Building Communities of Practice and Knowledge Management at Malaysian Muslim-Dominated Organisations: Toward a Research Agenda

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Abstract—This research will try to highlight on Communities of Practice (CoP) and how CoP will offer a productive solution for improving knowledge and Knowledge Management (KM). The relationship between individual and social learning has received a great deal of attention from the organisation theory perspective. Based on previous literature, the social constructivist perspective challenges the traditional idea that learning takes place in individuals' minds or in organisational systems and structures, where it starts with the assumption that learning occurs and knowledge is created mainly through conversations and interactions between people. Another interesting point that will be highlighted in this research is the exploration and understanding of the processes and dynamics of CoP (synonym with brotherhood of Muslims) in Muslim-dominated organisations. We found the dearth of empirical research into how social interaction and learning is actually created in religious community; and in addition for this research we also look upon the CoP issues from Islamic perspectives.

Index Terms—Communities of practices, Islamic thoughts, knowledge management, Muslim communities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) [1] were among the first scholars who used the term 'Communities of Practice'. Their publication of *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* described the nature of learning through practice and participation. In their study of traditional apprenticeship, they supported that learning does not occur through the transmission of knowledge in instruction but rather through the participation and immersion of the apprentice within a CoP. Generalising from several studies of the apprenticeship in different professions (i.e. midwives, quartermasters, butchers), the authors suggest that in every community there is a 'learning curriculum' which consists of a field of learning resources and situated opportunities in everyday practice as viewed from the perspective of the learners. The learning curriculum is characteristics of the specific community and it cannot be considered in isolation, nor can it be analysed separately from the social relations that shape legitimate peripheral participation in that community.

In their writing, Lave and Wenger [1] also used the term 'legitimate peripheral participation' to exemplify the process by which people learn and become socialised into being part of a member in community. This process is divided into three groups involving masters (or 'old timers'), young masters (or 'journey') and apprentices (or 'newcomers'). Lave and Wenger (1991) [1] believe that individuals learn as they participate through interactions with a particular community (i.e. its history, assumptions and cultural values, rules and patterns of relationship), the tools at hand (including objects, technology, language), and the moment's activity (i.e. its purposes, norms and practical challenges). They have illustrated learning as an 'integral *and inseparable aspect of social practice*' which involves the construction of identity through changing of participation in CoP (pp. 53).

Lave and Wenger (1991) [1] suggest that the process of legitimate peripheral participation in CoP can assist the creation and sustenance of such knowledge. Therefore, in recent years, scholars and practitioner have shifted their focus to the emerging theoretical concept of CoP in the hope of better understand the underlying dynamics of knowledge-based work (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Wenger, 1998) [2], [3]. Many have chosen to anchor their work in the knowledge-based view of the firm, which proposes that a firm's only 'true' source of sustainable competitive advantage is the ability to continuously create, disseminate and embed knowledge throughout the firm (Drucker, 1991; Spender and Grant, 1996) [4], [5]. Swan *et al.* (2002) [6] suggest that the notion of CoP can be used as a rhetorical tool to facilitate the control of professional groups over which managers have little authority. Therefore, in this research the concern is on the awareness of the Muslim employees towards knowledge sharing behaviour, how the Qur'an and Sunnah greatly influence the lives of Muslim and what are the factors that influence the creation of, participation in CoP at workplace.

Apart from the idea of learning as a situated learning, the driving force of CoP is the midpoint for sharing and transferring of valuable tacit knowledge possessed by individuals and groups (Kagut and Zander, 1992) [7]. On the other hand, it is important to note that CoP provide organisations with a vital source of organisational learning and incremental innovation as community members improve their practice through the creation of new knowledge (Wenger, 1998) [3]. Although, the concept of CoP was initiated within the context of traditional apprenticeships as proposed by Lave and Wenger's work, this notion was soon extended to refer to communities formed within organisations. According to Brown and Duguid (1991) [2], CoP formed within organisations play a significant role in the development of dispositional knowledge, which they define as know-how. Brown and Duguid (1998) [8] also assert that

'*know-how is critical in making knowledge actionable and operational*' (pp. 95).

