

# Critical Review of Literature on Knowledge Management Strategy and Organizational Performance

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**Abstract:** Knowledge is a critical asset in an organization thus there must be an effective identification, acquisition, storage, sharing and implementation in order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. The paper aims to review the empirical studies on knowledge management strategy and organizational performance. The paper also includes a critic, identifies the research gap, concludes on knowledge management and captures recommendations of the study. The paper demonstrates knowledge management strategy as being a driver of organizational performance and also a vital tool for an organization to survive, be competitive and make profits. The study recommends that organizations need to develop a policy on knowledge management in order to enhance an effective knowledge management so as to improve performance.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Management Strategy, Organizational Performance.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management has increasingly become a vital strategic necessity required by organizations in order to achieve success in the global business environment. Knowledge as an essential asset in organizations requires effective identification, acquisition, storage, sharing and implementation for organizations to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Knowledge strategy is an approach based on a firm's capabilities and also resources (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2012).

According to Chang and Chuang (2011) knowledge management processes is the extent to which the firm creates, shares and utilizes knowledge resources across functional boundaries. An organization needs to build systems to capture and transfer internal knowledge and best practices in order to enhance creation of a knowledge management strategy (Ash, 1998; Jasimuddin, 2008 & Oluikpe, 2012).

Knowledge management practices are necessary at the workplace as they enable management to promote knowledge sharing, knowledge acquisition and intellectual capital retention (Sunassee & Sewry, 2011). A firm could benefit more through selecting and focusing on Knowledge Management activities which are necessary in the most essential business units (McIver *et al.*, 2013). Scarce resources may be managed more efficiently and further, a firm can leverage on knowledge management initiatives to cascade learning to other organizational units,

According to Raula, Vuksic and Stemberger (2012) knowledge is an essential intangible asset that enhances achievement of organizational efficiency and performance. Gray (2011) alluded that firms could improve their organizational effectiveness thus enhance performance and further create additional possibilities for performance through successful knowledge capturing, sharing, and creation. Previous findings reveal that knowledge management and organizational performance have a positive relationship (Danish, 2012; Jelena, Vesna & Mojca, 2012; Gholami, Asli, Shirkouhi, & Noruzy, 2013).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Knowledge Management Strategy:**

Previous studies used distinct dimensions to propose a conceptualize knowledge management. Yusof and Abu Bakar (2012) alluded that knowledge management had no universally agreed dimensions. Beckman (1997) considered that there were eight steps within knowledge management activities which included the definition, the access, selection, storage, sharing, application, creation and finally the selling of knowledge. Dalkir (2011) looked at Knowledge Management process as one which entailed creation, dissemination and knowledge application.

Alavi and Leidner (2001) posited that different authors identified between four to ten processes which could be grouped under four core knowledge management processes that is knowledge creation and acquisition, knowledge storage and retrieval, knowledge transfer and sharing, and lastly knowledge application.

Demarest (1997) concerted that knowledge management consisted of five processes namely construction, embodiment, dissemination, use, and management. Miller (1999) suggested that knowledge management referred to the acquisition of knowledge which involved creating, collecting, storing, distributing and applying knowledge. Armistead (1999) divided the knowledge management process into three sub processes as knowledge creation, knowledge transfer and knowledge embedding.

### **2.2 Organizational Performance:**

Ya-Hui Ling and Ling Hong (2010) concerted that organizational performance was the total sum of accomplishments that had been attained by all businesses or departments which were involved with organizational goals during a certain period of time.

According to Ghalomi et al., (2013), there are no agreed unanimous measures of organizational performance among scholars and even practitioners. Organisational performance could be gauged using either financial or non-financial indicators. According to Bonoma and Clark (1988) a company's financial aspect is often measured using indicators such as profitability, market share, sales growth, and cash flow.

