

A holistic model of the role, development, and future of knowledge management: Proposal for exploratory research

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Abstract

This paper presents our proposal for an exploratory research study. The objective of the research is to develop a conceptual framework of the interpretations, meanings, perceptions, and beliefs related to the role, development, and future of the knowledge management (KM) discipline. We propose to develop a holistic model that will depict professionals' perceptions of this issue: the combined perceptions of both KM consultants and knowledge managers. The proposed qualitative research will be based on three research tools: Semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups, and content analysis. The data will be analyzed using a thematic analysis method based on the grounded theory approach. We collected preliminary empirical evidence from international KM experts during 2020. The findings revealed a remarkable variety of issues that exist at the core of the KM discipline. These issues include the role and purpose of KM in knowledge-intensive organizations, the implications of the existence or absence of KM, and views about future avenues for its development. Our intention is to explore these issues further by expanding the research to other KM professionals. Through this, we hope to assist in the positioning of the discipline in the age of knowledge. This research may contribute significantly to both the theoretical and practical aspects of KM. Its uniqueness is reflected in the voices of KM professionals. We foresee that our research will enable a better understanding of the evolution of KM as a discipline, its contemporary role, and its future possibilities.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management (KM) has received increasing attention over the past three decades. The ongoing debate regarding the question “What is KM?” is linked to the confusion regarding the character of the discipline. KM is multidisciplinary by nature, and a description of KM activities grows from different fields of knowledge (Alajmi & Alhaji, 2018). The field has evolved from various theoretical traditions, ranging from philosophy of the definition of what constitutes knowledge, through economics in the discussion of the role of knowledge in organizations, to psychology for explaining motivational patterns or those related to human interaction (Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006). Given its characterization by different concepts, approaches, and perspectives, the field of KM has been defined as “relatively diffuse and scattered” (Scholl et al., 2004, p. 19).

“Knowledge Management” is an elusive concept (Ode & Ayavoo, 2020). Over time, various definitions of this term have been proffered (Dalkir, 2005), varying in their complexity and focus on the different aspects of the field. It seems that the definitions of theorists are often outlined under a common idea, which highlights the paramount importance of knowledge as an asset that is at the core of the organization (Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020a). This paper conceptualizes KM as an organizational function involving many practices that support the achievement of strategic organizational goals.

The challenges that originate from the diversity and ambiguity of the various schools of thought that seek to define what KM is and what its future holds still persist, to the extent that some claim that this science is still looking for its true purpose (Handzic, 2017). The maturity of the discipline as a research issue and a field of academic study is evident in the growing number of journals and scientific

publications devoted to KM (Alajmi & Alhaji, 2018; Heisig, 2015; Heisig et al., 2016; Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020a; Ragab & Arisha, 2013).

This paper presents our exploratory research proposal of KM in knowledge-intensive organizations in detail. The study aims to develop a conceptual framework that will relate to the interpretations, meanings, perceptions, and beliefs about the role, development, and future of the KM discipline. As a solid foundation for achieving this goal, we will develop a holistic model that will depict the perceptions of experts in the field: the combined perceptions of both KM consultants and knowledge managers. As will be described later in this paper, we collected initial empirical evidence relating to the subject matter throughout 2020. In light of the compelling findings revealed to us in the initial data collection, which were found to relate to issues at the heart of the KM discipline, we intend to expand the study sample.