Within the framework of CoP, Handley *et al.* (2006, pp. 645) [9] argue that '*cultural richness or multiplicity of the broader social context generates a fluidity and heterogeneity within communities which belies an assumption in the literature that CoP are homogenous social object*'. There are number of arguments against the CoP perspectives (for e.g. Roberts, 2006; Handley *et al.*, 2006) [9], [10]. However, as emphasised by Handley *et al.* (2006) [9], the most important issue that need to be highlighted is how individual manage their roles, actions and relationships within multiple communities. As Wenger [3] suggests that '*we engage in different practices in each of the CoP to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves and gain different perspectives*' (pp. 159).

The recent interest in management studies which are mostly from the Western contexts have prompted the issue of managing knowledge for the organisation's benefit, yet the discussions on the influence of religion on KM still receives little acknowledgement. For Muslims, Islam is more than a religion; for them Islam is a complete way of life. The term 'way of life' is actually extracted from the Arabic word 'deen' – *deen* means to obey, to be submissive and to serve the ALLAH (God) the AlMighty. Islam considers that humans have the responsibility to serve the earth and humankind and are accountable for this role. This includes serving humanity and applying the principles of justice for all. Justice is crucial for peace and social harmony. In Islam, justice is a sacred principle in all matters from personal relations to matters of governance. Justice is instrumental in fighting poverty and inequality and is vital in the achievement of sustainable development.

In Islam, justice entails protecting individuals' rights, as well as the fair distribution of wealth and resources. Justice is a human value in Islam. Ignorance and illiteracy would prevent the performance of justice as it is taught in the Qur'an[1] and the Hadith[2] of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him - PBUH). Learning, seeking knowledge and wisdom are paramount for the achievement of justice and social harmony in Islam. ALLAH (God) has mentioned in Qur'an that individuals bear a responsibility towards the community '*...help you one another in Al-Birr and At-Taqwa (Virtue, righteousness and piety); but do not help one another in sin and transgression. And fear ALLAH. Verily, ALLAH is Severe in Punishment*' (al-Maidah 5:2)[3]. Learning is greatly emphasised in Islam. The importance of education and learning for the betterment of society was also emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad (PUBH) who asserted that for a Muslim to fulfill their role to serve humanity, they must acquire knowledge for the common good; for instance from the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah[4], as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says:

- '…. If anyone acquires knowledge of things by which ALLAH's good pleasure is sought, but acquires it only to get some worldly advantage, he will not experience the arf, i.e. the odor, of Paradise'.

Indeed, the first verse of the Qur'an to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) indicates the importance of education and learning in Islam; the verse started with the word *Iqra'*, it is a command that means *read*. That implies the importance of seeking knowledge which consists of learning, exploring and seeking enlightenment (Shaykh Husayn, 1999) [11]. The Qur'an (the ultimate source of guidance for Muslims) has in various verses pointed out the importance of

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[1] Muslims believe that the **Qur'an** is the very word of God (ALLAH) Almighty: a complete record of the exact words revealed by God through the Archangel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him). The *Qur'an* was memorized by Prophet Muhammad and his followers, dictated to his companions, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during the Prophet's lifetime. Not one word of its 114 surahs (chapters) has been changed over the centuries. The *Qur'an* is in every detail the same unique and miraculous text that was revealed to Muhammad over fourteen centuries ago. The *Qur'an* is the principle source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all subjects that concern us as human beings, including wisdom, doctrine, worship and law; but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time, the *Qur'an* provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and equitable economic principles. ALLAH has mentioned in the Quran: '*HE (ALLAH) has sent down to you the Book (the Qur'an) with truth, confirming what was revealed before; And HE sent down the Torah (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this as a guide in humankind; and HE sent down the Criterion (the Qur'an).*' ('Ali 'Imran 3:3-4)