Shabbir and Anwar (2015) measured organizational performance in terms of Organization's learning, Collaboration and Creativity; Kinyua, Muathe and Kilika (2015) used new products, speed of response to market crises, product improvement, customer retention and new processes which are non financial indicators..Abdi (2013), AL-Hayaly and Alnajjar (2016) and Riungu (2015) adopted the balance score card to measure organizational performance in terms of financial dimension, internal processes, client's dimension, learning and growth, employee's dimension and environmental dimension. Idris and Kolawale (2016) used time, cost and quality as indicators of organizational performance.

### **2.3 Empirical Review:**

A study conducted by Abdi and AmatSenin (2014) indicated that organizational learning fully mediated the relation between knowledge management and organizational innovation. The link between knowledge management and organizational innovation showed a critical knowledge output.

Abdi (2013) focused on knowledge management enablers at Kenya Revenue Authority and found that organizational culture, people, structural issues and IT infrastructure were significant knowledge management enablers. This was a case study and an interview guide that was semi-structured was used to collect primary data. Descriptive analysis and content analysis were used for data analysis. It was recommended that more studies be undertaken in Kenya on knowledge management and in particular on the influence of knowledge management on organizational performance.

Suzana and Kasim (2010) studied the significant role of Knowledge management practices in improving the performance of organizations. The results showed that knowledge management practices levels were a vital criteria for determination and improvement of organizational performance.

Tiyan (2013) sought to determine the extent of application of knowledge management as a competitive strategy among aviation training institutions in Nairobi. Descriptive survey was adopted as the research design. The findings revealed that due to knowledge management, employees competitiveness had improved.

Rukungu (2015) conducted a study at AAR Insurance to assess key success factors that influenced strategic knowledge management. Specifically the study examined how Culture, people and structure related factors regarding strategic

knowledge management influenced organizational performance. Findings revealed that Culture, people and structure related factors were critical areas in regards to the organization's performance and productivity and they influenced strategic knowledge management.

Katsuro, Mapira ,Mangava and Chimbindi (2013) noted that knowledge management created a sustainable competitive advantage, reduced design time and also costs for an organization. Further their study revealed that knowledge management was positively related to productivity.

Chang and Chuang (2011) examined empirically the effective knowledge management processes from the roles regarding infrastructure capability and business strategy on the firm's performance. The results confirmed that knowledge management processes had an impact on firm performance.

Yousefi, Taherkhani and Ghardashkhani (2014) examined the effect of knowledge management on learning and performance in education department of Abhar County and found that knowledge management had an effect on organizational learning and performance. Further, organizational learning had an effect on organizational performance. Organizational learning mediated the relation between knowledge management and performance.

Bashir, Noor and Aliyu (2014) focused on Knowledge Management and Organizational Performance of Mobile Service Firms in Nigeria. They Proposed a framework and further made a recommendation for mobile operators to develop and implement a strategic knowledge management policy in order to provide appropriate organizational knowledge that would satisfy the changing needs and preferences of the customers'.

Mills and Smith (2011) carried out a study on the impact of knowledge management resources on organizational performance. Findings revealed that some of the knowledge resources such as structure and acquisition indicated a direct relation to organizational performance while others for instance culture and technology had no relation with organizational performance.

Sisia (2015) conducted a study to determine the implications of knowledge management on organizational learning. The study adopted a descriptive research design and census approach. Primary data was collected using questionnaires. Data was analyzed both descriptively and inferentially using SPSS. The study revealed that knowledge management influenced organization learning. It was recommended that for firms to enhance organizational learning, they should consider elements of knowledge management processes and invest in technology. The study further recommended that organizations should create an independent knowledge management unit/ department.

Aminga (2013) conducted a study at selected campuses of Kisii University on the effects of knowledge management practices on organizational performance. This was a case study in which data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The study established that there was a strong and positive relationship between knowledge management practices and organizational performance. The study recommended that knowledge management initiatives should be supported by management and also management should develop a knowledge management policy.

Asli *et al* (2013) focused on the influence of knowledge management on organizational performance on small and medium enterprises using structural equation modeling and found that knowledge management practices had a positive and significant influence on organizational performance.

