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## Article

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Journal of Accounting and Management Information Systems (JAMIS)

## Provided in Cooperation with:

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

*Suggested Citation:* Pugna, Irina Bogdana; Boldeanu, Dana-Maria (2014) : Factors affecting establishment of an institutional knowledge management culture – a study of organizational vision, Journal of Accounting and Management Information Systems (JAMIS), ISSN 2559-6004, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Vol. 13, Iss. 3, pp. 559-583

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/310567>

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# Factors affecting establishment of an institutional knowledge management culture – a study of organizational vision

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates a range of approaches toward developing a Knowledge Management (KM) strategy according to the organizational vision of Romanian companies. Focused on issues which Romanian organizations face with respect to KM, this article centers on how the implementation of KM can be improved, considering both managerial and cultural issues. The data on which this qualitative research is based was obtained from local managers who reflected on aspects related to knowledge and its management within their organizations by fill in a reflection guide which consisted of open questions only. The analysis performed revealed several valuable insights provided through managers' attitudes and behaviors related to knowledge and KM.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Management (KM), KM culture, KM strategy, KM practices, organizational learning, qualitative analysis.

**JEL codes:** D83, M14, M15, D23

## 1. Introduction

With roots in cognitive science, artificial intelligence, organizational learning and innovation, Knowledge Management (KM) is itself not new. Managers have always used intellectual assets and recognized their value. However, these efforts were neither systematic nor did they ensure that available knowledge was shared and disseminated appropriately for maximal organizational benefit. For organizational success, knowledge as a form of capital must be exchangeable among persons, and continuously enhance itself.

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Enthusiasm for KM has waxed and waned over time, but it has generated a constant interest, both as an emerging area of research and as a business direction. Each organization needs to be aware of individual and collective knowledge so that it may make the most effective use of it. Most knowledge management initiatives have making knowledge visible (to reveal knowledge in an explicit manner from wherever it resides) among their final objectives, together with developing a knowledge-intensive culture and building a knowledge infrastructure.

The option organizations are facing today, as we move to the knowledge economy, is no longer whether they should or should not implement a KM strategy, but which approach is more suitable for this process.

There has been growing and consistent interest lately in culture relationship in KM. Undoubtedly there is a strong relation between different knowledge management approaches and cultural backgrounds. After all, knowledge itself is a concept related to the human mind. Knowledge appears, is interpreted, contextualized, processed and stored in the human mind. In other words, it is a product of human reflection and experience. As individuals, we are related to a certain culture – we share its values, beliefs, and we behave accordingly. Therefore, all the attempts to manage that very volatile resource at the organizational or any other level must be in accordance with the cultural environment.

Additionally, many recent studies have focused on the implications of globalization on KM. The globalization of markets and production continues to bring together people from different cultures and countries in culturally diverse organizations. We interact in multiple ways with other cultures, and very often we need to perform, as individuals or as groups inside organizations, in multicultural environments.

Despite widespread acknowledgement of the importance of culture to KM success, addressing cultural issues remains one of the most challenging aspects of KM implementation. The contextual nature of culture means that methods and practices successfully used so far in order to address cultural issues in one organization may not produce similar results in other organizations. There are no 'ready-made' solutions to cultural problems, so there remains a need to examine culture in KM within different types of organizations, and also to identify the implications of globalization to KM.

Considering all of the above, there are some questions which have been raised recently both in research and practice communities:

- *What are the approaches to KM that respond to this continuous and increasing demand? or*
- *What will the future of KM look like? or*
- *How will new information technologies contribute to KM? and*

- *How will KM change the way businesses are managed?*

Issues Romanian organizations face with respect to Knowledge Management represents an important focus of this research. Recognizing the need for KM implementation for the success of businesses, this article aims to focus on *how* the implementation of KM can be improved.

Another purpose of this research is to examine the culture relationship in knowledge management, the transition to a knowledge culture organizational model and implications of national culture for managing knowledge at the organizational level.

The following research questions have been explored in the present paper:

- What is the current state of KM implementation in Romanian organizations?
- What are the most frequent approaches to KM in place – or most likely to be embraced – in Romanian organizations?
- What are the specific cultural impediments to KM success? How do organizations confront and manage these and what lessons can be learned from these endeavors?

We strongly believe that, although “best KM practices” cannot be “exported” or replicated within organizations from different countries, with different cultural “patterns”, one can take advantage of successful experiences of KM implementations. Therefore, the necessary and inevitable transition to a knowledge culture organizational model can benefit from those “best practices” and reach a better dynamic in Romanian organizations.

