowledge enable the organization to solve specific tasks better, faster and cheaper than they would otherwise have been solved (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007; Christensen, 2007). It promotes teamwork as it facilitates the exchange of individual knowledge, stimulates collaboration, enables learning orientation and increases their ability of the organization to achieve individual and organizational goals (Lin & Lee, 2006).

Culture can play an important role in the knowledge sharing process of the organization (Sackmann et al, 2002; Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). A particular study found that knowledge sharing in a multicultural team is not dictated or driven by rational decisions, but by emotional acceptance (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). It is dictated by negative stereotyping behaviors, which means that employees may choose to share knowledge only to people who are close to

them or to the group wherein which they belong. Out-groups, or employees outside the group, may not receive as much knowledge as the in-group members as they are not emotionally accepted as compared to the latter.

Hofstede's Cross Cultural Dimension Framework further explains the relationship between group orientation and knowledge sharing. Among its five independent dimensions of national culture, the individualism-collectivism orientation dimension explains an organization can either be influenced by collectivistic or individualistic national cultures, which are means individuals are integrated into primary groups (Hofstede, 2001). In collective societies, workers tend to cooperate more, make more collective decisions, and perform better in groups (Zhu et al, 2007). This can result in "in-group bias", but can also be effective in binding individuals to reach a common goal (Hofstede, 2003). In individualist societies, employees and managers are expected to work and decide for themselves and are rewarded on an individual basis. This has less in-group biases, but might impede group-thinking (Hofstede).

In addition to Hofstede's framework, several studies have found evidences on the relationship between individualism-collectivism orientation and knowledge sharing behavior. In the study conducted by Siakas et al (2010) among European Union sponsored projects, some of the obstacles of an effective knowledge transfer found among the respondents were: differences in cultures; language

barriers; differences in perception of time; lack of trust; arrogant and self-centered characters; and lack of initiative to cooperate and work in teams. Similarly, Sackman and Friesl (2007) found that differences in identities and sentiments can trigger stereotyping behaviors. Also, Ardichvilly et al (2006) found that 'saving face,' modesty, and competitiveness all have influences on the knowledge sharing behavior of employees in all three countries. Other factors that were shown to have significant effect on knowledge sharing included: hierarchy; preferred modes of communication; and strong in-group orientation (Ardichvilly et al, 2006).

In the comparative study of Alajmi et al (2011) on the impact of national culture on service provisions in Kuwait and Egypt, the results revealed that high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance result in high information gap which is detrimental to effective knowledge sharing among employees. Interestingly, Alajmi et al did not investigate the impact of individualism-collectivism (IC) orientation on the knowledge sharing behavior of the two countries. Overall, despite the number of studies on the influence of national culture on knowledge sharing behavior and other management functions, the individualism-collectivism orientation remains one of Hofstede's dimensions that are still unexplored. Further, the scope of studies that explored the relationship between those variables is limited only to certain groups and ethnicities. The goal of the study is to determine whether or not individualism-collectivism orientation impacts

knowledge sharing behavior, specifically among public sector companies in Bahrain.

## **2.0. RESEARCH QUESTION**

The chosen context of the research is the public sector of Bahrain, which is found to be dominated by collectivistic culture as is considered to exist in the rest of the Arab countries (Hofstede, 2003). To explore the problem discussed in the introduction, the study will respond to the following research question.

### **Main Research Question:**

“What are the characteristics of a new conceptual model that help in explaining the relationship between national culture and knowledge sharing for public sector companies in the Kingdom of Bahrain?”

In order to better address the main research question the contemplated research will address a series of sub-research questions, being:

### **Sub-Research Question 1:**

“To what extent are employees in Bahrain predominantly collectivist in their thinking, attitudes and behaviours?”

## **Sub-Research Question 2:**

“To what extent does cultural orientation affect the level of knowledge sharing between employees in Bahrain?”

### **3.0. THE RESEARCH RELEVANCE**

Knowledge sharing is an important activity among public sector organizations in Bahrain. For example, as reflected in the report of the National Oil and Gas Authority (NOGA) of Bahrain entitled, “The Development of Oil Industry in Bahrain Past, Present & Future”, the country’s oil and gas industry is dedicated to the dissemination and promotion of knowledge (Bin Ali Mirza, 2009). It occasionally organizes major conferences on oil and gas to share knowledge about recent management practices or technological breakthroughs in the industry. Similar events also happen in other industries and sectors. Part of the motivation behind these events is to disseminate the knowledge in the latest trends and changes. As a collectivist region, it is important for individuals and companies to get together and share what they know with each other to help promote growth. This behavior is expected in Bahrain as people are driven by group-thinking rather than the self (Hofstede, 2003). In the study of Hutchings and Weir (2006), it was established that building relationships and connections are both important in business collaborations and information sharing among Arab companies. In other words, knowledge is strongly shared only by people

that belong in a closely-knit group, which often consists of family, friends, relatives, and colleagues.

