Knowledge Management from Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

This paper attempts to address the theory of *knowledge management* from Islamic perspective. It highlights the Islamic conception of knowledge, in terms of understanding its nature in the reality of knowledge society. This is done, with the assumption that once knowledge is managed, it is possible then to look at its functions and processes of development in the form of scientific realm. With regards to the Islamic conception of knowledge, the Qur'an invites human beings to *read* both the natural phenomena and the divine text (revelation). This paper aims to analyze how knowledge is managed according to the Islamic epistemology. Generally speaking, knowledge management and classification are very much influenced by the way society conceptualizes and realizes knowledge. Eventually, knowledge management and classification guide man to the ways of knowledge utilization. Therefore, any success achieved by a person is an output of his/her knowledge understanding and knowledge growth within himself. In this status, human beings might be influenced by a certain situations, limitations and constrains internally or externally that lead him to persuade either body knowledge or the functional usage of knowledge in making his own individual success in a form of user-centric based values.

Keywords: knowledge, management, function, and cultural

Abstrak

Kertas kajian ini cuba menangani teori pengurusan ilmu daripada perspektif Islam. Konsep ilmu dalam Islam dan sifatnya dalam realiti masyarakat berilmu akan dikupas. Ini dilakukan dengan andaian bahawa apabila ilmu terurus maka fungsi dan proses kemajuannya dapat dilihat dalam kerangka saintifik. Berkenaan dengan konsep ilmu dalam Islam, al-Quran mempelawa umat manusia agar melihat fenomena alam dan membaca ilmu wahyu yang terkandung dalam al-Quran. Tujuan kertas ini ditulis adalah untuk menganalisis cara ilmu diurus berdasarkan epistemologi Islam. Umumnya, pengurusan ilmu dan pengklasifikasiannya sering kali dipengaruhi oleh cara masyarakat menanggap dan menghayati ilmu. Akhirnya, pengurusan dan pengklasifikasian ilmu akan membimbing manusia ke arah cara-cara menggunakan ilmu. Justeru, kejayaan yang dicapai oleh seseorang individu ialah hasil daripada penghayatan dan

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perkembangan ilmu dalam dirinya. Hakikatnya, manusia mungkin dipengaruhi oleh situasi tertentu, kekurangan dan kekangan yang wujud sama ada secara dalaman ataupun luaran yang akan mendorongnya sama ada mencari ilmu teoritikal sahaja ataupun fungsi kegunaan ilmu sehingga mengecapi kejayaan bagi dirinya dalam bentuk memperoleh ilmu yang berasaskan nilai kepenggunaan.

Kata kunci: Ilmu pengetahuan, pengurusan, fungsi dan budaya

Introduction

This paper aims to explore and review the current literature on knowledge management (KM), its conceptualisation, application and implication output on individual development and organisational structure. The paper explains knowledge management in relation to morality and human decency. Similarly, the paper attempts to map out the rationale modelling strategies and objectives of KM application and practice. Likewise, while focusing on KM conceptualisation, this paper emphasises on how Islamic knowledge management (IKM) approaches add value to KM modelling and practice.

Nature of knowledge

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

In this regard, the issue of criteria that determines what constitutes knowledge is indeed crucial. For that reason, the term used here is defined as a general concept that refers to the act of understanding any factual information wisely for any consideration of its truth or falsehood. For instance, the various aspects of knowledge should be understood from the various action of human utilization of a particular knowledge. These varieties make it almost impossible to define types of knowledge explicitly. From this aspect, Jamil Farooqui (2005) regards knowledge is not purpose-free.

Knowledge, Sciences and Information

Due to some reasons, the terms "knowledge", "sciences" and "information" have been used synonymously or interchangeably in many contexts. They might be referred to as a specific understanding (theoretical or practical) or skill acquired by a person through experience or education. There is no unanimously agreed definition of these terms since the days of Greek philosopher Plato up to the present time. The source of knowledge creation and its types, for instance, might be among the leading factors of defining redundancy and calamity. The term "science" refers to the technical status of any knowledge acquired by human being. Therefore, a person who knows how to operationalize knowledge appropriately is regarded as a scientist.

The term "information", on the other hand, has many meanings, from everyday usage to technical settings, in which it can be defined as closely related to the notion of having data of something and its representation. Furthermore, knowledge refers to the ability in exploring and identifying the fact and figure of an information. Knowing the law of "clean air" as a gifted system that everybody has to take care of is, knowledge. Compare this to a person who becomes aware of "clean air" system

after being informed by someone. Goldman (2006) regarded knowledge as lucid information gained through the process of reason applied to reality or a successful evaluation of one's perceptions that lead to the use of reasoning objectively in drawing a valid and wise conclusion about the world.