This article starts by reviewing the main aspects of knowledge management related with the objectives of this research. The *first section* provides an overview of the literature and explores the relevance of KM concepts and practice, particularly within Romania. The research methodology is presented in the *second section*. The main findings are presented and discussed in the *third section*. Final remarks, together with the limitations of this study and future research actions are provided in our *Conclusions*.

## 2. Knowledge management in an organizational context

The purpose of this section is to review some of the main approaches to knowledge management from an organizational perspective and to highlight the relevance of the concepts and practices of knowledge management for today’s organizations in Romania.

The significance of knowledge as a vital resource for economy has been underlined in science and politics (European Council, 2000), (Stehr, 1994); it forms the basis for innovation and economic success (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Drucker, 1993; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Scholl, 2004; Schreyögg & Geiger, 2003). Knowledge Management (KM) is the strategy for creating, accessing and supporting this vital resource.

After 1990, interest in knowledge management continued to grow, along with the increasing value of knowledge as an asset and the development of information technologies. Accordingly, knowledge management has received in recent years particular attention from various academic fields.

Irrespective of the great interest in this area, there is no universally accepted KM model. Moreover, since knowledge management as a conscious practice is so young, executives have lacked successful models that they could use as guides.

Although there is no universally accepted knowledge management model, there are attitudes regarding knowledge management initiatives, which can be classified into two major categories, based on the knowledge targeted to be managed and the tools used for that. This taxonomy is mainly culturally determined. These two fundamental approaches to knowledge management can be found in the literature under different names: practice and process, mechanistic and behavioristic, codification and personalization.

Some studies show that effective firms excelled by focusing on one of the strategies and using the other one in a supporting role. Moreover, executives who try to excel at both strategies risk failing at both (Hansen & Nohira, 1999). A careful and detailed analysis of the cultural aspects should play an essential role in choosing one knowledge management strategy or another. In the global economic environment in which most of the companies must perform today, developing intercultural competencies and managing knowledge over cross-culturally dimensions represent new challenges for their managers.

There are different cultural frameworks at the organizational level in which knowledge management initiatives can be implemented with different degrees of success. The aim is to create the right company culture within an organization so that knowledge management can work.

According to Kumar and Thondikulam (2006), becoming a knowledge organization is a three-stage growth process. The first stage is focused on technical systems of knowledge management in the organizations, which enable locating and capturing knowledge. The second stage is focused on sharing and transferring knowledge. The third stage deals with generating new knowledge and

concentrating on processes. Therefore, there is a gradual shift from IT-based solutions towards a focus on organizational structures and processes, and finally to new values. Most organizations are in different stages of transition from an industrial culture to a knowledge culture, and only some are on the road to a creativity culture – where personal creativity becomes the focus of business.

Traditional eastern and western views of knowledge continue to influence the knowledge management practices in today's global workplace (Jelavic & Ogilvie, 2010). These cultural distinctions are classified into "eastern" (Asian countries – especially Japan) and "western" (North America and Western Europe). On these two different views are based the main approaches in artificial intelligence: the cognitive approach to "western" culture and the connectionist approach to the "eastern" culture. All later developments, both in artificial intelligence and knowledge management, seem to follow these cultural patterns. The process approach, which attempts to codify organizational culture through formalized controls, processes and technologies, is largely embraced by western cultures, while the practice approach, trying to create social environments or communities of practice to facilitate the sharing of tacit understanding, is adopted by eastern cultures. An understanding of these differing views is necessary for effective management in the international sphere, especially for providing a means for better cross-cultural understanding and successful knowledge transfer (Jelavic & Ogilvie, 2010).

Although these two traditional different perspectives of knowledge and knowledge management are largely recognized, both in research and practice, there are cultures that don't fit in any of them. For example, all the Asian countries cannot be identified (in that context) with Japan and in North America and European countries different patterns and cognitive styles can be found. Zhu (2004) identified different knowledge management styles by extending the two category classification (western and eastern) to a four category classification: American, Japanese, European and Chinese.

Furthermore, there are the Central and East European countries that are now part of the European Union. A detailed analysis of both the models of knowledge conversion and the context or space in which knowledge conversion and creation occurs and information is converted to knowledge. Undoubtedly, there are different nuances and specific variables that have to be considered beside the two traditional views of knowledge management since every cultural space has its own way to perceive and manage knowledge.

