

Knowledge Management Systems and Practices and SME Growth

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to conduct a preliminary review of various studies and papers on KM practices and systems and how that it has been applied in SMEs resulting in growth. By this, the study was guided by three key questions being; what are the KM systems and practices that exist in SMEs and how that these practices and system are being applied for business growth?

Methodology: The study was conducted based on an organized review of several papers searched through the various databases, including Google Scholar and springer link, with some inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the search, a total of 34 papers were deemed to be related to the aim of the paper. A quick scan of the abstract resulted in 8 papers best fit the criteria set and the focus was on papers that had a systematic review of existing papers that were related to the aim of the study. The 8 papers selected were further categorised into three, being KM systems, KM practices and KM benefits, and growth in SMEs with each of the categories focusing on a minimum of two key papers that are considered as having best dealt with the particular subheading as per the categories

Findings: The review revealed interesting findings, key among them is that SMEs like their larger counterparts employ varied strategies and approaches in deploying KM practices and systems. KM practices and knowledge management systems (KMS) have been identified as tools, mechanisms and systems that are used by organizations for business growth and organizational goal achievement. SMEs appreciation of KM has been viewed as undeveloped and fragmented compared to its large firm counterparts, with most of the knowledge activities still in the tacit realm. It was further identified that the implementation of KM activities results in several benefits or growth. These benefits or growth come in several forms including the ability to innovate and be competitive, employee development resulting in customer satisfaction, increased sales, fewer losses, increased productivity and process improvements.

Originality: The understanding and conceptualisation of KM practices, systems, tools and processes are sometimes farfetched, hence the study provides information and a model to conceptualise the understanding, putting the culture and environmental setup into KM climate that supports the processes and systems into achieving KM goals.

Keywords: Knowledge Management systems and practices and SME growth

Introduction

Knowledge is a resource for organizations both large and small. It has been observed and acknowledged by many authors the importance of knowledge and how knowledge is a useful resource in organizational development when properly harnessed. (Arsawan et al., 2020). While several authors have emphasized knowledge usage in large firms and businesses much has not been said in Small and medium enterprises (SME) since they largely indicate knowledge diffusion and its fragmentation in the framework of the small businesses (Cerchione et al., 2016; Lin, 2014). Most discussions on knowledge in small businesses have focused their attention on tacit knowledge rather than explicit knowledge. This goes to buttress the point made by some writers that a lot of knowledge management (KM) activities going on in the organizations particularly SMEs but they lack the understanding to appreciate that as KM.



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For knowledge to be properly utilized for organizational growth there is the need to implement appropriate practices and systems that will support the knowledge resource. These processes involve the organizational structures and management commitment as well as IT tools that will help the organization harness the knowledge for its use. Many writers have alluded to this fact and have proposed and asserted a variety of systems and tools appropriate for organizations.

Several authors have confirmed and acknowledged the potential or real effect of KM as a useful resource or tool for organizational performance or growth (Ates et al., 2013). The study has shown that KM practices and systems do not only pertain to large companies but also applicable to small companies. However, its usage and application may differ from organization to organization. It has been observed in most cases that much as SMEs have the potential to grow, it is saddled with several challenges. These challenges sometimes affect the implementation of KM systems and impede the flow of KM practices, thereby affecting operational performance.

This paper focuses on the literature review of papers highlighting the existence and application of KM in SMEs and how that the existence or otherwise of the practices and systems affect their operational performance or growth. The paper aims to conduct a preliminary investigation on selected papers on SMEs and their operations, as well as KM systems and practices and growth in SME's operations. The purpose is also to serve as a direction and a motivation into opening gaps for further research.