Here, we have to consider the fact that the meanings of words, sentences, and texts can change with time, cultural or even emotional conditions, i.e. space and span. According to Vamos (1990) the consequence of this fact is that a true logical proposition in one relationship can be false in another. Classical theories of knowledge however, would only recognise two categories of knowledge: true or false. This type of classification easily leads toward epistemological conflict, especially when dealing with immeasurable factual information. Nonaka (2009) on the other hand, classified knowledge to tacit and explicit. To expend further the understanding this classification, we may view the concept of classifying knowledge within a broader affiliation of knowledge aspect as presented in table 1.
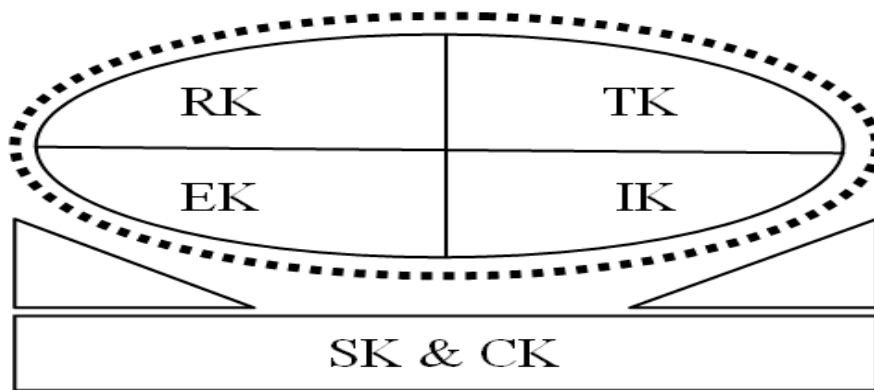

Figure 1: Conventional Conceptualization of knowledge

(SK=Source of Knowledge; CK=Creator of Knowledge; EK=Explicit Knowledge; IK=Informational Knowledge; RK=Revealed Knowledge; TK=Tacit Knowledge.)

The figure above describes all sort of knowledge originated from specific sources (SK), in which it also relates to a specific creator (CK) who produces various types of knowledge for specific needs and functions. Tacit knowledge (TK) for instance, appeared or structured in the mind of a person due to a certain reason, experience, or engagement that occurred before. This form of knowledge then transformed to become an informational knowledge (IK). In this regard, Polanyi (1966) described TK as something that we deal with unconsciously and most of the time we are not aware of its existence. Revealed knowledge (RK) on the other hand, is referred to the source of a particular information came from and its process. This means that the knowledge that we have is absolutely given by God through the revelation, (even though it deals with human affair or solving human problem). A "scientific knowledge" conversely, is referred to an operational representation of knowledge utilization output.

From the above discussion, we can conclude

that knowledge does not exist in itself. As symbolised by Peter Drucker (born in 1909 and known as the Father of Management), the source of wealth is something specifically referred to as human knowledge. If we apply knowledge to tasks that we obviously know how to do, we call it productivity. If we apply knowledge to tasks that are new and different, we call it innovation. Knowledge allows us to achieve those two goals only when it is organised and applied. Therefore, a successful organisation is the one which is successful in creating and sharing information and knowledge, as it leads to systematic organisational behaviours and strategies, i.e. Knowledge Management, as it was originally construed, focuses on the acquisition, structuring, retention, and dissemination of that knowledge.

Knowledge Management (KM)

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

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

KM's Component

KM as defined above can be observed as an existing process and application throughout human history with the exception of volume and structure, in which it consists of three important pillars:

a) Knowledge that should be developed through exploration and searching;

b) Methodologies in which knowledge can be easily used, distributed and shared; and

c) Effective users of knowledge as agents of change toward progress and success.