[2] **Hadith** is the collection of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) statements and actions coupled with the statements and actions of his companions. *Hadith* is believed to have been collected beginning 150 years after Muhammad's death in 632 C.E. and it is the basis of jurisprudence for Islamic law, or Sharia law. To begin to understand Islam, one must understand what parts make up *H*adith, how *Hadith* is classified, and how *Hadith* is legitimized to mold Sharia. *Hadith* has two parts. The first part is 'matn', which is the specific content or text of the statements and actions of

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions. The second part is 'isnad', which is the record of the chain of transmitters all the way back to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), similar to a family tree. Although an isnad containing Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) bloodline carries more weight, one does not have to be related to Muhammad to be a transmitter. Muslims classify *Hadith* in four different categories. The first three categories refer specifically to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Awl are the transmissions of Muhammad's statements, fi'li are the transmission of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) deeds or actions, and taqrir are the actions or deeds of the Prophet's companions or others that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has approved of. The fourth category of classification is qudsi which are the Prophet's words, inspired by ALLAH, that are not recorded in the Qur'an. Once *Hadith* undergoes critical analysis, it becomes authenticated, lending legitimacy to Sharia by offering legal proof. The process begins when Muslim scholars complete a thorough examination of the *isnad*. They look for information about the transmitters and the transmissions and examine the matn in historical context. Once the analysis is complete, the Hadith is given a rating as *sahih* (authentic), *hasan* (good), *da'if* (weak), and *mawdu* or *batil* (forged). If a *Hadith* is found to be *sahih* or *hasan*, it is admissible as Sharia. In addition to offering legal proof for Sharia, the authentication and interpretation of *Hadith* has had significant influences on the different sects of Islam. Each sect of Islam views different collections of *Hadith* to be the legitimate collection. They decide which *Hadith* to trust and which *Hadith* is unreliable. *Hadith* is also examined against the *Qur'an* and any *Hadith* that conflicts with the Qur'an is thrown out. Muslims consider the Koran the Divine Word of Allah, and it is above all else in Islam. *Hadith* is second with believers trusting the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), so it helps to provide supplementation and clarification to the *Qur'an*. *Hadith* provides to Muslims a window to look at the Prophet's way of life and offer examples of what he did or said so they may follow in his footsteps.

[3] al-Maidah (Arabic: الماﺋدة سورة, , 'The Food') is the 5th chapter of the Qur'an, with 120 verses.

[4] **Abu Hurairah** (Arabic: هويرة أبو), also known as `**Abd al-Rahman ibn Sakhr Al-Azdi** (Arabic: الأزدي صخر بـ ن ء بدالرحمن), **Abu Hurayrah**, or **Abu Horaira,** was a companion of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the narrator of Hadith most quoted in the *isnad* by *Sunni Muslims*. Sunni Muslims are referred to in Arabic as *Ahl ūs-Sunnah wa āl-Jamā'ah* (Arabic: والجماعة الـ سـنة أهل), 'People of the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the consensus of the *Ummah* (Society) or *Ahl ūs-Sunnah* (Arabic: السنة أهل) for short'; in English, they are known as **Sunni Muslims.**

knowledge for human development which shows that Islam places great importance in learning and seeking of knowledge. For example the first verse demonstrates that 'reading' is the way to approach the Creator i.e. ALLAH the AlMighty. Reading is recognised as the key to the acquisition of knowledge.

ALLAH has mentioned in Qur'an:

- 'Read! In the Name of your Lord who has created (all that exists). HE has created (all that exists). HE has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. HE has taught man that which HE knew not' (al-'Alaq, 96: 1 – 5)[5]

Hence, Muslims believe that ALLAH created humanity and commanded that they may seek knowledge in order strengthen their faith. Surah *Taha*[6], 20: 114 says, '*My Lord! Increase me in knowledge*'. This verse indicates that for the Muslims, they believe that whatever they know is limited therefore they need to keep asking for ALLAH's mercy to increase their knowledge. According to Muhammadul Bakir (2011) [12], in Islamic perspective, the definition of knowledge is very broad and it is not confined to only epistemological concerns but also includes the ethical value of Islam.