SMEs

SMEs are a vital part of any national economy. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, SMEs comprise about 95 per cent of enterprises in a nation and are responsible for employing 60-70 per cent of the workforce (OECD, 2000, 2002)

The definition and classification of SMEs in business circles have always been a bone of contention. The differences extend in many dimension including international institutions, national laws as well as industry. Finding a universally accepted definition that practically applies in all situations and all consideration has been an issue of great concern. Some have claimed that the definition of SMEs is relevant for the statistical purposes of assessing economic performance within a country, across sectors and between states. (Berisha, 2015)

A preliminary review of the literature on SMEs has shown a very unique approach to the definition and classification of SME, even though differs from region to region. Most authors have viewed the discussion on SMEs and their definition in two key perspectives being quantitative and qualitative, however, the thoughts on quantitative seem to be quite dominant. It is argued that the definition of SMEs span both quantitative and qualitative domains. For SME definition, mostly the quantitative indicators are used, the size, criterion of many employees and economic criterion of annual turnover and the summation of economic results in the financial statements. Quantitative criteria provide ease of dimensional categorization of businesses but contain the deficiency of lack of confidence and lack of access to reported data (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2006). They sharply indicate that it is indispensable the need of involving qualitative characteristics of businesses in their sorting into classes. SMEs are named according to dimensional criteria, but the characteristics of management, ownership structure and other unquantifiable aspects distinguish them from large businesses more easily than quantitative indicators.

Stoke and Wilson assert that even though the number of employees constitutes an objective and easily applicable criterion, it has important limitations, primarily because the number of people employed is dependent on the sector of the business and this makes generalized comparisons across sectors difficult (Stokes & Wilson, 2010). Several studies have shown that, despite

inconsistencies in quantitative criteria, SMEs across different countries tend to display similar organizational, cultural and strategic characteristics that are unique ((Leite & Ferreira, 2011)

Both, the European Union and the World Bank use the quantitative criterion for SME determination. This includes the number of staff and some financial data being total assets, annual turnover or annual sales. Based on these data a further classification into micro, small and medium-sized is determined. For purposes of this paper the European Union definition will be adopted as follows;

Table 1: SME Categorization

Enterprise Category	Head Count (employees)	Annual Turnover or Balance Sheet Total
Medium-sized	< 250	<= Euros 50 million
Small	< 50	<= Euros 10 million
Micro	< 10	<= Euros 2 million

Source: European Commission (2005)

KM AND SMEs

KM has gained popularity in recent times, with several writers exploring the application of KM in various organizations both small and large. There has not been a consensus as to the very accepted definition of KM (Edvardsson & Durst, 2013), however, most thoughts and ideas on KM wrap themselves around the process of putting in the effort to organize an institutions knowledge in such a way that it would be useful for business development and also foster a certain culture of continuous learning among its stakeholders.

For purpose of this study, the definition as captured by Gupta et al will be adopted. They viewed KM as a process that deals with the development, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information and expertise within an organization to support and improve its business performance. As corroborated by many authors, they further indicated that organizations need to harness knowledge not only to stay competitive but also to become innovative and that KM requires a major shift in organizational culture and a commitment at all levels of a firm to make it work. Through a supportive organizational climate, ideally, through effective KM, an organization can bring its entire organizational learning and knowledge to bear on any problem, anywhere in the world, at any time. (Gupta et al., 2000)

Most of those papers have confirmed and acknowledged the potential or real effect of KM as a useful resource or tool for organizational performance or growth. Research has shown that KM practices and systems do not only pertain to large companies but also applicable to small companies. However, its usage and application may differ from organization to organization.

Organizations who are successful in leveraging knowledge, normally witness increased efficiencies in operations, higher rates of successful innovations, increased levels of customer service, and an ability to have foresight on trends and patterns emerging in the marketplace. Besides the traditional reasons for managing knowledge, SMEs, in particular, must pay close attention to knowledge management for several salient reasons (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; K. Desouza & Evaristo, 2003).

Another area that is worth noting in the SME discussion borders on the fact that even though the studies on SMEs as compared to large firms is very minimal, it further worsens when comparing studies conducted on SME globally and that of studies on SMEs in Africa. This was eminent as we started the search in KM and SMEs with very little showing for studies conducted in Africa. These thoughts become important when argued from the point of the variation in the classification of SMEs in terms of their sizes, nature, management and the likes. This presents

the unexplored nature of wide studies in SMEs and the application and use of KM particularly in Africa. This offers an opportunity for further studies as a contribution to the KM and SMEs discussion in Africa is very limited.