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

KM's Functional Criteria

In principle, the interest and awareness of KM's functional behaviours in contemporary human development have gained ground in several aspects of individual achievement, societal stability and maturity throughout human history, in which KM has been observed as having a specific role in the context of spatial modelling of life and

stochastic reservoir modelling human life activities. Increasingly, these models go beyond the focus of a single data type and integrate numerous pieces of multi-disciplinary data each with their own complexity, and often only fully understood by discipline specialists. For instance, the KM process base is usually used as a project specific vehicle for documentation, collaboration, and creation of a quality assurance and quality control audit trail. Actually, the central obvious role for any KM system is to serve as the primary repository for project documentation and application of any kind of information (Michael, 1998; King, 2005). Therefore, the functions of KM can be observed in many ways. However, there are three important conditional functions of constructing any KM model; they are:

a) Identification of body knowledge, its categorisation and types – knowledge should be searched and developed. The first task of KM is searching and identifying information that can help users get their jobs done, achieves their life objectives and activities.

b) Simplification of knowledge description and application – collection of information will be meaningless without good management methodologies in simplifying all types of knowledge for complete understanding and easy application on the real ground of usage practicalities.

c) Utilisation of knowledge resources and its functional impact – user satisfaction should be the concern of any KM modelling and application. It can only be achieved by fulfilling user needs and tranquilities. In principle, the aim of knowledge discovery is for its users. In fact, people use information due to the fact that it can help them to solve their problems.

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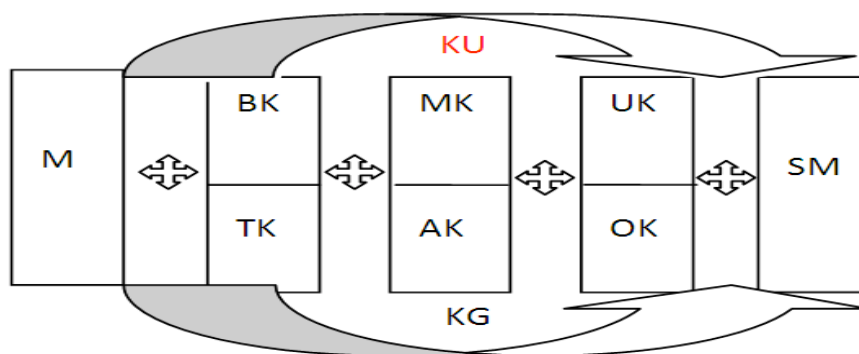

Figure 2: KM Functional Model

(M=Man; BK=Body Knowledge; TK=Type of Knowledge; MK=Methodology of Knowledge; AK=Application of Knowledge; UK=Users of Knowledge; OK=Output of Knowledge; KG=Knowledge Growth; KU=Understanding of Knowledge; SM=Successful Manager)

Figure 2 above describes the application of KM operational function in helping users achieve development goals and success in their life activities and productivities. This is the factuality of body knowledge (BK) in which it is not simply a collection of terminologies and abstract textual information without context. Each of the elements represents a sub-process of KM practices as shown

by the four-headed arrows that occurs when two (or more individuals) exchange knowledge, in order to move closer towards each other in the meaning they ascribe their success to knowledge function in making the events workable and successful. In other words, KM can be used as a tool to store, retrieve, disseminate and manage information related to user needs. For instance, Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) discuss the first key factor of success for an organization is to gain greater knowledge, especially in BK and TK. The second is to be able to transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge in which the knowledge becomes useable (UK) and functional (OK) within managerial activities.

According to the above KM functional model, any success of any human action (SM) was an output of his knowledge understanding (KU) and knowledge growth (KG). However, as a human, he might be influenced by a certain situation and constrain that lead him to manipulate either (BK) or (MK) or even (UK) in making his own success.

Islamic conceptualisation of knowleedge

Methodology

The main objective of constructing Islamic Knowledge Management (IKM) in this study is to facilitate users of knowledge (UK) with awareness about the componential elements of IKM. In other words, IKM practice composed off certain elements and specification in transforming UK to become a successful person in integrating all type of knowledge within his operational activities. In this regard, UK has to understand the nature of knowledge and its existence as a first step toward observing the possibility of IKM functional behavior and identifying its componential elements before reaching any tangible finding through

comparison analysis between KM and IKM.

Islam and Knowledge

The notion of *Islam* as a "manner of submission" to Allah (*s.w.t*) is a useful reference point to begin the discussion on the Islamic conceptualisation of KM. It is important to bear in mind that the Islamic notion of KM is related to and continuous with its notion of *'ilm* (knowledge). In Islam, the definition of knowledge is not confined to only epistemological concerns but also includes ethical truthfulness and other dimensions of knowledge objectivities.

Islam teaches that knowledge is a God-given bounty (*'ata*) to Mankind. According to Islam knowledge aims to guide the human intellectual endeavours to elaborate and understand the ultimate questions of life. The Qur'an says:

"Allah will exalt those of you who believe and those who are given knowledge to a high degree".

(The Qur'an, 58:11).