We intend to conduct the research in accordance with the qualitative-constructivist research paradigm. We are aware of the fact that too little knowledge, related to organizational KM activities, actually “flows” from professionals to academics. Therefore, we intend to support the improvement of this flow through comprehensive research of the variety of interpretations of practitioners. We hope that the study will enrich the scientific knowledge of the KM field in knowledge-intensive organizations and contribute to KM theory and practice. We anticipate that the research has the potential to add a tier to the understanding of the current status of KM, how it has evolved and how it is likely to develop in the future.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: We open with a literature review and a theoretical background of the issues, which provides an explanation for the necessity of this exploratory research. Included in this is our review of the literature related to knowledge as a strategic organizational asset, the KM discipline and its current state, the dispute regarding the vitality of the KM discipline, and the criticism of the term “KM.” This is followed by a detailed explanation of the research problem, its goal and importance. The final chapter presents our methodology, a description of the qualitative-interpretive research approach, and details of the planned data collection and analysis processes.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Knowledge as a strategic organizational asset

Knowledge is one of the most discussed concepts in almost all areas of activity and has many interpretations (Bejinaru, 2019). The literature abounds in various definitions given to the term “knowledge” (Heisig, 2015) and refers extensively to its elusive and intangible nature, as well as to the complexity of its nature and the fact that it is subject to interpretation (Dalkir, 2005; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006). According to Bejinaru (2019), it is difficult to accurately define knowledge without referring to its previous state as information or data. The form and function of knowledge have been a controversial issue for many years, and it seems that it is far from reaching a solution (Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006).

Through a positivist lens (Rechberg, 2018), knowledge is perceived as a major strategic asset in knowledge-intensive organizations (Bouhnik & Giat, 2015; Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020b). Moreover, knowledge is considered as a source of their competitive strength, and a means of gaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Tadesse, 2020). The knowledge increases in value as it is developed, managed, and utilized (Cavaliere et al., 2015). The management of organizational knowledge has important contributions to the organization as a whole. KM practices have been found to contribute to firm innovation, both directly and indirectly (Ode & Ayavoo, 2020).

The well-known quote: “to know what you know and what you do not know, that is true knowledge” is ascribed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Indeed, organizations often “do not know what they know” (Sieloff, 1999). This means that knowledge exists somewhere within the organization, but its existence, location, and the circumstances under which it was acquired are unknown. Organizational knowledge, which is not managed optimally, is closely related to knowledge-related risks. These risks include the following: a loss of critical knowledge when skilled employees, who possess core business knowledge, leave the organization, “reinventing the wheel” when extant knowledge is unknown, and a lack of uniformity among different units in the organization due to inadequate knowledge sharing. The severity of the knowledge risks is significant, sometimes acute, to the survival of the organization. Sometimes these risks even constitute an effective catalyst for investment in organizational KM efforts (Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020b).

2.2 | The KM discipline and its current state

“As a distinct scientific discipline, KM emerged in response to the increasing pressure on private and public organizations to make more efficient and effective use of their knowledge” (Serenko & Bontis, 2013, p. 141). Many organizations operate in a business environment that is characterized by frequent changes, accelerated technological developments, changing client needs, and strong competition for market segments, resources, information, and knowledge. In order to survive in such a dynamic, competitive environment and to differentiate themselves from competitors, organizations must learn new methods, develop organizational abilities, and promote innovative technologies to capture and manage knowledge resources (Bouhnik & Giat, 2015; Rahimli, 2012).

KM has been enriched by researchers from various fields of knowledge, such as psychology, economics, philosophy, information technology, strategic management, and organizational science (Dalkir, 2005; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006; Rechberg, 2018). In light of this, it can be concluded that KM is multidisciplinary in nature (Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020a). Although the importance of KM is widely acknowledged, not many managers possess a deep understanding of proper KM (Dalkir, 2005). Some people mistakenly think that KM is an end in itself. However, that is not the case; KM is a means to the solution of business problems that curb organizational inefficiency, thus improving operational performance (Chen & Chen, 2006) and enabling the achievement of strategic business goals (Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020b).