KM PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS

KM processes, activities and practices

There is no single standard for KM practices and activities that are applicable in all organizations. Each organization both large and small may adopt some KM practices for its operational activities. KM practices are defined as the set of methods and techniques to support the organizational processes of knowledge creation, storage, transfer/sharing and application (Cerchione et al., 2016). These practices are mainly embedded in the KM processes. According to Davenport (1994), KM is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge. Some authors have labelled the process as a four-stage process being discovery, capture, sharing and application. It is worth mentioning that no matter how the thoughts may be, it involves the processes of converting information into useful knowledge accessible by stakeholders for organizational development and this has been corroborated by many authors and writers.

Several authors and writers have varied thoughts and ideas on the KM processes and how that they are applied in large and small firms. These processes largely have fundamental procedures but differ in terms of their application from organization to organization. According to Gupta et al (2000) and based on the work by Nonaka and Takeuchi and Data ware Technologies, organizations can realize the full value of their knowledge assets only when they can effectively transfer knowledge between individuals. Through that, identified the following four processes that are commonly used by organizations for knowledge conversion; socialization, capture, dissemination and internalization.

The processes as indicated are usually spiced with the unique practices and cultural approaches of the organization. It is these cultural and environmental practices and approaches to the implementation of the KM processes that make each organization unique. In other words, each organization or firm has a unique approach to applying the processes and are usually viewed from the perspective of the organizations' stakeholders. These cultural and environmental activities and behaviours are viewed as the unique practices that support the processes for KM.

According to Nonanka's (1994) four modes of knowledge creation (socialization, combination, externalization and internalization); socialization involves the conversion of tacit knowledge to new tacit knowledge through social interactions and shared experiences. The combination also involves the creating of new explicit knowledge by merging, categorizing and synthesizing existing explicit knowledge, externalization involves converting tacit knowledge to new explicit knowledge. And finally, internalization involves the creation of new tacit knowledge from explicit knowledge. These processes involve iterative activities that are embedded in sharing of experiences through observation, imitation and practice. It generally occurs through workshops, seminars, apprenticeships, and conferences. These processes are very iterative and their continuous implementation results in a learning organization.

KM practices as pointed out by Cerchione et al., (2016) as a set of methods and techniques to support the organizational KM processes, further describes these practices as humanly embedded especially for SMEs operations being dominated by socialization and human-centred activities. SMEs are said to focus on short-term goals and survival. As a consequence, SMEs are not devoting sufficient attention to the development of business strategies (Petrov et al., 2020). Thus it is not surprising that most activities around KM are focused on tacit knowledge in SME operations. The study revealed a variety of people-centred practices and activities with

Desouza and Awazu (2006) and corroborated by many writers suggesting practices like focus groups, formal meetings, seminars, storytelling and other interactions as means by which the KM wheels are propelled into motion (K. C. Desouza & Awazu, 2006). These processes facilitated by what is termed the organizational KM climate (environment conducive for KM practices) differentiate one organization from the other in terms of KM application. Some organizations have a well-conditioned climate favourable for KM process implementation. The climate constitutes the cultural setting of the organization, its management structure and commitment, the organization KM awareness levels, how the KM strategy ties into the organizational strategy, resource availability and readiness, among others.

4.2 KM Systems

A knowledge management system (KMS) utilizes information-technology-based systems and tools to support and enhance the organizational processes of knowledge creation, storage, transfer, and application (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). They further suggested that it facilitates a cycle that captures the process of gathering information up and eventually leveraging and sharing such information. Several writers have placed a lot of premium on KMS at the disadvantage of key KM practices and processes. However, technology is secondary to a human element in the KM process.

There may not be a single or standard procedure in the implementation of information technology (IT) tools in organizations, likewise, there may not be a single technology comprising KMS. The literature reviewed suggest that whatever tools or systems designed to support an organization's KM, has to be complementary in nature purporting to enhance KM activities or individuals and the collectivity. Thus (Alavi & Leidner (2001) point out that, to achieve this the design of information systems should be rooted in and guided by an understanding of the nature and types of organizational knowledge.