"And whosoever is given knowledge is given indeed abundant wealth"

(The Qur'an: 2:279).

Prophet Muhammad (*s.a.w*) encouraged the acquisition of knowledge by saying:

"*Verily, the men of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets*"

(Abu Da'uw, hadith no. 3641)

The value of man is the value of his knowledge (the Qur'an, 2: 30-33; 2:269; 58:11; Sardar, 1993: 43; and also Jamil Farooqui, 2005).

Therefore, knowledge is not just a particular cultural production, neither an empty wisdom of an individual's experiences to include every single way of looking at things and acting accordingly, i.e. every way of life is based on a body of knowledge of a particular person and the universe he lives in and that knowledge determines his

attitude towards his own self (*anfus*) and the universe (*afaq*) in general, besides setting norms to which his thoughts and actions must conform. All beliefs, ideals and values - sacred or secular - spring from the worldview that emerges from the fund of knowledge at the disposal of a community. This is to say that knowledge is the root of culture and culture is the fruit of knowledge. Culture is like the knowledge on which it is based. Its value can be judged by the type of individuals it produces and of the society it establishes. It is not enough for Man to be born physically. One is made human through a cultural birth, through the inculcation of knowledge along with the belief, ideals and values it carries with it. The primary fact about Man is that he is not only a social but a cultural being. It is culture that gives meaning to what the Qur'an calls the divine trusteeship (*amanah*) as vicegerent (*khilafah*) and makes Man worthy of the exalted position as moral agents of Allah (the Qur'an: 2: 29).

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

According to the Qur'an (96:1-5), human beings are instructed to read, however, according to the Qur'an, this reading should be done in the Name of Lord, the Creator, the Most Generous who has taught by the Pen, and has taught Man that which he knew not. The command here is not just to collect knowledge and information, but also direct man to organise, plan and manage properly the knowledge given to him. This concept of knowledge is illustrated in Figure 3:
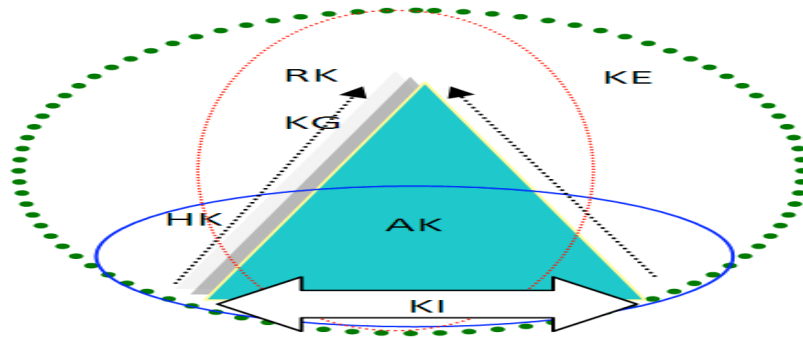
Figure 3: Islamic Conceptualization of knowledge

(KE=Knowledge Existence; KG=Knowledge Growth; KM=Knowledge Management; RK=Revelation Knowledge; AK=Acquired Knowledge; HK=Human Knowledge; KI=Knowledge Investigation)

The above figure shows that Muslims believe that knowledge originates from God and then it is transferred to man through various channels such as revelation, sense perception, reasoning, and intuition (observation and deduction) as affirmed by Muslim epistemologists (Al-Attas, 1990:1). The term knowledge existence (KE) refers to the nature of BK that exists within human activities. Some BK are observable by human being and some are not. Acquiring knowledge (AK) on the other hand, can be regarded as a reflection of human possibilities in achieving and exploring knowledge.

In other words, knowledge is an existing phenomenon that Man has to explore, acquire and investigate. Once knowledge is known to a person, it becomes information to him; in which it becomes a science after it is applied by him and taught to others. This process of exploring, obtaining and investigating reflect the nature of "knowledge growth" within the individual and the existence of human societies or civilization.

A Muslim as vicegerent (*khalif*) has to fulfil his task in investigating knowledge and developing its application as God created all those knowledge for him to be used and applied (the Qur'an 2:29-33). Although some of the Qur'anic verses in this regard refer to Islamic knowledge, they are general in their meaning and thus can be used to refer to learning in general.

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

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

Islamic Knowledge Management

It is obligatory for all Muslims to pursue

knowledge, to cultivate the various branches of knowledge and then to construct a suitable model of knowledge management in helping Mankind to become effective users of knowledge. Islam, in this regard, looks toward IKM's construction and application as important vision and mission for human development and survival as vicegerents of God, in which it should be bound by its intellectual wisdom, spiritual strength, mental ability, and even socio-cultural conditions of scientific creativity.