Ngah and Razak (2010) conducted a study on the effect of knowledge sharing practices on organizational performance of SMEs in Malaysia and found that knowledge sharing had a positive and strong influence on organizational performance. The study utilized convenience sampling technique and structural equation modelling to analyze data.

Danish (2012) established that there was a significant association between knowledge management and organizational learning though, the study failed to determine the extent to which knowledge management impacted on organizational learning.

Gichuhi (2014) conducted a study on knowledge management in university libraries and the study used descriptive research design by use of a survey approach. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The researcher concluded that knowledge management was weak due to not being well understood and supported.

A study undertaken by Gholami, Asli, Shirkouhi and Noruzi (2013) among SME's in Kenya indicated that knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, creation, sharing, and implementation directly influenced the organizational performance.

Jelena, Vesna and Mojca (2012) conducted a study whose aim was to prove that through creation, accumulation, organizing and utilization of knowledge, organizations could enhance organizational performance. Findings revealed that knowledge management practices measured through information technology, organization and knowledge positively affect organizational performance.

A study conducted by Kinyua, Muathe and Kilika (2015) in Commercial Banks in Kenya revealed that both knowledge conversion and knowledge application positively influenced performance. Bosieri, Ombui and Oeba (2013) found that information sharing culture on various subjects amongst the staff had enhanced the schools improved performance in national examination and thus recommended the need for schools to entrench Knowledge management for the improvement of performance and administration.

**Table:1 Summary of literature review on knowledge management dimensions**

Author	Knowledge management dimensions
Gakuo & Rotich (2017)	Knowledge acquisition, knowledge conversion, knowledge protection and knowledge application
Mohammed Abdulsalaam M. S. AL-Hayaly & Fayez Jomah S. Alnajjar (2016).	Knowledge exploration, Knowledge acquisition, Knowledge evaluation, developing and discriminating knowledge, applying knowledge and Knowledge accumulation
Kinyua, Muathe & Kilika(2015)	Knowledge Conversion and Knowledge Application
Sisia(2015)	Knowledge creation, Knowledge sharing and retention, Knowledge acquisition and application, Knowledge, transfer
Rukungu (2015)	Culture, people and structure related factors of strategic knowledge management
Tiyan(2013)	Acquisition-oriented KM processes, application-oriented KM processes and security-oriented KM processes
Marko Slavković & VericaBabić (2013)	knowledge creation, knowledge transfer, knowledge embedding, process innovation, administrative innovation,
Aminga (2013)	Knowledge capture and acquisition, Knowledge sharing practices and Knowledge management policies and strategies
Abdi (2013)	organizational culture (collaboration, mutual trust, learning, and leadership), structural issues (centralisation and formalisation), people, and IT infrastructure
Gholami, Asli, Shirkouhi & Noruzy (2013)	knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and knowledge implementation
Danish (2012)	organizational change, knowledge sharing and organizational learning
Jelena, Vesna & Mojca(2012)	information technology, organization and knowledge
Mills & Smith (2011)	structure, acquisition, culture and technology
Ngah & Razak (2010)	Knowledge sharing

## 2.4 Critique of Literature:

Qualitative methods such as questionnaires, interviews or surveys have been used in knowledge management studies for measurement of performance improvements. Knowledge management performance is usually evaluated premised on respondents' opinions and it relies largely on the respondents perceptions on the improvements made by knowledge management to their organizations. In corroboration Kannan and Aulbur, (2004) have criticized qualitative methods since they depend on individual judgments, which may have an associated danger of subjectivity and biasness. Despite this setback, qualitative methods have been widely accepted in this kind of research, since they provide stronger indications in relation to causality between knowledge management and corporate performance than the quantitative methods(Yu *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless, they have been criticized for their dependence on individual judgments, with the associated dangers of subjectivity and bias (Kannan & Aulbur, 2004).

Majority of the authors measured performance in terms of financial and non performance measures. However NidaShabbir & Sadia Anwar (2015) measured performance in terms of Organization's learning, Collaboration and Creativity. This focused on non financial performance measures and failed to take into account the financial performance measures which is also considered essential.