ALLAH has mentioned in the Qur'an:

- 'O you who believe! Keep your duty to ALLAH and fear HIM; and always speak the truth (al-Ahzab 33: 70)[7]

The truthful people are those who do not lie in their saying or their promises. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the most truthful person and was regarded as *as-Siddiq* (The Truthfulness). However, the concept of truthfulness is actually wider than just in sayings. One also needs to be truthful in action and more importantly in faith. Truthfulness in faith can only be achieved when there is congruence between intentions, words and actions.

Maududi (1991) cited in Raba (2001, pp. 179) [13] defined the meaning of *Siddiq*:

- 'The one who is upright and just, who is always actuated by truth and righteousness; who is fair and equitable in all his dealings; who always sides with truth and justice from the core of his heart; who opposes tooth and nail all that is unfair; without showing the least weakness; who is pure and so unselfish that both friends and foes expect nothing but impartiality from him'

The importance of truthfulness is described here to the extent that it covers all other values such as righteousness, trustworthiness, justice, fairness and brotherhood. That is why in a different verse in the Qur'an, ALLAH ranks the truthful individuals in the second group after the Prophets. ALLAH has mentioned in the Qur'an:

'All who obey ALLAH and the apostle are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of God – of the Prophets (who teach), the Sincere (lovers of truth), the Witnesses (who

testify), and the Righteous (who do good): Ah! What a beautiful fellowship!' (An Nisa' 4: 69)[8]

In Islam, the duty to seek knowledge and learning is obligatory for every Muslim. An example from the Hadith narrated by Buhkhari[9], as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has emphasised seeking and sharing knowledge tremendously and said:

- 'Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim, male or female, from cradle to grave'. In as much as seeking knowledge is a must for every Muslim; dissemination of knowledge is also incumbent on Muslims to the members of society. Hiding or keeping the true knowledge away from those who seek it, is considered a sin'.

It is, therefore, not surprising to find many verses in the Qur'an as well as the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad that highlight the importance of acquiring and having knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also warned that only those who have acquired knowledge will be the trustees of ALLAH on earth and will inherit the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and of Islam. It may thus be noticed that the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) excite people the spirit of inquiry, adventure and search for the truth in a most systematic and scientific way. It is interesting to note the beauty of Qur'an and Islam is that they come from ALLAH. It is not tacit knowledge and experience of human being like any other knowledge in the world today. KM was leveraged to disseminate the knowledge of Qur'an and Hadith to be practiced by Muslims until today. Learning from this experience, KM in Islam can also be seen as the process of disseminating, reusing, sharing and practising to enhance the fundamental teaching, methods and practices of Qur'an and Hadith knowledge to create value for mankind. The Qur'an and Hadith are the 'Intellectual Capital' which provides best practises strategies and create competitive advantage for Muslims. For example, the high level of intellectual and scientific achievements in the Islamic realms, during the Middle Ages, inspired by the Qur'an vision of knowledge testify eloquently to the miraculous effect of the Qur'an on the development of science and technology. The contribution of Muslim scholars in all branches of science was so remarkable that George Sarton (1947, cited from MEDNET Monograph Series on Islam and Qur'an, 1997) [14] in his 'Introduction to the History of Science' points out that during the period 750 – 1100 A.D. the contribution of Arab scholars was brilliant and these included such intellectual giants such as Al-Razi (Rhazes), Al-Farabi, Ibn-Haitham (Al-Hazen), Al-Masudi, Al-Khawarizmi, Ibn-Sina (Avicenna), Al-Biruni and Omar Khayam. These luminaries dominated the domain of science like the Colossus and dazzled the world with their brilliant scientific theories and discoveries. Sarton

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[5] al-'Alaq (Arabic: العلق, 'The Clot'), is the 96th chapter of the Qur'an with 19 verses. It is sometimes also known as al-Iqrā (Arabic: اقرأ, 'Read').