In collectivistic societies such as the Bahrain, collaboration and knowledge sharing has a higher chance of occurring if one of the managers in a particular business has connections to the managers of other businesses. Employees exhibit collectivistic behaviors and belong to specific groups (Hutchings & Weir, 2006). Hofstede has already established these traits as common in Bahrain, but the amount of studies dedicated to confirm is still diminutive. Specifically, these assumptions have not been confirmed by industry or by sector, which basically make them non-generalizable. This is the main reason the study aims to examine the relationship between individualism-collectivism orientation and knowledge sharing behavior. In other words, research is needed to confirm whether or not the collectivistic cultural orientation of employees and managers in Bahrain's public sector influences the knowledge sharing behavior of its employees. Therefore, the significance of this proposed research is to determine the following objectives:

1. To examine the national culture (collectivism-individualism profile) and knowledge sharing behavior of employees in public sector organizations in Bahrain;
2. To examine if collectivism or individualism either positively or negatively affect the frequency of knowledge sharing among employees in public sector organizations in Bahrain;



3. To compare the findings of the present study with existing academic literature in order to test the relationship between culture and knowledge sharing, and;
4. To develop and introduce a new model that will contribute new knowledge to the understanding of the relationship between national culture and knowledge sharing behavior for public sector companies in Bahrain.

#### **4.0. CONTRIBUTION TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE**

An improved understanding of knowledge processing, specifically among management teams, could improve their ability to meet a wide variety of organizational demands (Anand et al, 2003). Knowledge is acquired and applied through a step-by-step process. After its acquisition, knowledge can be applied to: the organization's leadership; organizational processes; technology; and learning process (Christensen, 2007). There are various means of acquiring knowledge and one of those ways is through knowledge sharing (Sackmann et al, 2002; Christensen, 2007; Sackmann & Friesl, 2007).

Despite its importance to the organization, knowledge sharing is often impeded by a number of barriers. One of these barriers is the organization's lack of interest in knowledge sharing (McDermott & O'Dell, 2000; Sackmann et al, 2002; Christensen, 2007; Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). Other barriers include the cultural diversities of the employees, the differences of their beliefs, values, ethnicity, norms and religion (McDermott & O'Dell, 2000; Sackmann et al, 2002;

Christensen, 2000; Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). These are basically characteristics that can be found in one's national culture, suggesting that the latter may indeed influence the perception and behavior of employees on knowledge sharing.

According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions' analysis, Arab culture is driven more by collectivistic values (Hofstede, 2003). Interestingly, collective behavior has been proven to be significantly related to Arab business practices. Studies have confirmed that distinct traits such as collectivism, trust, and the importance of favors can influence an organization's strategy when operating in an Arab territory (Tayeb, 1997; Abdallah, Maghrabi & Raggad, 1998; Namazie, 2003; Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Al-Hamadi, Budhwar & Shipton, 2007; Jones, 2008; Yegane & Su, 2008). In like fashion the contemplated research will further explore the link between Arab culture and knowledge sharing behavior.

