

Achieving and Sustaining Organisational Performance, the Effect of Knowledge Management Practices

Anthony Gyasi-Fosu

International School for Social and Business Studies,
Slovenia
afosu@sinapiaba.com

Abstract

Knowledge and learning are essential to organisational success (Pandey and Dutta, 2013). Many factors could be attributed to the achievement and, very significantly, the sustenance of organisational performance. A good knowledge management system is vital and incredibly significant for effective knowledge management, but more significantly importantly, the practices implemented to bring about effective knowledge management.

Purpose of Study

This paper aims to conduct literature research on organisational performance and how it is affected by knowledge management practices.

Scope of Study

This paper focuses on available literature exploring how organisations achieve good performance in various key performance indicators of their industries. Literature in multiple areas of organisational performance has been studied.

Methodology of the Study

This research paper reviewed relevant literature in articles, journals and books on the subject area. The keywords search was done on various websites for articles and journals for review. The key focus was literature on the relationship between knowledge management practices and organisational performance and, subsequently, literature that explores the relationship between knowledge management practices and organisational performance.

Findings & Outcome

The distinction between knowledge management practices and knowledge management processes was drawn in the literature. It was established in the literature that knowledge management practices work perfectly in collaboration with knowledge management systems, effectively utilising knowledge management processes to stimulate innovativeness of the organisation, thereby creating competitive advantage leading to organisational performance.

Keywords: Knowledge, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Management Practices, Organisational Performance

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is the currency of today's economy and the crux of knowledge management, which is the lifeline of modern-day organisations. It has been used since the 1990s as a tool to achieve sustainable competitive advantages and greater performance, and now, it is becoming an essential asset to sustain organisational competitive advantages and a vehicle for continuous progress and innovation (Saqib et al., 2017)

There have been numerous studies that have linked various aspects of organisational performance to knowledge management. For example, knowledge management has gained much traction in management and corporate studies in the last couple of decades. Various components of knowledge management have been studied, and the various correlations and collaborations with other factors to affect or contribute to organisational performance have been studied. Key among studied aspects of knowledge management is knowledge management practices and knowledge management systems.

This paper aims to study available literature on knowledge management practices and their various components on organisational performance. In the study of the effect of knowledge management practices, studies have indicated that there can be an over-emphasis on technology to exclude adequate people/quality planning or strong people /quality programmes from a knowledge perspective, hindered by inadequate enabling technologies. (Moffett et al., 2003)

The objective of knowledge management practices (KMP) is to support the creation, transfer, and application of knowledge in organisations. However, knowledge and knowledge management are complex and multi-faceted concepts. Therefore, to have a real effect on organisational performance, there is the need for a complex combination of knowledge management practices KMP riding on an effective knowledge management system KMS. Thus, effective development and implementation of KMS require a foundation in several rich pieces of literature (Yang, 2008); this is exactly the situation for knowledge management practices.

In the highly competitive business world, the success of one's organisation depends on how well the top management utilises its corporate assets to achieve business goals. These assets can be categorised into tangible (e.g. financial capital, buildings and employees) and intangible (e.g. knowledge, corporate image and branding). Conventionally, most firms have prioritised managing and utilising the tangible aspects in their day-to-day operations (Cham et al., 2016). Cham et al. (2016) (quoting McFayden and Canella, 2004) state that knowledge has become a critical resource. It is an imperative element for businesses to solve operational problems and to make decisions to support business strategies (Cham et al., 2016)

Many factors could be attributed to the achievement and, very significantly, the sustenance of the achieved success. Among the critical resources of production, land, labour, capital, etc., knowledge is one essential resource that is not professionally managed. For efficiency in

knowledge management, the effective set up of knowledge management practices built on a solid-state of knowledge management systems is vital and invaluable significant. This paper has been built on literature research on organisational performance and how it is affected by various knowledge management practices.