There is absence of consensus on knowledge management elementary issues. There are disagreements on theoretical concepts and as such there's failure on part of the knowledge management community to agree on core concepts that

would act as a basis for further development. Authors have disagreed on knowledge management strategy approaches, terminology, on main elements and also processes. Due to conflicts regarding fundamental issues in knowledge management, progress in this field has been hampered (Hazlett et al., 2005). Ngah and Razak (2010) utilized convenience sampling to collect data. This method used is not deemed adequate as researchers may have been biased in selecting the sample.

There is a challenge in the process of identification and measurement of the effects of application of knowledge management. Both practice and theory have failed to build a methodology performing the specific role of evaluation of knowledge management practice effects in organizations. This may be firstly due to lack of a consistent attitude to what amounts to key performance indicators for all firms. Secondly due to the fact of knowledge management effects being multidimensional thus preventing clear identification and measurement. Therefore studies presented in the reviewed literature confirms that different indicators may be used to analyze knowledge management effects on organizational outcomes. Thus, for example, Danish(2012) analyzed the effect of knowledge management on organizational learning; Yousefi, Taherkhani and Ghardashkhani (2014) examined the effect of knowledge management on learning and performance; Abdi and AmatSenin (2014) analyzed the mediating effect of organizational learning on the relation between knowledge management and organizational innovation, whereas Suzanna and kasim (2010), Bashir, Noor and Aliyu (2014), Aminga (2013), Gholami et al (2013), Katsuro, Mapira, Mangava and Chimbindi (2013) observed organizational performance; Tiyan (2013) analyzed the extent of application of knowledge management as a competitive strategy.

Further various studies have anchored research on knowledge management on different theories for instance Gakuo and Rotich (2017) used RBV, Organizational Knowledge Conversion Theory, Adaptive Structuration Theory, Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Cognitive Learning Theory; Tiyan (2013) based his study on Resource based View, Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation, the theory of Re-use and the knowledge workers theory; Kinyua, Muathe and Kilika (2015) based their study on RBV and Riungu (2015) anchored his study on Theory of Organizational Epistemology and Knowledge Spiral theory.

## **2.5 Knowledge Gap:**

The content analysis regarding the papers in the literature review provides detailed overview of main issues covered by the research on knowledge management and has enabled the identification of principal research gap on the topic. From the literature review its apparent that several scholars have established that knowledge management strategy is linked to organizational performance (Danish, 2012; Jelena, Vesna & Mojca, 2012; Gholami, Asli, Shirkouhi & Noruzy, 2013). In contrast, Sabherwal and Becerra-Fernandez (2007) indicated that some studies contended that knowledge management initiatives at times failed to have a positive impact on performance of business and usually did not result into an improvement in the organizational task outcomes. Hence there are inconsistencies in the literature in relation to the conceptual linkages between the two variables

## **3. CONCLUSION**

Although there has been an expansion in the field of knowledge management strategy which has grown from serving only one type of organization that is, the organizations providing consulting and professional services to serving many other diverse organizations, there's still a dearth in this research field as knowledge management strategy is still a growing subject and thus requires further investigations.

In order to gain an insight into an organization's operation and its challenges, an organization requires a knowledge management strategy that's well developed. According to Davenport and Prusak (2010) organizations should take into consideration strategies that are adaptive, intelligent including knowledge management processes and also best practices.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Depending on a researchers perspective and position, there's a variance in the way that the relation between knowledge management strategies/processes and organizational performance have been conceptualized. Thus in order to facilitate a proper and insightful knowledge management strategies/processes its vital to have a conceptualization that's well informed.

Organizations need to develop a policy on knowledge management in order to enhance an effective knowledge management so as to improve performance. Managers need to perceive knowledge management practices benefits that can increase overall organizational performance in terms of financial performance, productivity, staff performance, work relationships, innovation and customer satisfaction. Furthermore organizations need to make an investment in resources both internal and external to be able to employ appropriate knowledge. Additionally organizations should research on ways to reduce the challenges facing them in relation to knowledge management.

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