[6] Ta-Ha (Arabic: سورة طه, These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur'an, and none but ALLAH (Alone) knows their meanings), is the 20th chapter of the Qur'an with 135 verses.

[7] al-Ahzab (Arabic: سورة الأحزاب, 'The Clans, The Coalition, The Combined Forces'), is the 33rd chapter of the Qur'an with 73 verses.

[8] **An-Nisa** (Arabic: سورة النساء, 'Women') is the 4th chapter of the Qur'an with 176 verses.

[9] **Muhammad Ibn Ismail Ibn Ibrahim Ibn al-Mughirah Ibn Bardizbah al-Bukhari** (Arabic: محمد بن اسماعيل بن ابراهيم بن المغيره بن بردزبه البخاري), popularly known as **Bukhari** or **Imam Bukhari**, (196-256AH / 810-870AD), was a Sunni Islamic scholar of Persia He authored the Hadith named *Sahih Bukhari*, a collection which Sunni Muslims regard as the most authentic of all Hadith compilations.

specifically points out that '*9th Century was essentially a Muslim Century. To be sure, intellectual work did not cease in other countries, far from it, but the activity of the Muslim scholars and men of sciences was overwhelmingly superior*' (pp. 27). In the next 250 years (1110 - 1350), again according to Sarton, Muslims shared honours in the field of Science and Technology with European scholars.

These brilliant Muslim scholars by their path-breaking contributions not only carried forward the scientific legacy of the Greeks but also corrected some of their wrong notions and revolutionised the scientific temper in Medieval Ages. Al-Farabi – the greatest peripatetic philosopher of Islam excelled Aristotle and Plato in eminence in the science of logic and was known as the 'Second Teacher' the 'First' being Aristotle. Al-Khawrizmi – the mathematical genius invented Algebra, Al-Masudi and Al-Biruni were among the greatest encyclopaedic scholars. The former made monumental contributions in historical and earth sciences while the latter was at once a brilliant mathematician, an eminent astronomer, an outstanding geographer, geologist and mineralogist. Ibn-Al Haitham revolutionised the science of optics and Ibn Sina dominated the medical sciences like the Colossus till the end of 18th Century. Al-Razi gave new directions to clinical methods of diagnosis and medical treatment. Finally modern social sciences and the science of historiography owe their origin to Ibn Khaldun the founder of modern social sciences. All of these Muslims contributions are highlighted in this paper is to show that the Qur'an is an ultimate Intellectual Capital for the Muslims. For example, in the Qur'an, ALLAH challenges human intellect, ingenuity, innovativeness and skill in order to motivate people to acquire more and improve upon the existing knowledge. This is best expressed in the following verses of Al- Ghāshiya[10] '*Do they not look at camels, how they are made, and at the sky how it is raised high, and at the mountains how they are fixed firm, and at the earth, how it is spread out?*' (88: 17 -20). It is only through proper understanding of the Qur'an and Qur'anic inspiration to acquire knowledge that spirit of educational excellence and scientific eminence can be rekindled in the minds and hearts of Muslim Intellectual. Generally, although KM practices are well discussed in the literature, researchers still fail to demonstrate properly the strategic integration between members (the communities of practices), processes (HRM practices) and strategies (Organisational Policies and Knowledge Management Initiatives). We argue therefore that it is crucial for researchers to focus on the value of religion thoughts and how its influence the group communities and knowledge sharing behaviour at workplace. As mentioned earlier, both Qur'an and Hadith indicate the importance of knowledge in Islam and the duty of seeking knowledge and learning is obligatory for every Muslims. Islam has a holistic view of human development, which views learning and seeking knowledge as central importance. Islam also emphasise on the collective life among the Muslims and Islam seeks to weld the hearts of believers into unison, for it places a premium on the unity of faith and ideology, sharing values

and vision, society and destiny. For this research agenda, issues concerning power, politics and trust that will determine the quality of community as an ideal structure of learning within organisations will also be explored particularly in Muslim-dominated organisations.