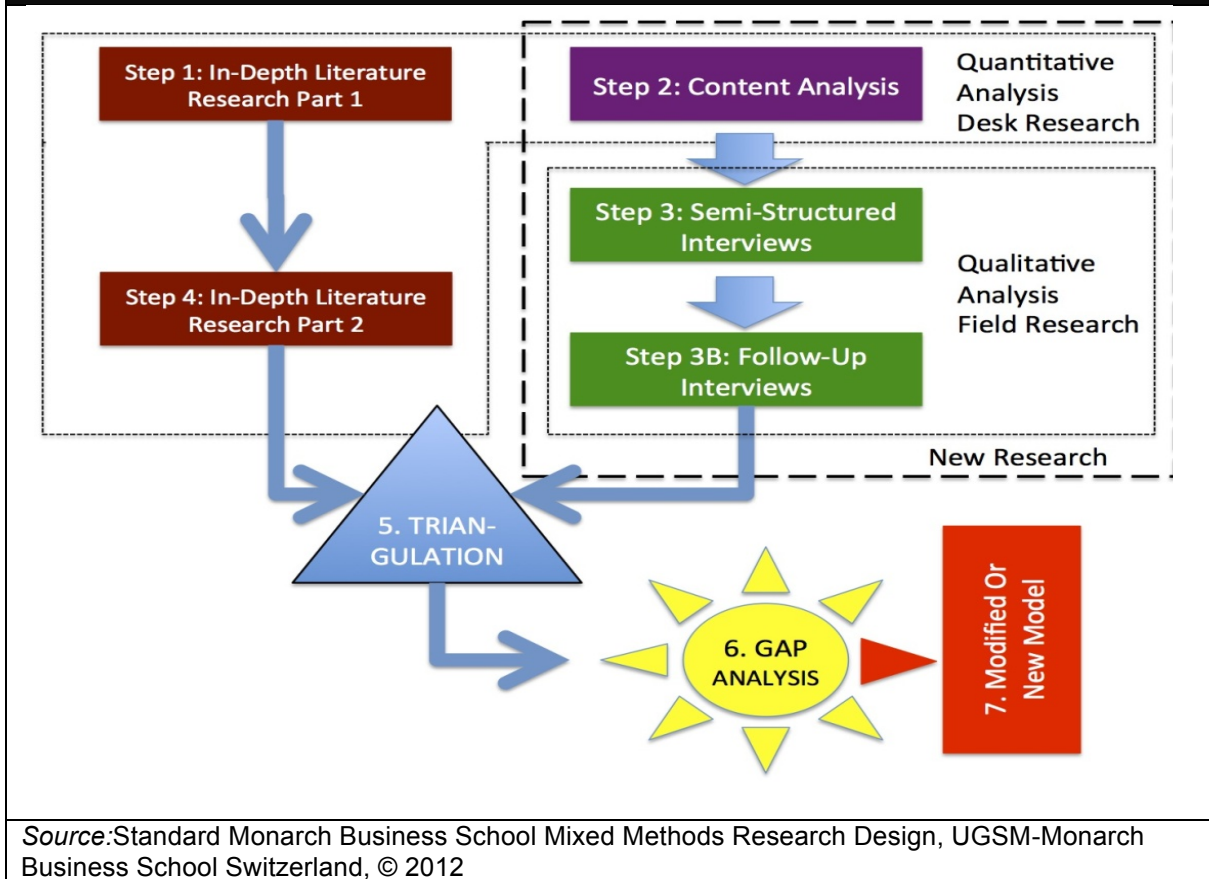
The contemplated research will help examine the extent to which cultural values affect knowledge sharing behavior. In general, public organizations in Bahrain have the natural need to acquire new knowledge and disseminate this to their employees and managers. The results that will be garnered from the contemplated research can generally provide new insights on how knowledge sharing behavior is either fostered or impeded due to the effect of collectivism. Specifically, the results of the study can extend the existing body of literature

about the effects of culture, specifically collectivism, in management practices in Bahrain. It can also contribute to cross-cultural management research and to the possibility that national culture can influence the knowledge sharing behavior of employees as exemplified in Bahrain and by extension other Arab cultures and spheres.

## **5.0. METHODOLOGY**

The contemplated research is designed as an empirical study of the relationships within national culture, specifically collectivism-individualism orientation and knowledge sharing behavior for public sector companies in the Kingdom of Bahrain. As Figure 1 shows, the aim of the present research is to respond to the main research question by way of a triangulation of research data within a mixed-method research paradigm that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. The specific elements of the combined method are: (1) in-depth literature review of related research materials; (2) content analysis, and; (3) structured and semi-structured interviews with primary respondents in the selected public sector companies in Bahrain.

Figure 1  
Research Process Flow



*Research Step One: Desk Research – In-Depth Literature Review Part 1*

The first step in completing the research process is conducting an in-depth literature review on related research subjects: specifically on national culture, individualism-collectivism orientation, and knowledge sharing behavior. The first part of the literature review is expected to provide a strong support on which the content analysis of the research process may be considered as a valid scientific context from the perspective of academic and professional knowledge. As shown

in Figure 1, the literature review will be broken into two parts. The first part being the initial literature review prior to the completion of the Content Analysis (Step 2) and semi-structured Interviews (Step 3A and Step 3B). This will be an ongoing process up to the implementation and finalization of Step 2 and Step 3. Then, in the fourth stage, the second part of the literature review will be carried out to provide more academic detail for the implementation of the Gap Analysis stage.

### *Research Step 2: Desk Research – Content Analysis*

Based on the foundations provided by the first part of the literature review, a quantitative analysis on the data obtained from selected public sector firms in Bahrain will be conducted to develop an understanding on the empirical relationship between individualism-collectivism and knowledge sharing behavior. Data sources that will be considered include academic journals, company newsletters, letters, email conversations, and other sources that can provide sufficient understanding on the subject matter. Content variables that will be subjected to analysis will be coded to statistical software such as SPSS or Minitab which will be statistically treated to determine the frequency of the variables.

