

Is KM declining? Editorial for EJKM

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Introduction

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, there is no doubt that we live in a Knowledge-Based Economy (OECD, 2014). Ragab and Arisha (2013, p. 873) highlight that “knowledge is the currency of the current economy, a vital organizational asset and a key to creating a sustainable competitive advantage”. Therefore, knowledge assumes a key role in developing sustainable competitive advantage, both at organizational and national level.

Interestingly, a recent survey developed among 729 CKO by the Global Knowledge Management Observatory (Kingston-griffiths, 2015, p. 4) revealed that the perception of knowledge Management (KM) is that it still lacks maturity and continues to be seen as a technology-led function. The report highlights that several managers perceived KM as in decline. However, within academe Serenko et. al. (2010, p. 16) highlight that the KM discipline is very diverse. Therefore, despite the recognized importance of Knowledge to support economic growth, both at the organizational and national level, complaints about the role of KM are emerging.

To help KM to increase its importance research must “help managers become better reflective practitioners” (Starkey and Madan, 2001, p. 4), developing pragmatic science that “simultaneously addresses questions of applied ... relevance and does so in a methodologically robust manner” (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 394). Recent literature recognizes that KM is showing signs of scientific maturity (Serenko and Dumay, 2015) and that can be used to support the development of pragmatic science. Focusing on KM within specific sectors, such as the public sector, Massaro et. al (2015) recognized that literature is fragmented and requires a strong emphasis on research methods. Similar considerations are developed in the field of KM in SMEs (Durst and Edvardsson, 2012; Massaro et al., 2016). There is no preference for quantitative or qualitative studies (Massaro, Dumay and Bagnoli, 2015), but researchers should show a sincere interest in getting their hands dirty within the organisation (Serenko and Dumay, 2015, p. 22) to guarantee the relevance of their studies.

Reflections from the 16th ECKM in Udine

This Special issue of EJKM presents a selection of the best articles from the 16th European Conference on Knowledge Management, held in Udine, Italy in 2015, where 110 articles were presented from 260 abstracts received representing authors of 46 different countries. Additionally, 15 PhD research papers were presented showing that a considerable number of new scholars are approaching the topic of KM. The research methods in the submitted papers varied, with quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods all playing a part, and most of the papers employed empirical analysis. Popular topics included the process of knowledge management (knowledge creation, collaboration, knowledge acquisition), knowledge strategy, leadership and data analytics. Particular interest was given to specific sectors such as the public sector and welfare. ECKM is attracting senior and emerging scholars from all over the world, covering many aspects of KM. Figure 1 illustrates the coverage of countries presented at the conference.

Papers selected for the Special Issue

From the conference; six papers were selected based on their rigor and relevance with the specific aim to increasing the dialog among scholars and practitioners about the importance of KM in all kind of organizations.

In the first paper by Fteimi and Lehner (2016) the authors specifically analyze 755 papers published in the Proceedings of the European Conference Knowledge Management (ECKM) in the period 2006-2014. Their results reveal a strong interest from the KM community in knowledge processes, innovation, learning, and technology. Additionally, their results show that normative papers, focused on models and framework development are the most common.

Additionally, Fteimi and Lehner find strong research activity in writing publications focused on knowledge process and more specifically focused on the process of knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, and knowledge creation. These results are useful and welcome, as the authors state “they can be seen as an attempt to reflect the identity and the research interests of the KM discipline.”