Davenport (1994) as cited in Gupta et al (2000) argues that in most cases, managers obtain information not from IT systems but through other channels: Managers get two-thirds of their information from face-to-face or telephone conversations; they acquire the remaining third from documents, most of which come from outside the organization and aren't on the computer system. Hence, organizations need a process of articulation and codification of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge so that it can form a repository of corporate memory. This affirms the thoughts that information work hand-in-hand with organization's practices and mechanism to be able to leverage on the potential contribution of Information systems on KM towards business growth.

Cerchione et al., (2016) in their literature review of varied papers and researches put the KM tools and systems in 3 different categories as; tools that support organizational learnings (intranet and websites), communication and collaborative tools (emails, blog, content management systems, social media) and management tools (database, document management systems, project management systems) and knowledge-based applications architecture (Enterprise resource planning, customer relationship management, document management systems, and data mining and warehouse).

KM systems, practices, and processes are such intertwined that some writers seem to put them together in several discussions. One classical example could be found by Gold et al (2001), describing them as factors affecting KM and further described them as KM capabilities. By this, they put the factors affecting KM into two as Infrastructure capabilities and Process capabilities. The infrastructure capabilities have three factors as Technology, Structure, and Culture and the process capabilities are discussed in four-factor perspectives. These four factors are acquisition, conversion, application, and protection (Gold et al., 2001)

Many models and conceptual designs have been identified through various literature and study of KM, however, the practical understanding and its conceptualization in terms of the processes, practices and activities are sometimes farfetched. This mix-up sometimes heightens when the discussion is put in the perspective of KM systems and tools. It is in the light of this that the model below is designed to capture the thoughts and ideas on the processes, practices and activities of KM as emerged in this preliminary review.

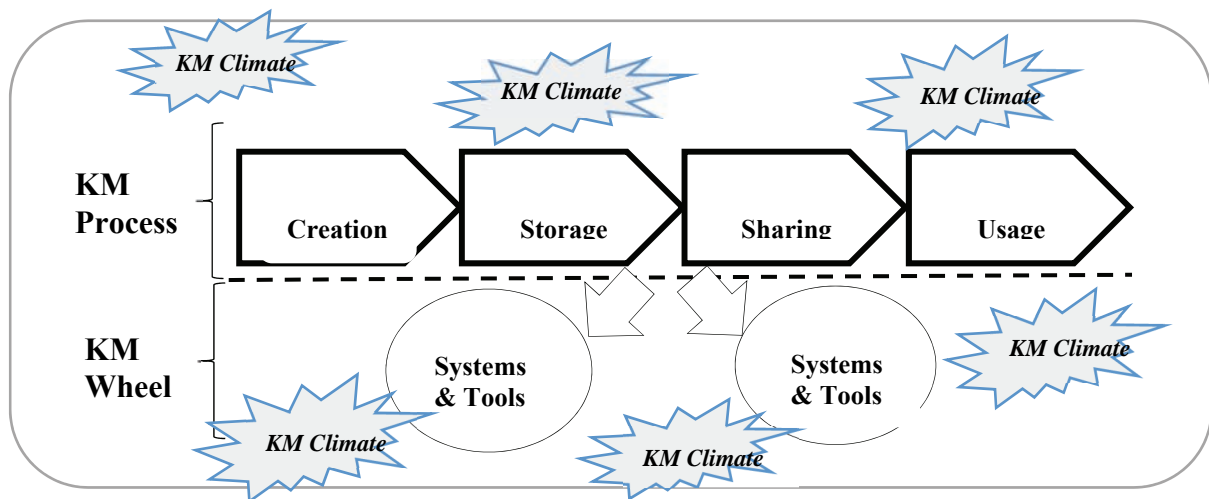


Figure 1: Conceptual Model – KM Activities

METHOD OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The study was conducted based on an organized review of several papers searched through the various databases. Based on the aim of the paper, some keywords that were related to the aim and ideas of the paper were used for the search. The words included knowledge management, KM and SMEs, organizational performance, SME growth, KM Systems and KM practices.