### *Research Step 3: Field Research – Structured and Semi-Structured Interviews*

With the completion of the literature review in Step One and the insights provided by the content analysis from step two a field research which will take the form of

a quantitative structured survey process and a qualitative semi-structured interview process with the key respondents will be conducted. The survey and interview questions will be developed based on the results of the initial literature review and the content analysis. The respondents to be considered will be public sector participants at the managerial and entry-based positions. The participants in the structured survey research will be entry-level employees of public sector organizations in Bahrain. Their attitudes on knowledge sharing and cultural orientation will be measured using a six-point Likert Scale, which is a summated rating scale that consists of statements that express either a favorable or an unfavorable attitude toward the object of interest (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). The respondents will be sampled using a convenience sampling method (Creswell, 2005).

The semi-structured interview process will involve face-to-face surveys with a minimum of 20 to 25 managers from the selected public sector organizations. The managers will respond to open-ended questions which they will be required to answer in real-time. The nature and design of the open-ended questions will be informed by the results analyzed from the larger questionnaire survey mentioned in stage one. Each interview will be recorded digitally which will then be transcribed to determine the different themes from the responses of the participants. The data will be analyzed qualitatively using INVIVO or MaxQDA.

### *Research Step 3B –Field Research – Follow Up Interviews*

Given that time, resources, and participant engagement allow for follow-up interviews, narrower and more specific information from the first round of the interview will be extracted. In this regard, a smaller sub-set of respondents, specifically 10 or less, from the first interview will be selected. The purpose of the follow-up interview is to provide a deeper understanding about the relationship between individualism-collectivism orientation and knowledge sharing behavior, by providing additional insights to the results of the initial literature review, content analysis, and structured and semi-structured interviews. The follow-up interview should extract new information from the selected respondents, including their personal opinions, and subtle understandings regarding the research subject.

### *Research Step Four –Desk Research –In-Depth Literature Review - Part 2*

The completion of the second phase of the interviews is expected to uncover important insights from the participants. Combined with the results from the initial literature review and the content analysis, it is expected that at this stage of the research, much information and knowledge about the relationship between individualism-collectivism and knowledge sharing behavior of managers and entry-level employees of public sector firms in Bahrain have been discovered. A follow-up literature review will be conducted in parallel and after completion of the

interviewing to further refine the scope of the research. This part of the research process is important to make sure that the scope of the research is described in terms of the most recent trend in the scholarly literature.

#### *Research Step Five & Six – Triangulation of the Data and Gap Analysis*

Triangulation of the data will be conducted after the necessary and important information has been exhausted from the in-depth literature reviews, content analysis, and structured and semi-structured interviews. This is critical in the research process because it allows the combination of the accuracy of quantitative data and the in-depth interpretation and insights provided by qualitative analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Triangulation fits well with the study of culture because it allows the collection of different types of data that may include cultural artifacts and values. This is basically difficult to achieve when using only one form of research method. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data will allow the researcher to determine existing knowledge gaps between theoretical and practical domains which can be used to formulate and design a new model of understanding.

#### *Step 7: Development of a New Model*

A thorough analysis of the existing frameworks from the academic field will be conducted which will be roughly based on the results of the gap analysis in step six. It should build on the extent of the agreement between practical application



and theoretical underpinnings of the subject matter which is the relationship between national culture and knowledge sharing behavior of managers and employees in the public sector organizations in Bahrain. This analysis will enlighten the researcher on whether or not the existing model address the requirement for practical application existing within the public sector and will bring to light any need for modification or improvement. Any disagreement found between the practical applications and theoretical model within the scope of the study will enable the creation of a new theoretical framework as an alternative model for the relationship between national culture and knowledge sharing. This last phase in the research process will contribute original knowledge as it may lead to the development of a new framework that will explain the relationships being studied.

### **5.1. SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION**

Secondary data will be obtained from a minimum of 3 public sector organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain. These data will be in the form of company brochures, policies, newsletters, announcement, journals, and emails, which will be later analyzed using content analysis techniques to determine the frequency of selected themes for the contemplated research. Primary data will be acquired from selected participants from each of the selected public sector organizations. Entry-level employees selected through convenience sampling will be surveyed using a structured questionnaire. On the other hand, managers that will be

selected from the three companies will be subjected to semi-structured interviews, as well as follow-up semi-structured interviews.

## **5.2. DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS STRATEGIES**

The first set of primary data will be collected from structured surveys on entry-level employees and then statistically treated using SPSS or Minitab. The second set of primary data will be collected from semi-structured interviews on managers from selected public sector organizations and then categorized and cross-tabulated. The semi-structured interview results will be coded and analyzed using NVIVO or MaxQDA. The collected information will be used to determine the individualism-collectivism orientation of the entry-level employees in public sector organization in Bahrain and its effect on their knowledge sharing behavior.