IKM's Functional Criteria

As discussed in 2.1.2, KM is composed of three elements: body of knowledge (BK), methodology (MK) and users (UK). IKM however, has another additional element that is the knowledge source

(KS). In this case, knowledge is considered as co-existing with Mankind. Therefore, their duty is to search and develop that knowledge according to their needs, urgencies and suitability. This approach is meant as a straightforward manner of looking into KS which is brought to light through interpretation based on an expert's specialisation or collective constructive finding which is known as *Ijtihad*. The output of this process should be valuable and convincing enough to appeal to the rational mind that inevitably appreciates their worth to practically apply them to enhance the effectiveness of productivities and achievements. These elements and their functional criteria of IKM can be illustrated in Figure 4:
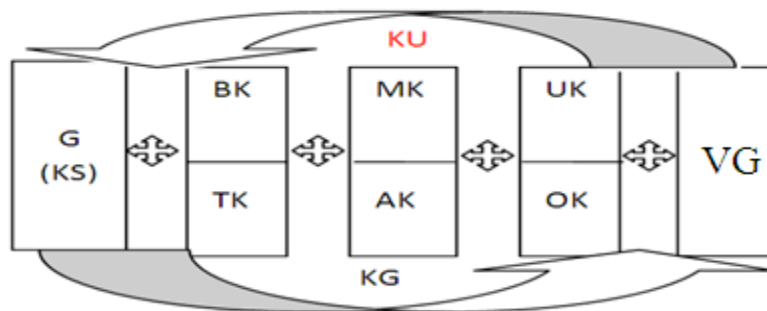

Figure 4: IKM Functional Model

(G=God; KS=Knowledge Source; BK=Body Knowledge; TK=Types of Knowledge; MK=Methodology of Knowledge; AK=Application of Knowledge; UK=Users of Knowledge; OK=Output of Knowledge; KG=Knowledge Growth; KU=Knowledge Understanding; VG=Vicegerent of God).

Figure 4 above describes the application of IKM and its operational function in helping users achieve the success as vicegerents of God (VG). The hypothesis here is, when human beings are able to manage knowledge for themselves as structured by IKM, they will be able to recognise the greatness of Allah, the Creator of the universe (Qur'an, 39: 38; 41: 53).

Finally, some holistic principles of IKM application can be listed from the above discussion:

1. IKM conceptualisation as drafted in this paper is an attempt toward knowledge realisation from an Islamic perspective.

2. IKM users have an optimistic view upon knowledge existence, its boundaries, categories and types. Consequently, they deal with knowledge as

part and parcel of their life activities and routine.

3. IKM users should not have to choose between knowing a little or a lot. They should be able to concentrate mostly on what they need to know and when it is needed to identify any related additional condition in which it requires another inspection of the environment designed for its usage. On this basis, Qur'an has been revealed gradually and in various stages.

The above discussion reveals that the utilisation of IKM focuses on users' wellbeing, practicality and effectiveness, especially in corresponding to human needs. We know that humans will remain forgetful and careless, by which his nature intuitively knows whether he is able to manage his own knowledge well or otherwise, and leads him to achieving the status of vicegerent of God successfully. In other words, mankind is always facing obstacles in all stages of his life. For this reason, he continuously searches for solution and evaluation as an integrated approach and up-to-date investigation of knowledge.

Conclusion

This research attempted to investigate the concept of KM as a step towards approaching IKM conceptualisation. In comparison, we observe that the application of KM movement strategies starts with users and ends with users (internal or external), i.e. its functional modelling is taking more user-centric based behaviours in many multi-disciplinary management efforts. IKM, on the contrary, starts with knowledge recourses for the purpose of user development and then ends up with the source of knowledge as user evaluation and confirmation in searching effective usage and application, i.e. its functional modelling is more towards recourse-centric based behaviours where all knowledge understanding (KU) and output (OK)

should be a reflection of knowledge source (KS) representation (physically or hermeneutically constructed). Therefore, the need for IKM is paramount to ensure:

1. Inclusion of all types of knowledge, including revelation, reflected in conformities within the modelling process.
2. Definition a modelling process that comprehensively covers the reservoir of issues which are humanistic in nature while leading to "fit-for-purpose" results in a defined time space and span.
3. Storage of knowledge generated during the modelling process for adequate and efficient model adoption and adjustment to suit specific workflow.

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

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