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Knowledge Management and Organisational Performance in Pakistani Think Tanks

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Knowledge Management and Organisational Performance in Pakistani Think Tanks

The PhD research is focused on developing a Knowledge Management and Organization Performance Model for think tanks –policy research organizations of a developing country. The synthesized model will be presented by combining theoretical and empirical findings. Theoretical model is drawn through the process of systematic literature review of the studies found in relation to knowledge management and organizational performance. Whilst the empirical model will be formed through the field study of 8 Pakistani Think Tank organizations through the qualitative methods of Interviews, observations and document analysis. Thematic analysis is in use to analyse the data and findings will be presented in form of 8 organizational case studies. Initial findings reveal that enormous knowledge resources of these think tanks are more relevant to output as compared to material resources, moreover cultural values and norms, and multi lingual environment have impact on their performance.

Word Count: 1935

Abstract

Acceptance of knowledge as strategic resource and increased interest towards Knowledge Management (KM) is guiding the way towards knowledge era. Rhetoric nature of knowledge, knowledge work and knowledge worker strongly demand for KM. Many countries had already adopted their knowledge goals and few still need the consideration. Among knowledge intensive organizations (KIOs) Think Tanks (TT) are unique being policy research intensive organizations. Think Tanks could serve as a bridge between state and society and their performance will have impact on both. Complex policy making process increases the challenge of measuring the influence of TT and knowledge management will strengthen them to meet the challenge.

Pakistani TTs can build right national image which is highly ignored. Pakistani TTs, apparently unaware of KM, are not only having treasure of Knowledge Resources (KR) but also using KM to enhance their organizational performance (OP). KRs are found more important for them to perform than material resources. Their knowledge capital (KC) highly depends on their human and social capital. Moreover cultural values and norms, multiple languages, knowledgeable leadership and national spirit have impact on OP. They take dual credit of having impact on governmental policies-macro level and people's perception-micro level.

KM-OP relationship is of current interest in the relevant literature and practice. Complex multi-dimensional nature of KM demands for concept clarity and surety. Literature mostly presents the link for specified dimension and explicit KM programs but silent on its cohesive view. Knowledge and its management are independent of any explicit definition and implementation. Literature and practice provides several example of KM failure because some specified dimension of it was selected and attempted for implementation. KM aligned with Organizational Strategy (OS) will underpin suitable processes, functions, methodology, technology, behaviour and structure in reference to strategic resource knowledge to achieve OP.

Background

Pakistan- 67 years old developing state- is struggling with multiple challenges of society, politics, economics and nature. It is a vision based nation state founded with specified purpose for which requirement of TTs remained visible from the very start. To full fill the nation's aim and overcome the challenges Pakistan requires a change which could be based upon KM. TTs can play a role for the change by serving as a bridge between state and society. TTs have enjoyed massive growth in the first decade of 21 century (McGann, 2011) whereas in Pakistan TTs observed growth during late 2000s (Zaidi, 2013). A Pakistani thinker Sayed (2012) have referred 'Think Tanks' as engines of developing policies and institutionalizing decision making ultimately developing the national knowledge culture. Weak research culture, deprived education and bad political culture forms the environment for Pakistani TTs. These small organizations of less than 50 employees but large pool of associates, volunteers and audience, also play their role in generating awareness and sometimes doing advocacy. Whether governmental or non-governmental, these NPOs fight for funding.

Aims & Objectives

The research aims to find KM value add to OP by synthesising theoretical and conceptual model. Theoretical model will result from systematic literature review (SLR) of KM-OP from business and management sciences field. Conceptual model will be based on the empirical study of 8 Pakistani TTs. Level of KM awareness, assessment of formality and informality of KM strategies and practices will be taken into account.

Research Gap

Current research will focus to clarify the KM-OP relationship for which literature have raised the need for example (Kalling, 2003), Choi & Lee (2003), Lin and Tseng (2005), Yang (2010), Mills and Smith (2011), Holsapple and Wu (2011), Jayasingam, Ansari, Ramayah & Jantan (2013), Al Saifi (2015) etc. Whereas Carmeli and Tishler (2004) and Zack, McKeen and Singh (2009) have specified it for large scale empirical studies. Chang and Ahn (2005) argued that most literature is based on implicit assumption of performance improvement by knowledge. Furthermore most of the KM literature is about explicit KM program and silent about the unexposed context. Secondly the aspect of informality of KM is rarely captured and requires empirical findings.