Knowledge management in global business environment should reconsider the concept of culture which, rather than being perceived as a source of differences, can represent a form of organizational knowledge that can be converted into a

valuable resource. Focused on cross-cultural interdependence rather than traditional views of comparative differences and similarities between cultures, cross-cultural knowledge management is more suitable to global business management (Holden, 2002).

During the last 25 years, Romania, like most of the other east European countries, imported a lot of international (especially Anglo-Americans) management principles and practices. American culture seems to be the one most valued by Romanians, even if the cultural environment of Romanian organizations differs a lot from it. At the same time, an important number of multinational companies appeared in the Romanian economic environment, influencing it with their own cultural values. Some of those transferred management practices were successfully implemented. Other practices remained at initial stages or even renounced of them.

The process approach to KM, which focuses on explicit knowledge and the extended use of information technologies, gained considerable traction within Romanian organizations. Business Intelligence and Knowledge management technologies were successfully implemented, many of them having Knowledge Bases and systems that implement artificial reasoning. Most managers recognize the importance of knowledge as an asset and the necessity to manage information and knowledge efficiently and effectively (Pugna & Albescu, 2012).

Looking at the values of Hofstede's five cultural dimensions for Romania, we can understand why, for many organizations, creating a knowledge vision or adopting a knowledge-based culture is not such an easy – or easy to duplicate – objective (Interact, 2005). From all the cultural dimensions, distance- to - power and uncertainty- avoidance influence the most organizational behaviors.

The great distance to power indicates that Romanians feel more comfortable in an organization with a hierarchic structure rather than in one with a network structure. Intense uncertainty avoidance indicates that we manifest anxiety regarding the future and we prefer today's safety to tomorrow's uncertainty. Organizational changes will determine defensive reactions – resistance to change. Rapid actions, with rapid feedback are preferred to long term objectives. In many organizations, initiatives that aim to create a working environment in which knowledge sharing is valued and even rewarded and informal communication between employees encouraged are based mostly on the “common sense” of their managers and are not integrated in a coherent knowledge management “vision”. Innovation – in the sense of implementing creative ideas – is not the most appropriate strategy in Romanian organizations due to the intense uncertainty avoidance and great distance to power. (Pugna & Albescu, 2012).

Therefore, the blind adoption of one approach or another is not the best solution. There is no defined knowledge management approach for Eastern – European countries, and it is clear that none of the existing approaches is “more suitable” for them. This presents both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, there is no “tested” path to take. On the other hand, there are multiple choices and tested paths that can be combined to arrive quicker and with fewer efforts to the desired destination.

### **3. Research methodology**

All research – whether qualitative or quantitative – is based on underlying assumptions about which research methods are appropriate and what constitutes a valid approach. It is important to know what these research assumptions are in order to conduct research effectively. Researchers agree that qualitative research is concerned with social processes and the meanings that participants attribute to social situations. Qualitative studies are conducted with a view to understanding the way in which participants perceive situations and events, while the meanings people attach to the phenomena under investigation are crucial (Bardi, 2007).

The underlying assumption of qualitative methods is that multiple realities exist in any given situation and these multiple perspectives – that of the researcher and individuals being investigated – are included in the article (Myers, 2007). The goal is to uncover and discover patterns that will help to explain the phenomenon of interest (Myers & Avison, 2002; Villiers, 2005). Qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data such as interviews, documents, participant observation data, pictures or objects to understand and explain social phenomena (Myers, 1997; Myers & Avison, 2002).

Qualitative methods are characterized by a first-handedness in which researchers strive to be at one with their research phenomena in a way that other methods do not require, sanction or even encourage (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011). As the objective of this article centers on KM strategy in Romanian organizations, our inherent knowledge of national cultural context can be valuable in the research process.

A grounded theory strategy is, according to Goulding (2002), particularly helpful for research to predict and explain behavior, the emphasis being upon developing and building theory. As much of business and management is about people’s behaviors, a grounded theory strategy can be used to explore a wide range of business and management issues. The choice of grounded theory as a research method for the present article was based on its valuable support for explaining behaviors. The aim of identifying the factors affecting the establishment of an institutional knowledge management culture cannot be addressed without exploring the managers’ attitudes towards it.

The main objective of data collection was to establish personal perspectives and facts about knowledge management policies in the respondents' respective contexts. Research participants were expected to answer open questions relevant to their respective roles. Open questions have been designed in order to encourage the interviewee to provide an extensive and developmental answer, and may be used to reveal attitudes or obtain facts (Grummitt, 1980). It encourages the interviewee to communicate their own perceptions and opinions.