II. Malaysian Working Style

Malaysian has a culturally diverse working environment. The Malay, Chinese and Indian origins have a respectful system embodying specific codes of verbal and non-verbal expressions in their interactions with others. The multi-religious nature of the Malaysian society is another big challenge. Similar to other East Asian populations, Malaysian place high regard on the Confucian values of collectivism, filial piety, harmonious relationships and the importance of giving face (Norma and Larsen, 1992) [15]. For Muslims, certain things are taboo, like pork and alcohol. Some Buddhists are vegetarians while Hindus refrain from eating beef. These intercultural sensitivities are often respected among the ethnics. The need to understand cultural preferences may have to go beyond tolerance as these may have impact when members work in teams. As a result, the employers need to understand the ethnic sensitivities and preferences if the team has a heterogeneous membership (Asma, 2001) [16]. As mentioned earlier, the majority of Malaysian population are Muslims thus management practices are also based on Islamic principles. Every company is known to include information on guidelines and policies in respect of religious practices, for example, every Friday, all Muslim male employees are allowed to go the mosque to perform their Friday's prayer and all employees are also given a time off to attend funerals of kith and kin. Therefore, Malaysian practices should be understood in the mixed context of Islamic, Confucian and Western values.

Islamic economic reforms have started in 1981 when Malaysian former prime minister, Tun Mahathir administration came to power. During Tun Mahathir administration, he has decided to utilise Islam as a positive ingredient in the development of the nation and its peoples, especially that of the Malays. At the state level, the role of Islam goes beyond ceremonial purposes. In March 1981, Tun Mahathir announced that the government would be setting up an 'Islamic Consultative Body' (ICB) to ensure that national development programmes conformed to Islamic Values. This committee would be discussing and deliberating and deliberate on various issues concerning Islam and development and to put forward its proposals to the government for consideration. For the first time since 1970, the NEP was being officially open to 'Islamic Input'. Later in 1981, the government announced its Inculcation of Islamic Values (IIV) Policy, which was meant to cover government administration.

- ''The Inculcation of Islamic Values into the country's administration will create a Government which is more just and effective. All citizens irrespective of race or religion will benefit from an administration based on Islamic values'
- –Tun Mahathir Mohamad, former Malaysia Prime Minister (1981 – 2003)

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[10] a**l-Ghāshiya** (Arabic: لغاشـية, 'The Overwhelming Event') is the 88th chapter of the Qur'an with 26 verses.

Over the years, the Malaysian Government has crystallised this policy and it became clear that the policy was meant to instill universal Islamic values which would enable the country to have an effective, strong, just and progressive administration. This was to create a dynamic work ethic which would increase productivity. The important values stressed were: trust, responsibility, sincerity, dedication, moderation, diligence, cleanliness (incorruptibility), discipline, co-operation, integrity and thankfulness. In implementing this policy, various bodies were established, the most important one being the ICB which was made up of 'Islamic Experts' in administration, law, economics, medicine, engineering, agriculture, sociology, Islamic philosophy and politics whose task was to analyse and evaluate policies and technology with the intention of modifying them to ensure that they were in line with Islamic values. All programmes planned under the IIV policy and the function of the ICB as it developed over the years were basically focusing on improving the work performance of Malaysian government employees, who were predominantly Malays/Muslims. The IIV policy was an attempt at improving individuals in their thinking, behaviour and value orientation. The Malaysian government has always stressing the need for the people to change negative attitudes and cultural traits. For the Malays/Muslims this was done via the IIV policy, while for the non-Muslims, other value policies such as Look East Policy and the Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy campaigns were emphasised. Presently the long term goal of Vision 2020 is to make Malaysia a developed nation according to its own mould, one that does not only stress material well-being but intellectual and spiritual dimensions as well. The Malaysian Government believes that the Islamic Values can contribute to the development of 'social capital' in Malaysia. As a conclusion, the following quotes underscore the importance of religion; in this case Islam, which plays an important role to reform Malaysia towards modernisation and developed country status.