This paper reviewed relevant literature in articles, journals and books. Literature on the relationship between knowledge management practices and organisational performance and, subsequently, literature that explores the relationship between knowledge management practices and organisational performance was the key focus.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Knowledge Management Practices (KMP)

The most practical definition of knowledge management practices is from the work of Inkinen (2016). His study defines knowledge management practices as the conscious organisational and managerial practices intended to achieve organisational goals through efficient and effective management of the firm's knowledge resources (H. Inkinen, 2016). In addition, his definition was strongly influenced by the works of Andreeva and Kianto (2012), Foss and Michailova (2009) and Kianto et al. (2014). (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Foss & Michailova, 2009; H. Inkinen, 2016; Kianto et al., 2014)

Many works of literature reviewed show KMP as an existing knowledge management process. However, others also clearly distinguish knowledge management processes from knowledge management practices. Knowledge Management Practices refer to the practices conducted in a firm to unleash its intellectual potential by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of organisational knowledge resources. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Choi & Lee, 2003; Heisig, 2009; H. Inkinen, 2016)

According to Parsad Gautam (2022), knowledge management practices could be defined as observable organisational activities related to knowledge management. (Parsad GAUTAM, 2022). He further identifies four key dimensions of knowledge management practices that appear to relate to performance: 1. the ability to locate and share existing knowledge; 2. the ability to experiment and create new knowledge; 3. a culture that encourages knowledge creation and sharing; and 4. regard for the strategic value of knowledge and learning.

However, the categorisation of Inkinen (2014), which was inspired by the work of Heisig (2009), seems to be one of the best in the available literature. This categorisation consists of four blocks; human-oriented factors (i.e. culture, people and leadership); organisation-oriented factors (i.e. processes and structures); technology-oriented factors (i.e. infrastructure and applications); and management processes-oriented factors (i.e. strategy, goals and measurement). This study focuses on the human-oriented factors and the technology-oriented

factors. This is because much of the literature makes Knowledge management practices refer to the aspects of the organisation that are manipulable and controllable by conscious and intentional management activities. Knowledge management practices are often presented in the literature as technical and human (social) aspects. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012)

2.2. KMP - Social and Technological (MIS) Aspects

Knowledge management is often presented as a combination of technical and human aspects in the literature. Therefore the two groups of management practices shaped based on managerial decisions and can impact the effectiveness of knowledge management are human resource management (HRM) and information and communication technologies (ICT). The impact of these practices on companies' perceived competitiveness and financial performance can be established. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012)

2.2.1. Social Aspects Of KMP.

2.2.1.1. *Organisational Culture Aspect of KMP*

Culture is perhaps the most influential factor in promoting or inhibiting the practice of knowledge management. Specifically, organisations that value their employees for what they know and reward them for sharing that knowledge creates a more conducive knowledge management climate. (Choi & Lee, 2003; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Parsad GAUTAM, 2022)

Organisational culture is another imperative factor for successful knowledge management. It defines the core beliefs, values, norms and social customs that govern the way individuals act and behave in an organisation. In general, a culture supportive of KM is one that highly values knowledge and encourages its creation, sharing and application. The biggest challenge for most KM efforts lies in developing such a culture. (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Scarbrough, 2003; Wong, 2005)

Since culture is a broad concept, it comprises many facets. One cultural aspect which is crucial for KM is collaboration. Wong (2005) asserted that a collaborative culture is important for knowledge transfer between individuals and groups. This is because knowledge transfer requires individuals to come together to interact, exchange ideas and share knowledge. Not only this, collaboration has been empirically shown to be a significant contributor to knowledge creation. Trust is also another fundamental aspect of a knowledge friendly culture. Without a high degree of mutual trust, people will be sceptical about the intentions and behaviours of others, and thus, they will likely withhold their knowledge. Therefore, building a relationship of trust between individuals and groups will help to facilitate a more proactive and open knowledge sharing process. (Choi & Lee, 2003; Detienne & Jackson, 2001; Goh, 2002; Wong, 2005).

2.2.1.2. *People Aspect of KMP*

HRM as a KMP

Certainly, KM practitioners cannot afford to ignore the value gained from Human Resources Management (HRM); people are the sole originators of knowledge. Davenport and Volpel (2001) stated, "managing knowledge is managing people; managing people is managing knowledge". Many authors have discussed the significance and roles of HRM in KM. While it is vital to KM for many reasons, the main focus here is on the issues of employee recruitment, development and retention. Effective recruitment of employees is crucial because, through this process, knowledge and competencies are brought into the organisation. Therefore, employees with the required knowledge and desired skills to fill knowledge gaps should be recruited.