Budget support for KM continues to be robust, and many organizations hold funds specific to this practice (American Productivity & Quality Center – APQC, 2015). Naturally, the KM budget is larger among large firms and for organizations where there is a high level of KM maturity. The Global Survey of KM 2020, conducted by Knoco (2020) among organizations from a variety of sectors, found that “small organizations mature more quickly, as change is easier and implementation can be faster” (p. 14). The survey also found that among the sectors surveyed, KM has a long history among oil and gas companies, legal firms, and aid and development organizations. But the huge interest in this field is not limited to practice. The increase in the scope of research works symbolizes the growing interest in the KM discipline and further confirms its status as a recognized management discipline. Moreover, as a discipline, KM is also recognized within the broader scientific community (Serenko, 2021).

2.3 | Controversy regarding the viability of the discipline

KM is considered a relatively young field (Serenko & Bontis, 2013). The deep historical roots of the discipline and the emergence of the first KM principles are described extensively in previous works (see, e.g., Serenko, 2021), and are not the focus of this article. It is a matter of historical record that KM has developed significantly since its establishment as a discipline in the late 1980s (Dalkir, 2005), and the literature records the evolution of KM over time (Handzic, 2017; Heisig, 2015). Alongside optimistic views, the KM discipline has been confronted with serious criticism that questions its future. Some skeptics anticipate the inevitable retreat of the discipline, while others see it as nothing more than a passing fad that will surely disappear (Davenport, 2015; Garlatti & Massaro, 2016; Tombs, 2004; Wilson, 2002). Davenport (2015), who is considered one of the founding fathers of the discipline, even declared: “KM is not dead, but it is gasping for breath.”

According to the testimony of Nakash and Bouhnik (2020a), the views that effectively nullify the KM are heard even today by senior academics, despite the fact these are not among researchers in the field. Although rare in the theoretical and research literature, such statements cause concern among certain KM circles (O’Leary, 2016), giving rise to significant questions regarding the validity of the claim of KM decline. Recent authentic testimonies have sought to challenge the pessimistic statements that have cast doubt on the future of KM (Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020a). In this spirit, and in view of its important role in achieving organizational efficiency, other thinkers have stated that “KM is far from being a fad or fashion” (Alajmi & Alhaji, 2018).

2.4 | Criticism of the term knowledge management

Over the years, the use of the term “KM” has received some criticism (McInerney & Koenig, 2011; Wenger, 2004). Some have claimed that KM is not an appropriate description and is even an oxymoron

because, in their opinion, “management” cannot be applied in the context of knowledge (Kabir, 2014; Leistner, 2010; Skyrme, 2000; Wah, 1999; Wenger, 2004; Wilson, 2002). This criticism was often based on the premise that man, by his nature, cannot manage knowledge (McInerney & Koenig, 2011).

It has also been argued that the term actually positions knowledge as an object that can be handled like a tangible good (Wah, 1999) and, therefore, it turns knowledge into a commodity (Leistner, 2010). This perception actually attributes subjective elements to knowledge (Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006). A similar approach referred to knowledge as related to all previous experience, and that exists only in relation to consciousness. Therefore, some people are of the opinion that the term “KM” infers a fundamental misconception (Leistner, 2010).

KM experts themselves expressed reservations regarding the discipline’s name, because according to their point of view “KM” does not reflect the varied activities related to knowledge (Clemmons, 2002). Others have objected to the name on the grounds that it is a vague concept. Furthermore, it is claimed that there has been an acute confusion between the terms “knowledge” and “information” over the years (Leistner, 2010), not only by practitioners but also in academic circles.

3 | THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Anyone who peruses the literature devoted to the value of organizational KM may be surprised to find this issue receives relatively little attention, considering the increase in scientific publications dedicated to the study of KM discipline. “What still seems to be missing from the current understanding is how exactly engaging in KM contributes to business value creation” (Heisig et al., 2016, p. 1169). The value of organizational KM is conceptually supported in the literature, although it is not supported by ample empirical evidence (Ragab & Arisha, 2013) and it has been claimed that this subject has been neglected by the research community (Kruger & Johnson, 2011). Although scholars often hint at the positive impact of KM on an organization’s performance, studies that empirically prove a connection between the two are scarce (Rasula et al., 2012).