The search focused on database sites Google Scholar and Springer Link. Some exclusion and inclusion criteria were set for the search. The inclusion criteria were articles, research papers, conference papers, English language, and SME focus, focus on KM, KM systems and practices and KM benefits and performance to SMEs. The search excluded paid articles and papers, dissertations, in all a total of 34 papers were deemed to be somewhat related to the aim of the papers. A quick scan of the abstract was done to determine which papers best fit our interest. The determination was based on a priority for papers that had made a systematic review of existing papers that were related to the aim of the study. This became necessary due to time constraints and was considered efficient means to have a broader view on thoughts and ideas of the topic. In all only 8 papers best fit the criteria and thus constituted the foundation for the review.

Investigation into the aim of the paper resulted in categorizing the identified papers into three categories of KM systems, KM practices, and KM benefits and growth in SMEs, with each of the categories focusing on a minimum of two key papers that are considered as having best dealt with the particular subheading as per the categories. Below is a table that shows the categorization and some ideas or findings that emerged from the preliminary review.

Table 2: Key Findings from Preliminary Review on relevant papers

No.	Category	Paper Title	Author(s)	Key Ideas / Finding
1.	KM practices	Does KM deliver the goods to SME?	Edvardsson and Dursts, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of KM in SMEs represent poorly understood area but show areas of improvement in organizational success, employee development, customer satisfaction, systematic knowledge activities, good external relationship and strategy
2.	KM practices	Exploring KM and learnings in Iranian SMEs	Jafari and Fathian, 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation differs according to the size of the firm • Learning is positively related to factors as training, employee participation and flat structure. • IT did not have an important role in KM in selected SMEs
3.	KM practices	KM at SMEs: five peculiarities	Desouza and Awazu, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMEs do not manage knowledge the same way as larger organizations • KM practices are scaled-down versions of the practices found in larger organizations is incorrect. • SMEs are resource-constrained hence have to be creative and innovative
4.	KM Systems	KM and KMS: Conceptual Foundations and Research issues	Alavi & Leidner, 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the literature and discussing applications of IT to organizational KM initiatives reveals three common applications; being coding and sharing of best practices, creation of corporate knowledge directories, and the creation of knowledge networks. • KMS initiatives support the KM process in business growth
5.	KM Systems	What role do Information systems play in KM activities in SMEs?	Marin Gresty, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Systems (IS) aid the creation, storage, dissemination and use of the knowledge in SMEs • IS can be used to facilitate team-based working and social relationships • Over-relying and having too many competing systems for KM has risk
6.	KM Systems	KM in SMEs	Ansari et al, 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KM and KMS implementation are varied depending on several factors • KM strategic initiatives focus on less expensive and interactive tools and systems. • SMEs have a flat structure and that has a limited number of decision-makers thus ensuring effective decision making
7.	KM benefits and growth in SMEs	KM and growth in Finnish SMEs	Salojarvi and Sveiby, 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high level of KM-Maturity correlate positively with long-term sustainable growth • Finnish SMEs showed high awareness about KM but only a few have benefit in terms of growth from KM related activities
8.	KM benefits and growth in SMEs	The Benefits of KM in SMEs	Edvardsson and Dursts, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a benefit for a business to apply KM activities • SMEs benefit from innovation and creativity which result in business growth

The papers in each category were reviewed revealing the thoughts and ideas as captured by the various papers. The investigation into the papers is guided by the following questions;

What are the KM systems that exist in SMEs?

What are the KM practices that exist in SMEs?

How these KM practices and systems are applied in the SMEs growth?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

KM practices and SME Growth

Most of the papers reviewed acknowledge the importance of KM as a resource and a tool for organizational improvement and development. They further confirmed that knowledge in SMEs is mainly human embedded and there is the dominance of socialization, with the owners of the organization being the key actor in the knowledge processes and activities. The review further points that the framework of knowledge in the field of KM in SMEs is still fragmented and many areas are still unexplored. It was highlighted that firms are more likely to adopt informal processes to manage knowledge (Hutchinson & Quintas, 2008), with SMEs being the worse culprits. Thus acknowledging the innovative nature of knowledge for organizations and the potency of knowledge in helping organizations have a competitive urge. Cardoni et al., (2020) recognized the importance of KM and indicated that it allows entrepreneurs to identify and exploit opportunities to enhance entrepreneurial orientation and to reinforce organisational learning. However, they were quick to agree with the numerous studies that assert that SMEs do not manage KM the same way as large firms.