Furthermore, companies must enlist those who tend and are inclined to create and share knowledge. The skills and competencies of knowledge workers need to be continuously developed to produce valuable contributions to a company. If not, as with other tangible assets, their value will depreciate. Hence, companies have to provide appropriate professional development activities to their employees. Another central issue in KM is how to retain knowledge from being lost; this is where the function of employee retention gains its significance in KM, particularly for the SME sector. (Davenport & Voelpel, 2001; Wong, 2005)

HRM practices are a powerful means for stimulating desired knowledge behaviours among employees and can therefore be expected to contribute to creating competitive advantage and high performance (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012)

According to Foss and Minbaeva (2009), while there are some key theoretical contributions arguing the link between HRM, knowledge performance and financial performance, there is a lack of empirical evidence in this field, and consequently, no agreement as to which HRM practices matter for knowledge performance (Foss & Minbaeva, 2009)

However, Andreeva and Kianto (2012), referring to Scarbrough (2003), pointed out three aspects of HRM that are particularly important in shaping the flow of people and knowledge: employee selection methods, compensation strategies, and career development systems. First, effective selection of new employees is crucial because it is the process of building on an organisation's knowledge and competencies. Organisations should hire those who have the required knowledge and skills that they desire. Second, compensation strategies can help promote KM. Both tangible and intangible incentives can motivate employees to share and create knowledge. The third aspect is career systems, which concern systematic training and education to employees and how to retain good employees and their knowledge when they leave the organisation. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Scarbrough, 2003; Wong, 2005)

In the existing literature, rewards have mostly been discussed with knowledge sharing. While getting people to share what they know and disseminate this information across the organisation

has often been hailed as the main focus of knowledge management, several studies have found that knowledge sharing does not easily happen and needs to be specially promoted. Unless knowledge sharing is reflected in reward mechanisms, it is unlikely to occur. Compensation strategies promoting knowledge sharing can be tangible (bonuses or one-off rewards) and intangible (status and recognition), monetary or non-monetary. Incentives of multiple types are likely to lead to the best results for encouraging knowledge sharing and other knowledge processes such as knowledge use. (Kulkarni et al., 2007). (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Scarbrough, 2003)

2.2.2. *Technology Aspects of KMP*

It is indisputable that one of the key enablers for implementing KM is IT. Its capability has evolved from merely a static archive of information to be a connector of a human to information and one human to another. IT can enable rapid search, access and retrieval of information and support collaboration and communication between organisational members. It can certainly play various roles in supporting an organisation's KM processes. However, IT as a KMS is distinct from IT in MIS, which supports KM as a form of KMP that promotes collaboration, workflow, customer relations, and e-learning. (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Lee & Hong, 2002; Luan & Serban, 2002; Wong, 2005)

IT support, and for that matter, effective management information system practices (MISP), was noted to be one of the main facilitators of knowledge acquisition, creation and sharing, which pushed firms to improve performance through innovations and organisational agility. Again, similar to knowledge-based HRM practices, researchers have found technology-oriented KM practices, i.e. MISP, to support innovations. Meanwhile, MISP, which promotes collaboration, communication, information search, real-time learning, simulation, and prediction, can directly link a firm's innovativeness and organisational performance. (H. Inkinen, 2016)

2.3. Knowledge Processes and Knowledge Management Practices

It is worth noting that a clear distinction must be made between knowledge processes and knowledge management practices in the study of knowledge management practices. The former refers to the knowledge processes that naturally exist in the organisation (e.g. knowledge sharing or acquisition). The latter refers to those management practices that support the efficient and effective management of knowledge for organisational benefit. Knowledge management practices can therefore be said to consist of a set of management activities that enable the firm to deliver value from its knowledge assets (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012)

2.4. Knowledge Management Practices & Organisational Performance

Much of the available literature on knowledge management and its effect on organisational performance or development has done so in varying degrees. Much of the early knowledge management literature consisted of theoretical papers proposing hypothetical relationships

between aspects of knowledge management and organisational outcomes. Again, there are case studies of highly successful knowledge management applications. (Adams & Lamont, 2003; Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Chapman & Magnusson, 2006; Edvinsson & Malone, 1997; Nonaka et al., 1996; Zaim et al., 2007)

Meanwhile, empirical studies assessing knowledge management's impact on corporate performance in larger samples of firms do exist. It could be concluded from these studies that knowledge management impacts performance. However, the impact of knowledge management on corporate performance could be direct or mediated by some other variables, such as organisational processes or intermediate performance indicators. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Choi & Lee, 2003; Hussinki et al., 2017; Kianto, 2011; Tanriverdi, 2005; Zack et al., 2009)