## **5.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The respondents will be treated ethically during the full duration of the research. They will have the right to keep their identities confidential or the right to back out of the study. They will be given the opportunity to review and approve an informed consent form before agreeing to participate in the study. The signed informed consent records are to be stored in a brown envelope that is secured in a safety storage box. Only the individuals conducting the research and the proper authority of the University will have access to the documents. After 3 years, the records will be destroyed.

## **6.0. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a wealth of research on culture and knowledge sharing in management. To determine the nature of this organizational phenomenon the research finds it necessary to review studies that have established concepts and facts about knowledge sharing within the organization.

### **6.1. CROSS-CULTURAL DIMENSION MODEL**

Hofstede's cross-cultural model consists of five independent dimensions of national culture that represent "fundamental problems of society" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 1). These dimensions are: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism (collectivism); masculinity (femininity); and, future orientation (long-term versus short-term). Power distance refers to the extent of power inequality among the members of a particular group. Collectivism and its counterpart individualism are about the extent to which group behavior is favored over individual behavior. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which people within a particular group avoid unlikely situations. Masculinity versus femininity refers to the extent a particular group prefers masculine-like behaviors, e.g. aggressiveness, versus feminine-like behaviors, e.g. gentleness. Finally, future orientation refers to the choice of focus for people's efforts. Regarding the collectivism versus individualism dimension, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the rest of the Arab nations have a low individualism ranking which indicates that it is

predominantly a collectivist country. Thus, this would suggest that foreign managers should consider developing a close and committed team that treats every individual as members of the organization family (Hofstede, 2003).

## **6.2. COLLECTIVISM IN ARAB CULTURE**

Tayeb (1997) argues that Islam through the national culture influences organizations in the Gulf region. Islam plays a very dominant role in Arab culture as it is considered as an all-encompassing creed governing every aspect of life of Muslims. The Koran basically advocates a system of belief based on individual enterprise and individual reward. The role of the State according to Muslim scholars should be limited to matters with which the market cannot really cope, such as, the broad direction of the economy, and natural monopolies (Tayeb, 1997). Some Islamic work-related values include: equality before God; individual responsibility within a framework of co-operation with others; a view that people in positions of power should treat subordinates kindly, as if their subordinates are their brothers or sisters; fatalism but also a recognition of personal choice; and encouragement of consultation at all levels of decision making: from family to the wider community and to the country as a whole. Muslims in the Middle East are also governed by these Islamic principles. However, according to Muna (1980), their decision making and management-employee relationships are characterized by a process of consultation rooted in their Islamic traditions and emphasized in the Koran. This asserts that those who conduct their affairs by

consultation are among the ones on whom God's mercy and heavenly rewards will be bestowed (Muna, 1980; Tayeb, 1997). Muna, however, confirmed that Muslims in Arab states are more collectivistic to their South Asian counterparts. The survey results of that study revealed strong expectations among senior managers, partners, and even some friends and relatives consulted on organizational or daily issues. This implies the prevalence of a collectivistic culture wherein an individual must give priorities first to friends, close relatives or superiors who have great influence over them.

In contrast and despite the established belief that Arab societies are collectivist in nature several studies have revealed that this may not be the case. For instance, it is highlighted instead of scheduling meetings managers prefer to have one-on-one consultation with a subordinate or a close friend (Muna, 1980). Similarly, Yousef's (1998) study found that Arab culture nurtures consultative and participative tendencies instead of consulting with only close individuals. Further, young, highly educated, and middle management Arabs are open-minded and are willing to involve subordinates in the decision-making process and therefore employ participative decision-making style (Yousef, 1998). Yousef's findings were also supported by previous studies such as Ali (1989), Ali and Al-Shakhis (1985) and Ali *et al* (1995, 1997).

According to Hofstede's culture dimensions, Arab and Islamic states are more collectivistic in nature than they are individualistic. This means that these countries have strong adherence to family ties, kinship and network building (Namazie, 2003). Namazie (2003) also stated that Arab states also have a strong nepotism culture and close network culture wherein only members of the family or networks are to be trusted. Thus, in a situation wherein it is necessary to share knowledge throughout the team it can be assumed that most employees would only share their knowledge to a member of the network to which they belong.