Even when scientific findings on the value of organizational KM were obtained, they were based primarily on numerical analyses and took the form of cause-and-effect relationships like, for example, evidence provided for the direct connection between KM processes and organizational innovation (Bouhnik & Marcus, 2015). Additional results confirmed the effect of KM capability on competitive advantage (Chuang, 2004). We cannot find any comprehensive scientific studies that examine the set of beliefs and perceptions linked to the direct and indirect values derived from KM activities in knowledge-intensive organizations. When the KM professionals were interviewed for previous studies, they referred to future research directions of the field and did not expand their minds about other issues (Heisig, 2015; Heisig et al., 2016).

Scientific evidence related to the inherent value of the management of organizational knowledge resources is of crucial importance,

as it is key to the KM discipline as a whole gaining legitimacy: both in the academic field and on a practical level (Heisig, 2015). Previous works have therefore concluded that it is essential to deepen the understanding of the contribution of KM to business results. This understanding is perceived by KM experts as an essential research subject to advance the discipline in both the academic and practical world (Heisig et al., 2016).

Over the years, the extensive research literature on KM has focused on a predominantly optimistic view, which few have challenged (Dwivedi et al., 2011; Heisig, 2015; Schultze & Leidner, 2002). The discipline also boasts a large research community and a vast increase in the number of scientific publications (Heisig, 2015; Heisig et al., 2016; Ragab & Arisha, 2013). Moreover, the discipline also receives continuous attention in conferences and existing academic programs (Handzic, 2017; Hislop et al., 2018) and even garners ongoing funding support within organizations (APQC, 2015, 2019). However, declarations pronouncing the decline of the KM discipline have occasionally been heard (Nakash & Bouhnik, 2020a).

Given the conflicting scientific evidence as to whether KM has made progress toward academic maturity, Serenko and Bontis (2013) reached a conclusion regarding the vital need for future research “to better understand the state and future development of the KM discipline” (Serenko & Bontis, 2013, p. 142). In light of narrow, partial, or misconceived conceptions about KM, we intend to thoroughly investigate the narrative of professionals in relation to the pessimistic views that challenge KM's future. Over time, skeptics have spoken against the term “KM,” chosen for the discipline upon its inception (Clemmons, 2002; Kabir, 2014; Leistner, 2010; McInerney & Koenig, 2011; Wah, 1999; Wenger, 2004; Wilson, 2002). It remains unclear whether the derogatory remarks about the title “KM” are also the utterances of domain professionals.

Serenko et al. (2010) identified about a decade ago that practitioners' contribution to the body of knowledge related to KM is diminishing. Accordingly, they called for collaboration between academic researchers and industry practitioners in a variety of research projects. Specifically, they recommended that future researchers adopt research methods that rely on the qualitative paradigm, which has no adequate and satisfactory representation in the KM field. Interviews, focus groups, and text analysis are among the research tools they have proposed in their research work for future research (Serenko et al., 2010). A growing gap between KM practitioners and academics has also been found in a structured literature review of scientific research in the field over the past decade (Serenko, 2021). We wish to bridge the knowledge gaps described above by recording the opinions of those in the KM profession as part of our examination of the discipline's role, development, and future.

4 | THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the theoretical background described above, we seek to adopt the proposal to conduct research that will help “better understand where the KM discipline was, where it is, and where it wants to be”

(Serenko & Bontis, 2013, p. 150). More specifically, we are interested in the opinions of KM professionals engaged in knowledge-intensive organizations. On the one hand, the views of KM consultants who provide external KM consulting services to a variety of organizations in the local and global market and, on the other, the views of knowledge managers who are responsible for KM activities in knowledge-intensive organizations across various sectors. The consultants acquire knowledge of the status of KM in various organizations over the years and thus potentially have a wide “macro” perspective of the KM discipline. The perspective of knowledge managers, on the other hand, is often characterized by micro-vision, as a specific view of KM within the organization to which they belong.