- 'We see absolutely no contradiction between Islam and modernisation. Indeed, the Islam of the 21st century must be an element of our modernisation programme'
- –Tun Musa Hitam, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia (1981 – 1986)
- If some have questioned whether Islam and modernity are compatible and warned of a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West, Malaysia is a Muslim nation that deflates such facile stereotypes. It has simultaneously emphasised its Muslim identity and promoted pluralism.'
- –John Esposito, Asiaweek, 4 April 1997 [17]

In the late 2003, the Malaysian government has geared its efforts towards implementing the approach of Islam *Hadhari* in the country with the aim of bringing Muslims back to basics, returning to primacy of values and principles as prescribed on the Qur'an and the Hadith that form the foundation of Islamic civilisation. Islam *Hadhari* postulates ten fundamental principles: faith and piety in God, just and trustworthy Government, free and independent people, vigorous pursuit and mastery of knowledge, balances and comprehensive economic development, good quality of life for the people, protection of the rights of minority groups and women, cultural and moral integrity, safe guarding natural resources and the environment, as well as strong defence capabilities. The ultimate goal of Islam *Hadhari* is to infuse Islamic values throughout the society at all levels, from individual to institutional. The Malaysian 4th former Prime Minister urges Malaysians to take pride in their cultural heritage and adopt values and attitudes that consistent with God's written instructions, to do the right thing to others as well as acting righteously when it comes to dealing with other people. We argue that there has been little effort to discuss on the influence of religion thoughts at workplace with respect to CoP and KM; and we believe the time is now opportune to address these gaps in the literature.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary approach for this empirical study is to capture the richness of individual experience within two similar departments in two Muslim-dominated organisations (profit based organisation and non-profit based organisation) with the focus being on CoP. The proposed research methodology is qualitative. The core method utilised to generate data to answer the above research aims will be interviews. Hakim (1994) [18] concedes that qualitative research is appropriate in accessing the personal experience of workers and hence, the focus will be on reporting individual perspectives and feelings. Qualitative methods are useful when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed. Qualitative methods offer a mean to understanding and describing social situations and the one we will use are: group or personal interviews, observation and document analysis. These techniques capture the full richness and complexity of the real world and will allow me to detailed examination of people and their behaviour in their daily interactions. In this research, case studies will be used as a research method. Case studies play a significant part in research across the disciplines – including organisation studies – and for exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research. In particular, case studies offer an approach for analysing organisational development and change as well as providing as answers to 'How' and 'Why?' questions (Rowley, 2002) [19]. Through case study methods, a researcher might attempt to assess the social life of an individual and their entire background, experiences, roles and motivations that affect his or her behaviour in society (Yin, 1994) [20]. To compile a case study, various methods are deployed by researchers. To achieve the proposed research aims and objectives, we will use the methods listed:

A. In-Depth Interview:

- The purpose of the interview is to access individuals; awareness, views, opinions and understanding around the topic of Islamic teachings, Communities of Practice and also Knowledge Management. Focus group interview will also be conducted as an alternative approach. It is an attempt to learn about the biographies and life structures of group participants (Berg, 2001) [21].

B. Non-Participant Observations

- To gain additional understanding of the environment in

which the two Muslim-dominated organisations personnel operate and the routine information and technologies used. Varity of situations have been encountered as permitted by the organisations and include, department visits, securing a temporary work space in the department and attending meetings. Note-taking was the prime method for recording the observations.

C. Documentary Analysis

- The purpose of documentary analysis is to provide an additional source of evidence to further contextual the analysis. Documentary evidence may come from several sources such as organisational reports, strategic and operational plans, existing procedures and manuals, system documentations and so forth. The method acts as a supplement to the other methods used in the research. The evidence gathered in the documents can be used to contextualise the phenomena. However, all the documents are subject to availability. This study will focus on Research & Development (R&D) personnel at the two Muslim-dominated organisations. R&D personnel are seem to be the most appropriate samples in this study as derived from the work of Reich (1991) [22]. According to his analysis R&D personnel play critical position to an organisation due to: i) the importance of their knowledge and skills as productive force for the organisation; ii) they are viewed as constituting an investment for organisation rather than just being a labour cost; iii) their personal embodied knowledge is such that it represents a form of personal equity and as such means that many knowledge workers are potential entrepreneurs.