Literature Review

Rhetoric nature of Knowledge and its management is extending into the KM-OP. External and internal diversities of the KM field are adding to the complexity. An SLR would be required to handle the rhetoric relationship (Rashman, Withers & Hartley, 2009) of KM-OP. External diversity of KM-OP as resulted through the SLR is distributed over 47 disciplines out of which the discipline of 'Business' is the choice for current study considering its top ranking and nature of the study. Flow chart to present the SLR process is as follows:

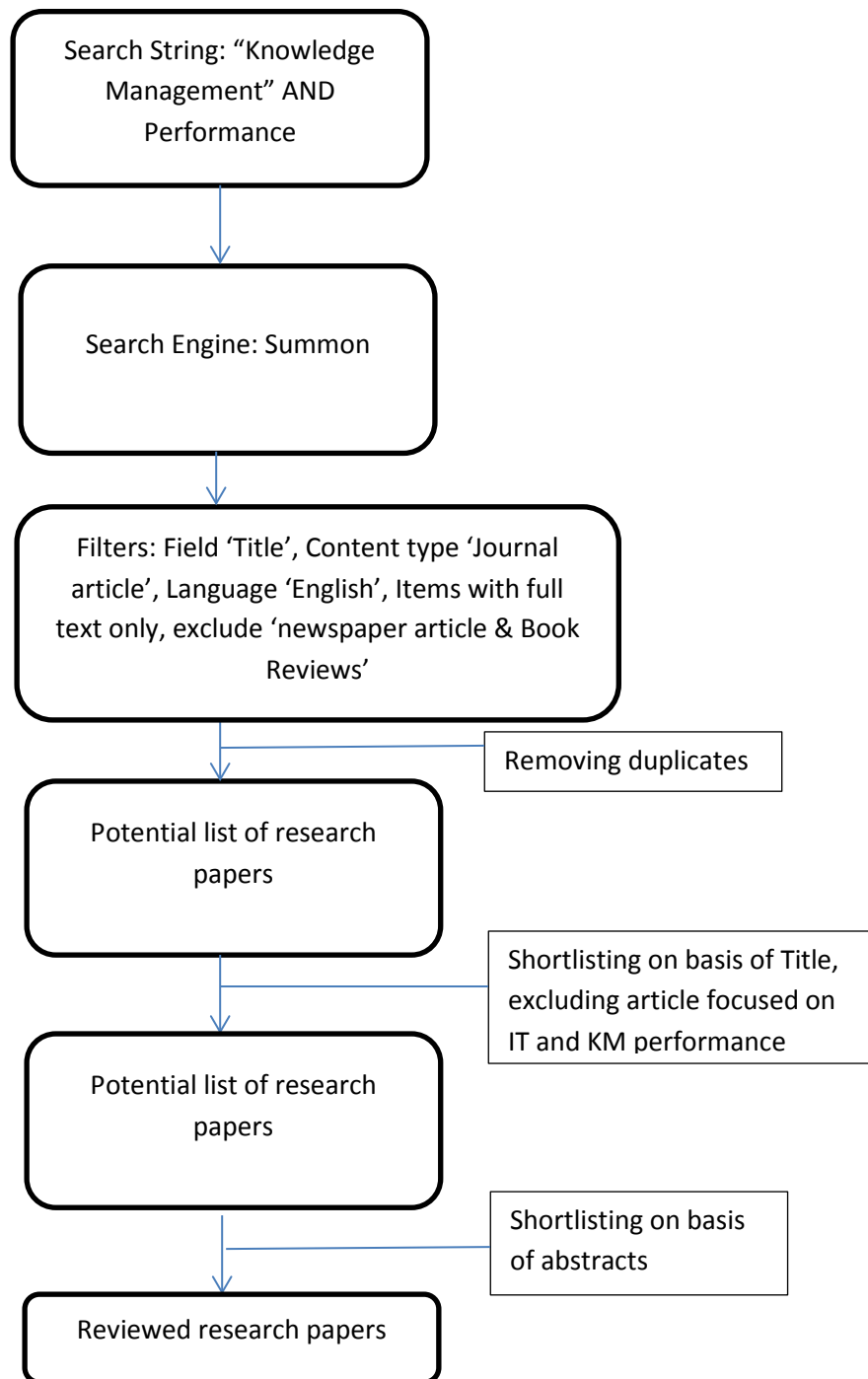


Figure 1: SLR- Adapted from Kauppi, Moxham, Bamford, 2013

Few articles were later added through snowball technique considering the relevance.