We intend to query the experts about their views on the truthfulness of the statements found in the literature regarding the challenges to the future of KM. We will give them the opportunity to provide arguments to verify or refute the controversial statements, and we will try to understand how they perceive the sources of these statements. In an attempt to deal with the nature of the statements, we wish to expose new insights into the meanings related to the value of KM and its contribution to knowledge-intensive organizations, as reflected in the views of the professionals. This deepening will be achieved through comparative analytical analysis, which will juxtapose the KM consultants' views with those of the KM managers themselves. Furthermore, we will collect new findings about their beliefs regarding the term “KM.” As an outcome of these steps, we hope to obtain a better understanding of the contemporary role of the KM discipline in the age of knowledge. Moreover, we would like to shed light on its evolutionary development, and further explore possible directions for its future.

4.1 | Preliminary data collection

We have already conducted a number of preliminary interviews during 2020 with KM professionals who fall under Heisig's (2015) definition of KM “expert.” The empirical analysis of these initial data illustrates a unique mosaic of meanings, which international KM consultants attribute to precisely the issues that this exploratory paper wishes to focus on. Expert opinion suggests that the research community could add value by focusing on studies in the spirit of the research proposed below. They believe that it is desirable to connect the academia and the practical fields by uncovering the KM professionals' perspectives on KM, based on their direct acquaintance with the field.

Our initial results provide arguments that disprove claims of a decline of the discipline and, indeed, reveal reasons for its vitality. While attempting to understand the source of the pessimistic statements regarding KM, the experts are, for the first time, led to consider the appropriateness of the term “KM” that represents the discipline. Furthermore, the initial results emphasize the risks of the absence of KM or of poor KM, and shed light on the severity of knowledge risks and the importance of their management. These negative views are tempered by exposing the meanings ascribed to the opportunities and strengths of managed organizational knowledge.

Moreover, as part of our initial exploratory study, we had a unique glimpse into the challenges involved in KM. In the opinion of the interviewees, these challenges have a significant impact on examining the viability of budget investment in KM efforts. In order to examine the possible ways of tackling the challenges, we consider it appropriate to expand the sample. Also note that, having received testimonies of positive changes in knowledge flow processes, we gained insight into possible future avenues of KM in knowledge-intensive organizations.

4.2 | Design a holistic model for KM

Researchers have long recognized that interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches are required for adoption in KM empirical studies. This, in order “to establish a sound interdisciplinary framework for KM which can be successively developed, filled and improved by manifold empirical investigations” (Scholl et al., 2004, p. 33). In our view, the initial findings we obtained illustrate the importance of the KM profession from both academic and practical perspectives. Moreover, given that the existing literature is fragmented, the preliminary findings shed light on a variety of issues related to the core of KM discipline. Therefore, and in the spirit of the statements calling for future research to take a holistic approach with respect to KM, we consider it appropriate to expand the research through new perspectives.

The purpose of the proposed study is the empirical development of a conceptual framework pertaining to the interpretations, meanings, perceptions, and beliefs regarding the role, development, and future of the KM discipline. The holistic model we propose to develop will depict the relationships between the professionals' perceptions and the unique issues that this study wishes to focus on. The model will provide a broad picture of a variety of elements that underpin the KM discipline, including: components of optimal KM as a basis for creating a strategic management tool, knowledge risks in their absence, the field challenges and their implications, tangible and intangible business benefits, KM effectiveness assessment.

“KM approaches have to integrate different perspectives in order to provide useful help for the organizational practice” (Scholl et al., 2004, p. 31). Moreover, the substantial concern the research community would abandon the applied side, so that KM “becomes a pure scholarly discipline” (Serenko et al., 2010, p. 17), has long been raised. In this context, we hope that by totality of the complex it will represent, the model will be available not only to the KM community, but if it will also properly serve the practitioners. Given the understanding that formulating a KM strategy is the weak point of many organizations (Dayan et al., 2017; Heisig et al., 2016), we strive to develop an applied model that will support the design and implementation of KM methods, solutions, and tools in knowledge-intensive organizations.