Some of the papers sought to discuss knowledge in the light of both tacit and explicit outlooks, with most indicating tacit knowledge as dominating in the SMEs as opposed to that of large firms. This points to the fact that most SMEs are not developed in the KM processes as they operate mainly in tacit than in explicit. Edvanson and Durst (2013) pointed out that compared to larger firms, SMEs tend to be more oriented towards the management of tacit knowledge, and their communication paths in SMEs often involve other companies, rather than remaining within the organization. This confirms the assertion by most of the writers that knowledge in SMEs is fragmented and not well structured. They viewed KM as a poorly understood area.

Despite the issues that pertain to SMEs application of KM, it was observed in the papers reviewed that some kind of gains or growth is attained in the implementation of KM practices. Most of the papers viewed business growth from varied perspectives, however for the purpose of this study we will adopt the explanation given by Edvanson and Durst (2013) in their paper "Does KM deliver the goods in SMEs". This paper was the basis for this discussion in the sense that, it summarizes thoughts and ideas on the subheading from varied papers and writers concluding on some useful ideas on the subject. They viewed growth in the perspective of organizational successes and depended on the five-dimensional benefits proposed by (Choy et al., 2006). It was concluded through their review that small businesses can substantially benefit from applying KM initiatives. These benefits or growth areas included increased sales, fewer losses, increased productivity and process improvements. Others are also in the area of employee development, improved customer satisfaction, innovation, creativity and improved external relationships. All these have been proven mostly with empirical studies confirming that growth could result from the application of KM practices not only in large firms but also in small businesses. Albassami et al., (2019) in their study of SMEs in Pakistan revealed a significant relationship between organizational innovation and SMEs performance. They additionally showed that SMEs internal innovation can be improved through effective KM practices.

One of the key elements or benefits of KM particularly in SMEs is the ability of the small firms to acquire useful knowledge from outside the firms. This useful knowledge when integrated

with the internally generated knowledge brings out creativity and innovation which has the potential to cause the firm to have a competitive edge over its peers. Many studies have shown that innovation brings competitiveness and innovation is a vital element for business growth (Volberda et al., 2014). This innovative prowess as witnessed in many studies result in the organization gaining a competitive edge not only among peers but the confidence to play above its gallery. This was well captured by a study conducted on how innovation could benefit small businesses. In the study, it was found that knowledge identification/creation, knowledge collection, knowledge organizing, knowledge dissemination, and knowledge application have a positive and significant impact on the innovation capacity of SMEs (Hussain et al., 2019). Hassan & Raziq (2019) pointed out in their study on KM practices on innovation in SMEs that, KM practices are implemented not only in larger firms but also SMEs in conformity with many studies. This adds to the numerous contributions by many authors seeking to establish the existence of KM practices in SME operations. They further revealed that each dimension of KM practices has an equal contribution to organisation business operation and business growth of SMEs.

KM Systems and SME Growth

As earlier indicated, KMS involves the utilization of information-technology-based systems and tools to support and enhance the organizational process and activities of knowledge creation, storage, transfer, and application. This happens in both large and small firms in varied concentrations and proportions. This depends on several factors which include, the firm's readiness and commitment to implement, the understanding and training acquired to aid in implementation, among other things.

The papers reviewed highlight several thoughts and ideas on KM systems and their application in SMEs. Most of them corroborated the potential importance and role of information systems in firms both small and large (Reed et. al, 2011). The studies have shown that SMEs tend not to use technologies such as intranets, databases or record management systems (K. C. Desouza & Awazu, 2006; Egbu & Botterill, 2003). This they attributed to the scarcity of resources (Wong & Aspinwall, 2004) and lack of education and training (Lee et al., 2005). They further asserted that short approaches are rather common in managing knowledge in businesses. This was strongly disputed by some writers as reviewed, contending that proponents of such assertion view KM systems as huge infrastructure that seek to support the KM practices. (Meaza et al., 2012), in their study of KM practices in Basque Country SMEs, dispute this assertion, contending that implementing a KMS does not require a large organizational infrastructure. In this study and others reviewed, it became obvious that some level of information systems was employed but not to the level of most large firms. Systems like intranet, emails and the use of shared drives and folders were seen to be common among SMEs studied. These simple tools were useful for KM creation and sharing among employees and other stakeholders (Evangelista et al., 2010) and aided in business process development.