Internal diversity of the KM-OP is attempted to be captured in detail and is briefly explained. Studies resulting from SLR presenting the KM-OP used various dimensions which are summarised as below

Table 1: KM Dimensions in KM-OP Literature

KM Dimension	Citation
KM Practices/ Processes / Methods	Gloet, Marianne; Terziovski, Milé (2004), Palacios Marqués, Daniel; José Garrigós Simón, Fernando (2006), Andreeva, Tatiana; Kianto, Aino (2012), Valmohammadi, Changiz; Ahmadi, Mohsen (2015), Jain, Ajay K; Moreno, Ana (2015) / Karadsheh (2009), Tubigi, Mohammed; Alshawi, Sarmad (2015) / Liu, Pang-Lo; Chen, Wen-Chin; Tsai, Chih-Hung (2005).
KM Strategies / Principles	Yang (2010), Choi, Byounggu; Poon, Simon K; Davis, Joseph (2008) / Mohamed, Mirghani; Stankosky, Michael; Murray, Arthur (2004), Starns, John; Odom, Cynthia (2006).
KM Orientation	/ Wang, Hult, Ketchen & Ahmed (2009).
KM Systems	Gallivan, Michael J; Eynon, Jim; Rai, Arun (2003), Ma, Yuxin; Harmon, Stephen W (2006), Markus Mau; Nicole Mau (2008), Cao, Qing; Thompson, Mark A; Triche, Jason (2013).
KM Maturity / Excellence / Fit / Improvement	Kruger, Cornelius Johannes (Neels); Johnson, Roy D (2011), Chen, Le; Fong, Patrick S.W (2012) / Chourides, Pieris; Longbottom, David; Murphy, William (2003) / Chen, Yue-yang; Yeh, Shang-pao; Huang, Hui-ling (2012) / Chen, Yue-yang; Yeh, Shang-pao; Huang, Hui-ling (2009).
KM Capabilities	Wong, Wai Peng; Wong, Kuan Yew (2011), Tseng, Shu-Mei; Lee, Pei-Shan (2014), Tseng, Shu-mei (2014), Cohen, Jason F; Olsen, Karen (2015).
KM Resources, Assets	Wu, Ing-Long; Chen, Jian-Liang (2014).
KM Factors/ Enablers	Holsapple, Clyde W; Wu, Jiming (2011) / Ho, Chin-Tsang (2009).
KM Tools / KM Technologies	Vaccaro, Antonino; Parente, Ronaldo; Veloso, Francisco M (2010) / Malhotra, Yogesh (2005)
Specified KM for example Customer KM, Strategic KM, Industry Cluster KM, Supplier Focused KM, Team KM, Market KM Competence, Product and Process KM, KM centric help desk	Taherparvar, Nastaran; Esmaeilpour, Reza; Dostar, Mohammad (2014), Fidel, Pilar; Schlesinger, Waleska; Cervera, Amparo (2015) / López-Nicolás, Carolina; Meroño-Cerdán, Ángel L (2011) / Lai, Hsu, Lin, F. Chen & Lin, (2014) / Lakshman, C; Parente, Ronaldo C (2008) / Sung, Sun Young; Choi, Jin Nam (2012) / Jia-Jeng Hou; Ying-Tsung Chien (2010) / Chang, Suk-Gwon; Ahn, Jae-Hyeon (2005) / González, Luz Minerva; Giachetti, Ronald E; Ramirez, Guillermo (2005)

Along above many other studies have taken some specific dimension of KM and proved its impact on OP, need is of some starting point for the adoption of KM. In life cycle of any organization very first thing which comes at priority is its strategy, and KM needs to be initiated along it. Whereas strategic resource 'knowledge' created throughout the organization, imparts the ability to respond change, creating demand for KM (Choi, Poon & Davis, 2008). Mavodza & Ngulube (2012; 2) have provided definition of KM as follows:

“KM is a process that enables an organisation to improve its performance by enabling learning and innovation whilst solving its problems, acknowledging and resolving gaps in its operations, and recognising knowledge (comprising people and information) as an organisational asset which has to be managed through enabling policies and institutional tools”.