In light of the small number of studies dealing with issues that this exploratory research will seek to examine, certainly from the point of view of KM professionals, we expect the holistic model to be

innovative and to provide a strong foundation for a wide inherent perspective of KM in knowledge-intensive organizations. Moreover, we strive for the model to position KM as an essential, advanced, and evolving field, and in essence as a living and kicking.

5 | THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of the research is anticipated to manifest in the form of significant contributions to KM theory and practice. On a theoretical level, the proposed study has two important potential implications. First, from a critical-skeptical perspective, and by simply considering a representative sample of KM professional' opinions, we hope to examine the relevance of KM. We anticipate that the arguments that will be revealed in the study will shed new light on skeptics' beliefs. Second, the research will enrich the empirical knowledge of KM through the application of a conceptual framework in the context of a relatively unexplored field of science. Despite the increased interest in KM, the KM professionals' worldview is almost completely absent from the existing literature. In this context, the novelty of the study will be recording the KM professionals' opinions, as part of the attempt to bridge this fundamental gap. Thus, the holistic model that will be established may be a unique opportunity for a point of view that goes beyond the boundaries of an exclusive academic perspective.

Third, we also see the practical potential for this study. It has long been claimed that a deficit in understanding the contribution of KM to knowledge-intensive organizations may create a lack of legitimacy for the field as a whole, including a loss of relevance at both the practical and academic levels. In other words, the lack of evidence of the contribution of KM to business results may threaten the discipline as a whole. This threat intensifies against the background of statements that are quick to eulogize the discipline and is also suggested in the criticism of the use of the term “KM.” The study of the proposed issues will therefore enrich the arguments regarding the necessity of KM and will also prompt future research in this area. Finally, the model will be available to the KM research community and practitioners as a foundation for a deeper understanding of the various aspects of organizational KM. This background makes it apparent that, in addition to the academic justification of this study, it also has value from an organizational perspective.

6 | METHODOLOGY

6.1 | The research approach

The research will be based on the qualitative-constructivist research paradigm, which questions the existence of an objective reality. According to this paradigm, an absolute external reality, detached from perception and interpretation, cannot exist (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016; Shkedi, 2003). Qualitative research involves a holistic interpretive approach to the world. This means that qualitative

researchers research things within their natural context, with as little intervention as possible (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016). The search for social meaning that extends out of the human experience is conducted through an understanding of the phenomenon, as it is understood and structured by the social actors, that is, the objects of knowledge, who take part in it (Shkedi, 2003; Shlasky & Alpert, 2007).

The attempt to reduce the possible space for variance in the results of the research will be achieved through the use of several research tools – a method known in the literature as “triangulation.” This methodology involves the use of several sources of information and their cross-examination of evidence, in order to examine the issues investigated from different angles (Shkedi, 2003; Shlasky & Alpert, 2007). Accordingly, the proposed qualitative research will be based on three research tools: in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and content analysis. The rationale for the triangulation method is to increase the quality of the research.

In-depth interviews were chosen as a tool for data collection because of its ability to allow interviewees to relate their narratives, to understand the meanings they attach to their experiences, and to perceive their cultural contexts. The focus groups will make it possible to gain collective insights based on the participants' perspectives of the research subject (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016; Shkedi, 2003). Content analysis will complete the picture. This tool was chosen for its ability to reveal hidden concepts or patterns in the data and possible alternative meanings hidden in the responses (Bauer, 2000).