One of the key challenges of SMEs in managing knowledge is the loss of knowledge in the firms as a result of the separation of key staff from the firm. The study revealed the role that information systems play in curtailing this challenge. It was evident in the study how that the provision of a repository of lessons learnt could be useful information that would aid in innovation and creativity since knowledge could be considered the bedrock for creativity and innovation. Other useful information is being captured with the aid of information systems as a way of improving and enhancing the knowledge repository which has the potential to aid in innovation when properly utilized. This information includes market news, competitor activity, among others. This goes to confirm the assertion by many studies indicating that SMEs focus on external knowledge rather than an internal one.

Teamwork in organizations is always viewed by many as an important element for business growth. Chua (2006) asserts that team working is a key way by which knowledge can be transferred. A review of the studies showed evidence of teamwork among members of SMEs through the use of technology in the form of shared drives, which facilitated cross-functional teamwork thereby facilitating rapid distribution of documents and ideas sharing among team members. This supported business processes and innovation in SMEs.

Concerning the questions that were outlined to guide the review, it emerged that various literature as captured above has clearly shown that KM practices and systems exist in SMEs however in varied forms and undeveloped and fragmented nature. Some major practices dominating the review in relating to the question on the existence of KM practices included the domination of tacit knowledge in the KM processes and activities. Prominently captured was also the fact that most of the knowledge resided with the owners of the business. It was further revealed that the SMEs seek to focus on knowledge from outside the firm which has the potential to enrich the knowledge base providing them with the leverage in terms of ability to innovate. It could be concluded from the study that KM practices exist in the operations of the SMEs but would be quick to say that not to the level of the large firms in conformity with many authors. Concerning the existent of KM systems in SMEs, it emerged that KM systems in SMEs are not that developed even though existent. It was revealed that its existence provides leverage to the firms in terms of knowledge sharing and usage.

One area viewed as a gap in the review and was considered to be interesting for further research would be the assessment of the degree or extent to which KM practices exist in these SMEs. This would specifically detail the extent or degree of their existence and could further reach out to other areas where it could be directly linked to organisational performance or growth.

Again on the question of how KM practices and systems are applied to the SMEs' growth as a guide to the review proved to be positive. The application could be evidenced in several ways and forms prominent among them were in the areas of innovation and creativity, which had a positive influence on business growth and performance. The KM systems and practices also facilitated business processes particularly the systems since knowledge access and sharing became handy for employees and promoted a learning environment for the organisations. This was viewed to be putting the firms into a greater competitive advantage.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to identify the body of knowledge regarding KM practices and systems and SME growth and to improve our understanding of this topic to better position the topic of KM and its actual relevance.

The study revealed that KM practices deal with two key activities, being the KM process backed by institutional culture and a mechanism that seeks to support and enhance the processes and activities in harnessing the knowledge and using it for organizational benefit. These processes as revealed are usually similar since they all borders on the generation, storage, usage and application of the institutional knowledge. However, what makes the difference has to do with the kind of culture and environmental setup with management attitude towards the processes and systems. Varied approaches were used in dealing with the knowledge management practices and mechanisms and how those organizations both small and large use these processes for their operational gains.

The review revealed interesting thoughts, especially how that most of the authors label KM practices and processes and how that each has dealt with the topic. The three key labels of KM practices and systems as per the review are KM tools, KM capabilities and KM factors. All these labels as a reviewed point to very few varying ideas and thoughts. All these thoughts and

ideas could be described as the processes being facilitated by the IT-based systems (wheels) in a conducive KM climate to promote business growth in SMEs.

Given the varied nature of SMEs in terms of size and nature of operations as well as the difference that exist from region to region, it may be out of place to lump all SMEs into one basket in studies and research. This however calls for more studies and investigation into the various categories of SMEs and how that each may apply in KM. It would be interesting to also have a further study into how that Information systems support each of the KM processes in SME operations.

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