Many other studies have confirmed the collectivistic view of Arab managers and employees. Al-Hamadi, Budhwar and Shipton (2007) explored the influence of national culture and national institutions on Omani HRM in which both public and private employees from six organizations participated. The results of the study revealed that Omani employees have strong adherence to religion and this influences their view on HRM giving high priority to Oman's civil service laws; it further puts forward how they believe that labor market and the campaign to hire only local employees has a significant influence on HRM policies and practices. Similar results have been found in the study of Yeganeh & Su (2008) on the HRM practices of Iran. The findings revealed that staffing in an Islamic and Arab state is marked by pervasiveness of networking, entitlement, compliance with Islamic-revolutionary criteria and high job security (Yeganeh & Su, 2008). Further, compensation is described by features, such as: fixed pay,

ascription/seniority-based reward, and hierarchical pay structure. Training and development programs are found to be unplanned and spontaneous. Finally, the appraisal function receives little attention and tends to be based on subjective and behavioral criteria. All of these imply the potential prevalence of an “exchanging favor” culture wherein decisions are made unsystematically in order to comply with favors. In a separate study, Yeganeh & Su (2007) confirm that Muslim managers are characterized by traditional values such as collectivism, past orientation, high hierarchical distance, mistrust and conspiracy.

One specific cultural trait that adds to collectivism in Arab societies is a practice called *Wasta*, which refers to “exclusivity” or to the adherence to interpersonal relationships and networks through strong family and kinship ties (Hutchings & Weir, 2006). While this practice can help boost business collaboration and knowledge sharing, Al-Ali (2008) stressed that it can also be destructive at times. For instance, Al-Ali (2008) stressed that such practice in the UAE has produced negative social capital and has acted as a barrier to reform and good governance. Governments in the region are unwilling to devote the resources and social disruption to address entrenched sensitive and negative social issues.

Because collectivistic societies promote group thinking they are expected to steer clear of questionable behaviors that involve extended networking or prioritizing insiders from group members (Al-Khatib et al, 2007). However, this is not always

the case as reflected in the Wasta culture of the Arabs, or even the Guanxi culture of the Chinese. In these cases, collectivism can result to the idealist view that effective networking can be achieved only through giving favors or clinging to close friends, relatives, family members or associates. Al-Khatib et al (2007) study on Chinese organizations implied that corruption in collectivistic culture is based on the concepts of idealism, relativism, and Machiavellian tendencies. Idealism refers to “the degree to which individuals understand actions as right or wrong, and believe that a ‘right’ decision can be made in an ethically tenuous situation. Relativism refers to “the degree to which an individual rejects universal moral norms in making ethical judgments.”(Al-Khatib et al, 2007, p.87) Finally, a “high Machiavellian individual believes it is appropriate to use any means to accomplish personal and organizational goals, including manipulation, persuasion, and deceit.” (Al-Khatib et al, 2007, p.87). Because of the existence of Wasta it is possible that Arab countries also possess this form of collectivism wherein a large personal network can be more advantageous than having no network at all.

### **6.3. THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON MANAGEMENT**

Kluckhohn, Strodbeck, Schein, Inkeles, Levison and Hofstede are theorists of culture that offer many similar views regarding how culture affects the management process of organizations (Groeschl & Doherty, 2000). Schein’s (1985) five dimensions relate closely to the value orientations of Kluckhohn and



Strodtbecks (1961), while Hofstede's four dimensions and Inkeles and Levison's predictions of common human problems are also very similar in nature. Through the comparison Groeschl and Doherty (2000) developed a model that is called "layers of the onion". The first layer is behavior and represents the explicit culture. The implicit culture includes a second and deeper layer namely values. Thus, the core of any culture is formed by basic assumptions (Groeschl & Doherty, 2000). This theory is similar to the theory of Wright, Berrell & Gloet (2008) which explains the complex relationship between the surface and deeper levels of culture that managers may find difficult to balance. For instance, the surface level may include social norms and behavior that promote collectivism and group thinking while the deeper levels include: emotions, fear, individualism, and thinking of one's family first. Basically, these theories show that both implicit and explicit cultures exist within organizations and the most difficult challenge is how to balance these two dimensions. Together, these two dimensions form the accepted and unaccepted behaviors within the organization. They build the distinct characteristic of the organization unique from other similar types of organization. For instance, two manufacturing firms may operate within the same nature of industry and size but they differ in terms of culture, how each employee behaves, how decisions are made, and how managers approach every problem.

#### **6.4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

Lopez, Peon and Ordas (2004) have found support for the positive correlation between culture and organizational learning. After exploring two specific hypotheses, which are: collaborative culture has a positive impact on organizational performance; and that there is a significant effect of collaborative culture on organizational learning, the results of the causal-comparative research showed that the effect of collaborative culture on organizational learning was statistically positively significant. Thus, based on these results, it can be assumed that collectivism in organizational practice may have a positive significant effect on the behavior of employees toward organizational learning or knowledge sharing. For instance, a culture of building personal networks and exchanging favors within a particular management team may result in a selective behavior wherein employees mostly share knowledge with only the members of their personal network.