6.2 | Data collection

The research will commence with about 20 in-depth semi-structured personal interviews with KM consultants, who provide services to knowledge-intensive organizations in various sectors. In addition, approximately 20 in-depth semi-structured personal interviews will be held with knowledge managers, who are responsible for KM initiatives and activities in organizations belonging to different sectors. These sectors include the public sector; the financial sector; the health sector; technology, media, and communications; industry, energy, and resources; and industry and consumer products. Based on the theoretical and research literature, we built a set of questions, which will serve as a basis for the personal interview. To ensure the reliability of the research questions included in the pre-compiled questionnaire, the questions were presented for the early judgment of six KM professionals with at least 10 years of professional experience. The questions were clarified according to the emphases received in judgment (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016; Shkedi, 2003).

Following an initial analysis of the findings, further empirical evidence will be sought through 2–3 heterogenic focus groups. As part of the focus groups, KM professionals will be asked about issues that we will identify that need to be delved into. In preparation for the group interviews, a set of questions will be formulated with the intention of validating or enriching the findings obtained in the individual interviews. Both the personal and focus group interviews are expected to last between 1 and 1.5 h and will be recorded with the

participant's informed consent. In this context, the research will be conducted according to the accepted rules of ethics in the scientific community. For this purpose, the proposed research procedure was approved by the ethics committee of the academic institution, as part of which the qualitative investigation will be conducted.

Data collection will be completed using content analysis of selected texts published on a number of social media platforms. We will analyze texts from discussions conducted in two internal organizational social-professional networks of a global consulting firm, which provides KM consulting, among other services. Participating in these groups are a large number of senior consultants, who are exposed to the state of knowledge resource management and to the views of the managers in knowledge-intensive organizations to whom they provide services. The investigation will expand to the discussions that take place in two public groups targeted at the KM community in a well-known social media platform. These groups consist of thousands of knowledge managers working in various organizations, who tend to share thoughts, professional deliberations, and opinion pieces about challenges and innovations in their profession. The extent to which the discussions will be analyzed depends on the saturation point. In other words, we will cease collecting data when the findings do not contribute any further to the conceptualization of the themes that emerge from the research or to the creation of new themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

6.3 | Data analysis

Data analysis is a process of arranging and constructing the information collected, for the purpose of its interpretation and understanding of its meanings. The systematic analysis involves dividing the information into sections and reorganizing it into a new analytical order. At the center of the analysis of findings obtained through qualitative research methods is the task of selecting a piece of information and associating it with a category (Shkedi, 2003). Qualitative-constructivist categorization is the process of creating categories from the interpretation of information. It requires researchers to develop or match perceptions relevant to data, rather than to implement a system of predetermined laws (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data analysis in this exploratory research will rely on the thematic analysis method. This method highlights the words and descriptions of the informants, as reflecting their experiences, beliefs, and knowledge. “The thematic analysis can be seen as dealing with the text as a window that allows a view into the human experience” (Shkedi, 2003, p.94). This approach is appropriate for this research proposed because it places great emphasis on listening to explanations and interpretations of others. Specifically, text excerpt analysis was chosen as the thematic analysis technique (Shkedi, 2003).

The translation of the descriptive picture of the research findings to a theoretical conceptual system will be based on the grounded theory approach. This theory is one of the accepted research types of qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The purpose of this approach is to formulate theoretical explanations

for social phenomena by systematic and attentive analysis of data (Creswell, 1998). The starting point of the grounded theory approach is that in human behavior there are patterns and repetitions, which cannot be described mathematically (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The data will be transcribed and coded by subject categories. The holistic model will be developed while relying on the analysis of the findings, which will be obtained from the three research tools. In order to increase the reliability of the model, we will be assisted by a senior researcher to judge the themes that will be identified in the analytical analysis of the results (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016; Shkedi, 2003). The analytical process will be documented as a basis for validity and reliability analysis in the next steps, and will be able to stand up to the scrutiny of independent professional bodies (Shkedi, 2003).

In conclusion, we see the proposed study as a window of opportunity for adopting an inherent holistic perspective, which will constitute an accurate mirror of KM in knowledge-intensive organizations.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable - no new data generated, or the article describes entirely theoretical research.

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