This reflects KM efforts are required and made to enhance OP considering it at the strategic level and later comes selection of styles, processes and tools; the operational level choices. Mills and Smith (2011) have assessed KM outcomes as OP, KM success and strategy implementation. This serves as two pillars for current research first KM supports strategy implementation and then results in OP. Kalseth and Cummings (2001) argued KM works as OS as well as developmental strategy. One of the Wiig’s (1997) KM strategies is ‘Knowledge strategy as OS’ which focuses on knowledge process at every step of the business. According to Steyn and Kahn (2008) alignment of KM strategy with OS will define the positive effects of KM implementation. IMPaKT framework of Carrillo, Robinson, Anumba, & Al-Ghassani (2003) recognizes KM alignment to OS. Same is thought by Schiuma and Carlucci (2007) including the concern for OP objectives. Moreover Armstrong-Flemming (2015; 11) have reported Snyman and Druger (2004) who argued that “strategic KM must be embedded in OS that in turn becomes integrated with OP”.

Methodology

The study makes use of (1) Critical realism to qualitative methodology at the philosophical and methodological level. (3) Triangulated methods of Interviews, observations and document analysis. (4) Partial Grounded Theory, Inductive logic and manual thematic coding at the analysis level. (5) Presenting the findings in form of multiple organizational case studies, summing up into the suggestions that can be adopted as practice for better performance.

Critical realism capability to handle complex organizational phenomenon (Wynn and Williams, 2012) and perceiving reality as distinct from the researcher’s perception, the study is making use of qualitative understanding of KM-OP link within KIOs without any explicit KM program. Exploration of tacit phenomena’s i.e. low level KM awareness, informal practices and less cognizant strategies paved the way for qualitative study.

Small policy research organizations are considered as unit of analysis for the study. Participant organizations have been carefully selected within their specified work domain and geographic area considering the resource limitations of the study and are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Participant Organizations

Islamic Research Institute (IRI)
Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS)
Institute of Strategic studies Islamabad (ISSI)
Institute of Strategic Studies, Research & Analysis (ISSRA)
Pakistan institute of development economic (PIDE)
Institute of Regional Studies (IRS)
Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad (IPS)
Centre of International Peace and Security (CIPS)

Anonymity and confidentiality have a special consideration in the study, whilst a detailed code of ethics is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Code of Ethics

Principle of ethical research	Description of Practice
No harm to participant	The field work was in routine organizational territories with all the safety and security measures without any extra concern of possible harm. While methods interview, observations and data analysis will only involve the researcher and organizational members interaction in predictable setting with no explicit possible harm. In conversation during data collection it was ensured from the researcher of not stating anything which creates any bias towards any individual respecting the diversity and individuality.
Dignity	Dignity of the research participants is utmost respected and it is ensured that there would be no discomfort or anxiety would be created due to data collection. Prior appointments were taken and choice of venue and time selection is given to the participants.
Informed Consent	Written consent had been taken from the organizations for research participation and individual consent from each interviewee has been taken verbally. Research title, objective and scope of the interview are briefed to each interviewee at start of each interview.
Privacy	Any confidential data shared would be kept confidential by the researcher. And if needed it will be described in coded form.
Anonymity	Although the anonymity by the organization is not required not demanded rather there listing is encouraged, but if at any stage of research the demand arises it will be respected. There is demand from a few interviewees about some specific points/information to keep then anonymous which will be addressed by detaching the information from interviewee's identity as will be used in data analysis and presenting the findings.
Confidentiality	All data collected including the audio records, pictures, field notes will be only in access of researcher and will be kept on the researcher's personal laptop, online password protected Dropbox account and university's secure online storage.
Deception	Clarity of the scope will be provided at the start of interview to each interviewee and researcher will ensure to keep the interview within scope else again provide directive explanations.
Affiliation	Researcher's affiliation with the University of Huddersfield as a PhD candidate will be informed to all participants. University's business cards are also used for the purpose and introduction with the interviewees.
Honesty and Transparency	It would be ensured that the essences provided by the participants is preserved and presented with minimum assumptions. Transparency would also be ensured by the procedural cares during data collation and analysis. Organizational case studies will also be shared with the organizations before publishing.
Misrepresentation	Quality measures to ensure objectivity, validity, credibility will be adopted.