The study will undertake a comparative analysis between two Muslim-dominated organisations. The two organisations are expected to have different approaches in building and managing CoP and KM as they facing diverse organisational contexts. We are interested in exploring the conflicting different approaches they adapt in terms of the influence of CoP on KM implementation as perceived by the key workers and from our observations of their working practices.

IV. RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS AND EXPECTED OUTPUT OF THE RESEARCH AGENDA CAN BE REGARDED ON TWO LEVELS

A. Academic Field

Less developed by far is the emerging concept of the link between religion and knowledge sharing behaviour. In this study, the term spiritual capital will not be used due to the definition and descriptions of spiritual capital is not 'fit' with Islam. According to Garcia-Zamor (2003, pp. 358) [23] *'Spiritual and religious belief are compatible, though not identical; they may or may not co-exist. In office settings, it is absolutely crucial to understand the difference between the two.... Spirituality is definitely not about religion'.* Laabs (1995, cited in Garcia-Zamor, 2003, pp. 358) [18] states that the spirituality is *'about knowing that we are all spiritual beings having a human experience. It is about knowing that every person has within him or herself a level of truth and*

integrity, and that we all have our own divine power'. In contrast, the meaning of Islam is 'submission to ALLAH' and for the Muslims, Islam is the completely way of life and Islam teaches how the believer has to oblige the commitment to his faith. In this study, it will provide the definition of Communities of Practice and Knowledge Management from Islamic perspective, and also to demonstrate on how Islamic teachings have significantly related to CoP and employee knowledge sharing behaviour. According to the Stark and Finke (2000, cited in Finke, 2003, pp. 7) [24], *'when religious organisations provide members that share the same emotional attachments, hold the same beliefs, and practice the same rituals, the organisation can more effectively produce religious commodities for all'.* In this study it seeks to prove that religion can also contribute for an economic value to the organisation, which is deserves to be labelled as religious faith capital.

B. Business and Organisation Development

We believe that knowledge sharing is not a one way activity but it is a process of human action and interaction of knowledge within organisation. Therefore in this study, we will demonstrate that if organisation careful pay attention on CoP and KM activities and make them part of the organisational routines, the organisation will be able to create a common goals, common language, common view points and also collective knowledge. This is also the starting point for the creation of social capital in the organisation, in which organisation opens an opportunity for the employees learn together, and also at the same time the employees will build their personal networking and make friends with other members from other departments within the same organisation. Some of the prominent KM writers (for e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Marquardt, 2002) [25]–[27] have suggested that CoP and KM could exert considerable influence in organisations, particularly in areas such as innovation and performance. As Grant (1996) [28] puts it, *'knowledge has emerged as the most strategically-significant resource of the firms'* (pp. 375) and is able to lead to the development of capabilities and competitive advantage (Bhagat *et al.*, 2002; Bogner and Bansal, 2007) [29]–[30]. While all the literature on KM can be regarded as relatively concise understanding of a process attaining a specific outcome, however they are mainly cases based on the view of organisations from the developed countries. Therefore a more comprehensive view on CoP and KM is obviously required for the purpose of the present study especially by examining the CoP and KM in developing countries. This study will contribute to providing the research results that are responsive to local Malaysian organisation rights, needs and interests.

V. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, it is the intention of this study to suggest that contemporary KM literature has reached an important juncture whereby it has to start engaging and focusing on the KM in Asia-driven phenomena. This study also would like to take the challenge as recommended by Bruton and Lau (2008, pp. 656) [31], who remarked, *'Asian management*

researchers should have the confidence to know that their findings have something to offer to the academic community today and in the future'

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