Sackmann and Friesl (2007), using the model developed by Sackmann et al (2002), explained that due to the simultaneous interactions between and actions of multiple and diverse cultures, the organization may experience a problem of cultural complexity. Differences between employees may exist in terms of: gender, ethnicity or profession, cultural backgrounds in regard to different home organizations, or to different regional and national origins. These differences may

impede knowledge sharing, as a culturally diverse group interaction may involve emotional, cognitive and experience-based elements.

By simulating an intercultural management team using MBA students, Sackmann and Friesl (2007) explored the different effects of cultural diversity on the behavior of the students. Seven propositions that could potentially be tested by future studies were developed. Most of these propositions are relevant to the current research. It proposed that unexpected confrontation with cultural differences blocks knowledge sharing in project groups at an individual and group level. Further, it proposed that unexpected confrontation with cultural differences strengthens a group's intra-group identity. This fosters knowledge sharing within the intra-group and prevents knowledge sharing between groups. It also proposed that the stronger the group identity, the more difficult it is for the group to open up to people with cultural differences and listen to their knowledge and suggestions. Fourth, the more obvious and pronounced the perceived cultural differences, the stronger are the effects of in-group knowledge sharing vs. out-group distancing. Fifth, innovation can be developed if the home-territory group feels that their group can benefit from the ideas of other persons or groups. Sixth, knowledge offered by another person or group is only implemented if that person is emotionally welcomed in the group and accepted as a member. Finally, groups composed of members with cultural differences will only engage in knowledge sharing and its implementation when they engage in

cultural reality negotiation and develop a mutually accepted new cultural reality (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007).

According to Lin and Lee (2006), the critical elements of organizational climate affect knowledge sharing behavior. These elements include: top management support; employee involvement; stimulus to develop new ideas; and a reward system for knowledge sharing. Lin and Lee tried to divert from this view and explored instead the relationship between IT support and knowledge sharing. Their findings revealed that such relationship is insignificant. Factors that are more significant to knowledge sharing are elements of a socially-oriented organizational climate such as top management support, open communication, stimulus to develop new ideas, and reward systems inducing knowledge sharing. These are more likely to have positive benefits and compatible beliefs about promoting knowledge sharing than socio-technical factors, as shown in the results of Lin and Lee's study. These findings imply that the contemplated research may find that knowledge sharing behavior is significantly influenced by cultural traits and beliefs. For instance, communication between employees may malfunction because culture influences the individual to only share knowledge with one of its networks. It could be possible that knowledge may develop only within the intra-group network, instead of within the general group itself.

## **6.5. KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR**

Various studies have explored the knowledge sharing behavior of employees. One of these studies is the research of Lin and Lee (2004) on the influence of the perceptions of senior managers on intentions to encourage knowledge sharing. In this study, knowledge sharing behavior has been labeled the dependent variable of study as Lin and Lee hypothesized that senior managers' intentions to encourage knowledge sharing will positively affect corporate knowledge-sharing behavior. The correlation coefficient results of the study confirmed this hypothesis, implying the influence of an individual factor, i.e.: intentions to encourage knowledge sharing, to the knowledge sharing behavior of the employees. The correlation also confirmed the significance of subjective norms to knowledge sharing. Based on this result, it can be assumed that the structure of knowledge sharing within the organization is vulnerable to the personal practice and preferences of the employees, especially the leaders who display knowledge sharing intentions. This result is relevant to the current study because it suggests that collectivism, which can be considered as a part of an individual's personal practice, can affect the knowledge sharing behaviors. A qualitative study conducted by Ardichvilly et al. (2006) has confirmed this relationship as the results revealed that collectivistic characteristics such as 'saving face,' modesty, and competitiveness all have influences on the knowledge sharing behavior of employees in all three countries. Further, hierarchy, preferred modes of

communication, and strong in-group orientation were also found to have significant effects on knowledge sharing behavior (Ardichvilly et al, 2006). The results in Ardichvilly et al's study basically suggest that employees in collectivist cultures are likely to distrust outsiders which can be a problem if knowledge sharing takes place in a cross-cultural setting. However, high collectivism in a tightly-knit group that shares the same views and goals can promote knowledge sharing activities, specifically when people have the same ethnicities and cultural background (Brijball, 2010). As theorized by Wei et al (2008), subjective norms affect attitudes of employees toward knowledge sharing, but are fully mediated by elements of commitment, such as: internalization, identification, and compliance. These elements are most likely present in a collectivistic environment suggesting that collectivism can promote positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing, specifically if knowledge must be shared with in-group people. In contrast, collectivism can lead to negative attitude towards knowledge sharing if knowledge must be shared with out-group people.