Findings

Idea of Pakistani TTs is as old as of Pakistan itself and is developed by knowledgeable founders of Pakistan. Development of Pakistan's first constitution laid the actual foundation for its first TT. Scarcity of material resources remained the fate of country and its organizations and unfortunate early loss of its human capital-the knowledgeable leaders left the country in a dangling state. Previously the organizations had valuable resource -high calibre scholars and researchers that started diminishing and the knowledge culture and so the role of knowledge intensive organizations. Recent era have realized the need and have started observing growth of TTs. Current state of Pakistani TTs is quite devastated considering the state is in crisis, bad economy and politics and certain other socio-natural factors. No matter the TT is attached with some governmental body or independent, it struggles for funding. But more miserable is the fact the more precious resource-knowledge, what they have, they don't value it. Silos of knowledge resources both explicit and tacit remain there unnoticed, and human capital is not considered as capital. Whether they are aware or not, they are valuing or not, resource is there and they are managing it, and that is the invisible factor which is making up their performance. Intangible capital of cultural norms and values, multiple language skills, knowledgeable leadership and national spirit are adding to their performance.

Discussion/Conclusion

Chong (2006) is of view that OP is determined by benefits of KM implementation and has been discussed immensely in literature. No doubt there are plenty of studies focusing on KM-OP but with specified dimension and explicit KM program. Firstly failure of KM choices could be due to the wrong selection of its dimension and demands for a cohesive view seen from the strategic level. Secondly knowledge and its management is independent of its explicit definition and implementation. So a context without an explicit KM program could be a better mode to test the relationship and its existence. That could be the starting point for KM initiatives and choosing the dimension which better suits the context.

Basically strategy provides answer of 'what to achieve' and performance measures 'how much has been achieved' whereas KM link the two by informing 'what to use' and 'how to use' for optimum resource utilization. Resource based view is relevant here and the context with scarcity of tangible resources and higher utilization of intangible resources extend it to knowledge based view considering knowledge as strategic resource.

TTs with strategic objectives of enhancing quantity and quality of research based policy suggestions could achieve higher performance measures by conscious management of knowledge resources and minimizing the error. This fits well with the Carrillo, Robinson, Anumba and Al-Ghassani (2003) IMPaKT framework. This is also informed by the theory at all three tiers where TTs strategic objectives are linking policy makers and public (Perez, 2014), optimally utilizing human, organizational and relational capital (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2007) to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and impact while reducing risk and increasing network (Agostino, Arena, Azzone, Dal Molin, & Masella, 2012). This can be presented as below framework:

Table 4: KM-OP Frameworks for Think Tanks

KM-OP Framework for Think Tanks

Strategic Objectives	KM	Performance
To inform policy process: 1. Providing analysis to policy makers 2. Participating in public debates.	knowledge assets and their management processes: Intellectual capital -Human capital -Organizational capital -Relational capital	Efficiency Effectiveness Impact Risk Network
(Perez, 2014)	(Schiuma & carlucci, 2007)	(Agostino, Arena, Azzone, Dal Molin, & Masella, 2012)
New policy development Criticize existing policies Alternate solution for policy problems (source: Pilot Interview)		

Adapted from Carrillo, Robinson, Anumba and Al-Ghassani, 2003

Future research questions are (1) whether creating awareness for the KM terminologies would be of any value add or let them move with their home made terminologies. (2) Whether conscious use of KM would be of any additive advantage or not. (3) Whether increasing the formality level for KM would be of any value or not. (4) What is best tacit-explicit mix for these TTs.

Pakistan’s vision considers TTs to serve as bridge between state and society. Realization for research, informed policies and informed society is clear by the growth of TTs. They are not using the terminologies of KM but they do possess the KR and they are managing it for performance. Awareness about KM and its conscious adoption underpinned at the strategic level will have a clear impact on OP.

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