Many literature studies indicate that knowledge management practices are positively associated with organisational performance. It is evident from the literature that both qualitative and quantitative studies allude to this fact. More specifically, knowledge management practices are directly related to various intermediate measures of strategic organisational performance (namely, customer intimacy, product leadership, and operational excellence). Those intermediate measures are, in turn, associated with financial performance. (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Massey et al., 2002; Nonaka et al., 1996; Parsad GAUTAM, 2022)

While it is argued that KM can bring direct economic benefits to the firm through saving or earning money (e.g. Davenport et al., 1998), a more usual view seems to be that the impact on the firm's financial performance is indirect. Certainly, it can be inferred that the knowledge management practices employed to this effect are a determinant factor for this impact. For example, according to Demarest (1997), management of knowledge delivers economic benefits to the firm in such various manners as accelerating innovation and structural agility; reducing cycle time and program failures; creating a healthy and knowledge-friendly culture; attracting and maintaining high-quality knowledge workforce; and by improving re-use levels of knowledge and corporate memory. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Demarest, 1997)

2.5. Organisational Performance

The potential for KM to create a competitive advantage is positively linked to organisational performance. When examining the existing academic literature on the topic, one cannot notice the relative shortage of empirical studies demonstrating an actual connection between KM and organisational performance. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012)

Parsad Gautam (2022), (quoting Treacy and Wiersema (1995)), proposed three strategic performance capabilities, each offering a path towards competitive advantage. These are; 1. Product leadership represents competition based primarily on product or service innovation. 2. Customer intimacy represents competition based on understanding, satisfying and retaining customers. 3. Operational excellence represents competition based on efficient internal

operations. Organisations often implement knowledge management practices to improve one or more of these three strategic performance capabilities. (Parsad GAUTAM, 2022)

2.5.1. Other Factors affecting Organisational Performance

Again, literature has revealed that organisational performance comes from many factors. In his study, H. Inkinen (2016) points out that organisations should pay attention to specific knowledge management leadership attributes and organisational arrangements to achieve firm performance through knowledge management (H. Inkinen, 2016). Hooi (2019) also wrote that teamwork, which engages the employee in knowledge exchange and mutual problem-solving generates more technological innovations and product innovations. It encourages talented human capital to interact and share knowledge to pursue organisational goals (Hooi, 2019). Muffet et al. indicated a strong relationship between Knowledge Management and other organisational factors, namely organisational culture and internal technical culture. Further analysis of these elements revealed that factors internal to the organisation are intruded upon by macro-environmental elements. (Moffett et al., 2003)

2.5.2. KM and Innovation

In its ideal form, innovation can improve performance, solve problems, add value and create a competitive advantage for organisations. (Gloet & Terziowski, 2004). Heisig et al. (2016) noted that a bulk of empirical studies have addressed and indeed validated the impact of KM as an essential enabler and facilitator of innovation in organisations (Heisig et al., 2016). Efficient knowledge management practices (KMP) help firms achieve sustainable competitive advantages. Meanwhile, Bose (2004) links KM to the various factors needed to link KM success to innovation. These include reducing the loss of Intellectual Capacity from employees who leave, reducing the cost of developing a new product/service, the increase in productivity of workers by making knowledge accessible to all employees, and, therefore, increasing employee satisfaction (Bose, 2004). All these processes cannot be effective without the proper and effective implementation of the various knowledge management practices. (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Bose, 2004; H. Inkinen, 2016; H. T. Inkinen et al., 2015) .

Several early literature reviews suggested different value propositions of KM in the innovation process. These propositions range from creating tools and processes to exploiting tacit knowledge for innovation to support collaborative problem solving, enabling retrieval and re-use of ideas and learnings from previous innovations up to the influence of an open-minded KM culture fostering creative thinking (Heisig et al., 2016). A bulk of empirical studies have addressed and indeed validated the impact of KM, and for that matter, knowledge management practices (KMP), as an essential enabler and facilitator of innovation in organisations (Aboelmaged, 2014; Heisig, 2009; H. Inkinen, 2016)

2.5.3. Innovation and Organisational Performance

Because of the increasing levels of competition and decreasing product life cycles, innovation

is widely regarded as one of the most important sources of sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly changing environment allowing a firm to improve profitability and maintain competitive advantage (Atalay et al., 2013; Artz et al., 2010). Again, Kanchana et al. (2011) showed that effective knowledge management would lead to better learning and, subsequently, more innovativeness in an organisation (Kanchana et al., 2011)

By deconstructing some of the critical elements of the resource-based view and the knowledge-based view of the firm, Bogner and Bansal (2007) suggest that there are three components to knowledge management systems that influence firm performance: the firm's ability to produce new knowledge, its ability to build on that knowledge, and its effectiveness in capturing a high proportion of the subsequent spin-offs (Bogner & Bansal, 2007).

3. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The categorisation of Inkinen (2014), which was inspired by the work of Heisig (2009), was one of the most effective in addressing knowledge management practices. Out of the four categories, human-oriented factors, organisation-oriented factors; technology-oriented factors; and management processes-oriented factors, this study finds human-oriented and technology-oriented factors the most potent described in the literature.

This study shows that the literature highlighted the most knowledge management practices under human-oriented factors in organisational performance: knowledge-based human resources management practices and knowledge management leadership practices.

The literature strongly suggested that HRM practices were associated especially with innovations. Some studies pointed out that HRM practices increased the knowledge processes, such as acquisition, sharing and creation, which impacted innovation capability, administrative and technical innovations, product or service innovation and technological knowledge and product and process innovations. (Chen et al., 2010; Inkinen, 2016; Kuo, 2011; Soto-Acosta et al., 2014)

Under the human-oriented factors, knowledge management leadership practices were also well featured in literature. This literature suggested that a transformational leadership model, including idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualised consideration, increased the firm's relative performance compared to its competitors through improved knowledge acquisition and financial performance through learning and innovation. (Birasnav, 2014; García-Morales et al., 2012; H. Inkinen, 2016)

Based on the results of their exploratory study Gloet and Terziowski (2004) conclude that a knowledge management model based on Information Technology and Human Resources Management focus is a reliable and valid instrument for measuring and predicting the relationship between KM practices and innovation performance. Again, based on their work, there is a significant and positive relationship between KM practices based on IT/HRM and

innovation performance. Therefore, it can be argued that organisations should adopt an integrated approach of knowledge management practices to maximise innovation performance leading to competitive advantage. Knowledge management contributes to innovation performance when a simultaneous approach of "soft HRM practices" and "hard IT practices" are implemented. (Gloet & Terziowski, 2004)

Again, the findings of Nguyen (2022) confirm that the general knowledge management capability of a firm is a multi-dimensional construct composed of social knowledge management infrastructure capability, technical knowledge management infrastructure capability, and knowledge management process capability. Social KM capability is identified by three dimensions: organisational culture, structure, and people (HRM).

Knowledge management process capability is identified by four dimensions: knowledge acquisition, conversion, application, and protection processes. While social and technical KM infrastructure capabilities are strongly correlated, they enable KM process capability, with social elements having a dominant influence. In turn, KM processes as dynamic capabilities take the central role with the application process as the most important contributor to firm competitiveness. As a result, the indirect effects of social and technical infrastructure capabilities on organisational Competitive Advantage are fully mediated through KM process capability. (Nguyen, 2022)

Thus, no knowledge management practice can be said to contribute directly toward organisational performance. Instead, it takes a well-balanced combination of Knowledge management practices, in the bracket of social practices and technological practices, working through an efficient combination with an effectively harnessed organisational knowledge management processes to combine to stimulate innovation that leads to organisational performance. Again, it can also be deduced from the literature that this combination of knowledge management practices and knowledge management process is much enhanced in its ability to contribute to innovativeness and hence, organisational performance. Organisational performance thus happens when these factors are best situated on a well-established knowledge management system.

For knowledge management practices to contribute to organisational performance, they would have to interact efficiently with good organisational knowledge management processes. These have to hinge on the presence of good knowledge management systems to stimulate innovativeness. Innovativeness then leads to a competitive advantage for the firm, thus creating organisational performance.

4. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

A significant limitation of this study is that it has been conducted over a relatively short period, and hence literature that has been reviewed has not been exhaustive.

Again, because the focus of this study was to investigate if and how knowledge management practices (KMP) affect organisational performance, other possible knowledge management functions that potentially could impact knowledge management success and organisational performance were not fully studied. Future research may focus on other knowledge management processes, such as knowledge creation, sharing and utilisation, which may be equally crucial for knowledge management success and organisational performance.

Another limiting factor was that the literature selection process left room for personal preferences; exclusion based on titles, abstracts and full texts followed carefully pre-set criteria, but the reviewer's judgments can also make a difference (H. Inkinen, 2016).

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