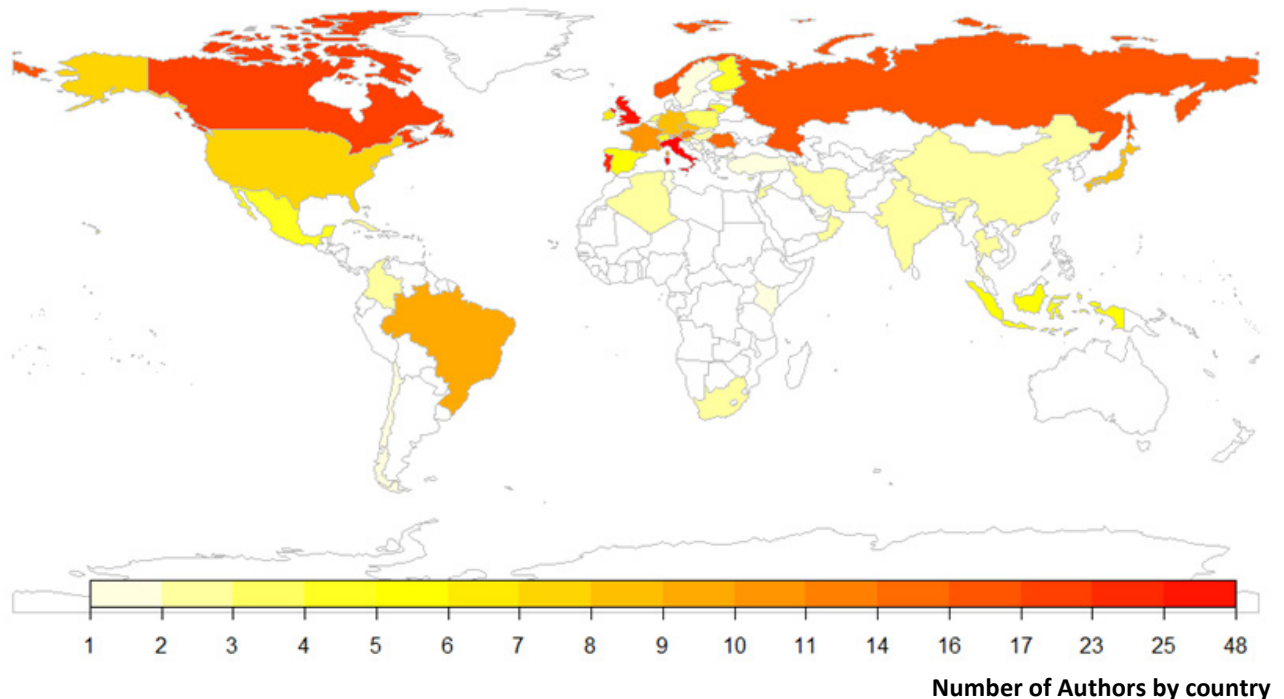


Figure 1: Global Spread of Authors represented at the ECKM 2015

In the second paper by Kaiser et al. (2016) the authors suggest a new learning approach for organizations, which envisions a future scenario. Two organizational learning projects are analyzed in the paper. One case is conducted in a high school in Austria. The second is conducted by an Austrian Economic Chamber. Findings from both case studies support the new approach proposed by the authors and suggest that the learning approach proposed produces more paradigm challenging knowledge compared to the output gained from conventional approaches.

The third paper is a study by AlRashdi and Srinivas (2016). The paper provides an overview of the KM initiatives within Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Libraries. The paper explores direct and indirect benefits of applying knowledge sharing in decision making within libraries. The methodology used in this research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The major findings proposed by the authors highlight the need to develop a collaborative atmosphere within all the seven libraries analyzed and proposes some solutions such as major problems to check on.

The fourth paper is a study developed by Bardy et al. (2016), which focuses on the connection between KM and intellectual capital. The paper presents a case study from an Austrian chamber of agriculture. The study presents an IC Statement used to improve processes and outputs within the organization studied. Findings reveal that the IC statement not only enhanced processes in the organization and allowed them to be more responsive to change at the EU level, but also provides a framework for this organization and others for process mapping and quality improvement. The primary focus for both an ICS and knowledge management should be on relational capital, processes delivering the service, and the organizational and human capital of the institution.

The fifth paper is a study developed by Klimontowicz (2016) which focuses on an analysis of resilience in the Polish Banking Market. The purpose of the article is to define knowledge factors that influence resilience on banking market. The paper presents the theoretical foundations for the resilience concept in the banking market; knowledge factors used to establish resilience in the Polish banking market and their impact on the banking sector together with the main challenges facing the Polish banking sector in the near future.

The last paper, by Araci, et al. (2016), presents an overview of different types of trade-off curves (ToCs) and the role of knowledge-based ToCs in Set-based concurrent engineering by employing an extensive literature review and industrial field study. The paper proposes a process of generating and using knowledge-based ToCs to create and visualize knowledge.

Conclusion

We started this editorial with some evidence that claimed a declining role for KM. However, results from the conference reveal that KM is still attracting senior and emerging scholars from all over the world. Additionally, the KM literature is evolving and reaching a more mature stage. Within this process, some elements must be checked. Rigor and relevance are key characteristics to assure KM can proceed as a pragmatic science and the papers selected here exhibit these elements. Empirical studies are all presented, and some of them are developed by the collaboration of scholars and practitioners. Research models are diverse, employing quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. All these elements allow us to conclude that KM is still a vibrant discipline, which is not declining but moving to a more mature stage.

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