## **6.6. SUMMARY**

Knowledge sharing can provide many benefits to the organization. Knowledge can be improved through the development of systems that support collaboration and knowledge sharing. Effective knowledge sharing can improve leadership and organizational effectiveness. Trust and individual motivation can facilitate effective knowledge sharing but collectivistic and idealistic motivation can prevent

free knowledge sharing as it becomes exclusive only to certain in-group members. When used effectively, shared knowledge on customers, suppliers, and internal capabilities can positively affect product development performance as well as indirectly affect downstream strategic imperatives via enhanced process performance (Hong et al, 2004). The organization must make sure that its corporate culture supports knowledge sharing for it to work well. The senior staff must participate in knowledge sharing and should promote mutual sharing amongst individual parties and groups, encourage the sharing of knowledge, as well as having enough time and having a positive view and interest on knowledge sharing. A significant negative relationship between knowledge sharing behavior and turnover intention exists, that is why it is important that employees are constantly motivated. Studies from various primary and secondary sources reveal that managers could plan strategies and interventions to provide employees with opportunities to share which could be in the form of training courses, workshops and exchanges in informal settings. In an Arab setting, effective knowledge sharing is still unexplored specifically on the relationship between Arab culture and knowledge sharing behavior. However, several studies have confirmed the positive relationship between collectivism and other management practices such as in HRM and other fields.

## **7.0. RESEARCH PLAN**

Three public sector organizations in Bahrain will be randomly selected to be included in the study. Consent forms to conduct the study will be emailed to the human resource departments of the three selected organizations to gain permission to survey their employees. A systematic random sampling method will be used to randomly select the employees who will be surveyed. The target sample size will be at least 25 employees from each organization, which will be oversampled to 50 from each organization to achieve statistical relevance. Managers and directors will not be included in the research.

The questionnaires will be sent to the respondents through email, which is expected to be returned within a week. If email is not available, then the respondents will be interviewed through the phone. Data will be coded and will be typed on SPSS or Minitab.

Aside from the 6-Point Likert Scale survey, a number 25 respondents will also be subjected to face-to-face interviews. The knowledge that will be gained from these interviews should further refine and inform the research as the in depth questioning is expected to reveal much more granular details that cannot be obtained from the survey. Data will be recorded digitally and will be transcribed for qualitative analysis. Data will be analyzed using INVIVO or MaxQDA.



## 8.0. RESEARCH TIMELINE

An overview of the estimated time frame for the completion of the contemplated research is presented in Table 1. The preliminary and in-depth literature review stages have been completed at an external institution with the balance of the research to be completed at UGSM-Monarch Business School Switzerland.

<b>TABLE 1 Research Timeline</b>	
Date	Stage
June 2007 – May 2008	Preliminary Literature Review - Open University Malaysia
June 2008 – May 2009	In-Depth Literature Review - Open University Malaysia
June 2012	Transfer To UGSM-Monarch Business School Switzerland
August 2012	Research Proposal Perfecting
September 2012 – March 2013	Final Literature Review Stage on Knowledge Management, Culture, Collectivism, and Knowledge sharing. Research on related theoretical frameworks and their link with the research topics.
November 2012 – December 2012	Interview Design Finalization Preparation And Scheduling of Meetings
December 2012 – February 2013	Field Work: Data Collection From Participant Interviews
February 2013 – March 2013	Analysis of Data
March 2013 – June 2013	Completion of Manuscript Writing
July 2013	Submission of Manuscript

## 9.0. RESEARCH BUDGET

The contemplated research will be privately funded. No scholarly grants or financial assistance is being requested of the University. As shown in Table 2, the total cost for the research will approximately reach US \$16,000. The contemplated research is presently fully funded and may commence upon approval.

<b>TABLE 2 Research Budget</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost US \$</b>
Conferences	\$2,500
Hotel Accommodations	\$3,000
Books and Article Purchases	\$2,000
Travel Expenses	\$3,000
Parking Costs	\$200
Long Distance Charges	\$500
Reproduction Expense – Questionnaires	\$700
Reproduction Express Manuscript Copies	\$700
Software and Digital Recording	\$2,000
Miscellaneous Supplies & Other Costs	\$1,500
<b>Total Approximate Costs</b>	<b>\$16,100</b>
The above cost represents a general estimate of the cost to be incurred to successfully complete the research. Costs may vary. Additional cost to be funded by the researcher.	

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