Respondents were invited to fill in a reflection guide which consisted only of open questions. The questions were meant to prompt and guide responses, not to elicit answers about pre-specified categories. Accounts of the respondents' experience of knowledge management practices used in their companies were sought and open questions were the most appropriate form of elicitation. Therefore, the reflection guide shares features with unstructured interviews.

The account guide consisted of three parts. The first two questions established the research participant's perspectives on both the meanings and importance of knowledge, knowledge management and knowledge management processes. The following questions explored knowledge management policies in place in their particular context (their perception of leadership attitude towards knowledge management and learning, the existence of information technologies related to different approaches to knowledge management, attitudes related to knowledge sharing and also some cultural aspects). The last question was included to allow the research participants to add any features or facts that they might consider relevant for the topic.

For this study, we collected data from 24 respondents. Potential research participants were selected based on their managerial position and their familiarity with the investigated topic (knowledge management), by utilizing both theoretical and convenient sampling (Whitman & Woszcynski, 2004).

The subjects were MBA students at INDE (National Institute of Economic Development). Each of them occupies a managerial position in a Romanian organization. Also, all of them participated in this MBA program at the course entitled "Management Information Systems", with a module dedicated to Knowledge Management Systems. Thus, all subjects had at least a "theoretical" contact with Knowledge Management; this was an important criterion in selecting the research participants. Initially, we tried to address a larger sample, by extending this group to managers who didn't necessarily have previous contact with knowledge management as a discipline of study. This attempt evidenced that, although willing to participate to such a study, they were not able to identify the concepts in the open questions. This strengthened our initial assumption regarding the lack of a coherent knowledge management strategy in Romanian organizations.

Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasize the inevitable influence of the researcher's identity in qualitative research. Researchers are no more 'detached' from their objects of article than are their informants, they have their own understandings and convictions as well as conceptual orientations, and they are part of a particular culture at a specific historical moment.

We had the position of "observers" of the phenomenon under study from which we have an initial assumption: *the lack of a coherent strategy regarding knowledge management and the "blind" adoption of external practices without reflecting on the cultural issues*. We began this research with this assumption in our mind. This presented both strengths and weaknesses. Our participation as observers (even if from an "outsider" position) gave us a privileged perspective and access to behaviors and "informal accounts" which can be drawn upon in order to triangulate the perceptions expressed in the formal accounts. Alternatively, we had to detach from our position, renounce preconceived ideas, and be objective in the process of data analysis.

In this study, we have tried to identify all possible violations of ethical standards to ensure that taking part in the research will not harm any of the participants. The anonymity of the responses was guaranteed – the research participants were asked to provide only their managerial position. No pressure was "imposed". The communication process associated to data collection took place on the Internet, some months after they had been assessed for the KM discipline.

#### **4. Factors affecting establishment of an institutional KM culture - results and discussion**

Our research focuses on the issues Romanian organizations face with respect to KM, in their effort to implement a knowledge culture organizational model. It aims to provide an assessment of the current situation, and to detect the most likely applicable approaches for an effective management of knowledge. Another objective was to grasp the value of culture as an enabler or obstacle for good knowledge management practices.

To respond to the main research questions of this article, we have devised a set of themes to be investigated. For each theme and subtheme, categories and relations between them were identified and analyzed.

**Table 1. Topics investigated and their relation with the research questions**

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEME	SUBTHEME
RQ1	The importance of managing knowledge	The usefulness of knowledge development
RQ1 RQ2 RQ3	Knowledge management strategies in Romanian organizations – approaches and actual state	The “Consciousness” of Knowledge Management both as a concept and as a management policy The existence of a coherent knowledge management strategy The existing knowledge management approaches and practices
RQ2 RQ3	The role of information technologies in knowledge management	
RQ2 RQ3	The attitudes towards knowledge sharing. The importance of tacit knowledge	The attitudes and influences related to knowledge sharing The main barriers to knowledge sharing The interest of managing tacit knowledge
RQ1 RQ3	The attitudes towards organizational learning	
RQ2 RQ3	A vision of a coherent knowledge management strategy	

The research questions explored are:

- What is the current state of KM implementation in Romanian organizations? (RQ1)
- What are the most frequent approaches to KM in place – or most likely to be embraced – in Romanian organizations? (RQ2)
- What are the specific cultural impediments to KM success? How do organizations confront and manage these and what lessons can be learned from these endeavors? (RQ3)

#### **4.1. Theme 1 - The importance of managing knowledge**

*The usefulness of knowledge development for companies is identified in terms of:*

1. COMPETITIVITY
2. INNOVATION
3. LEARNING

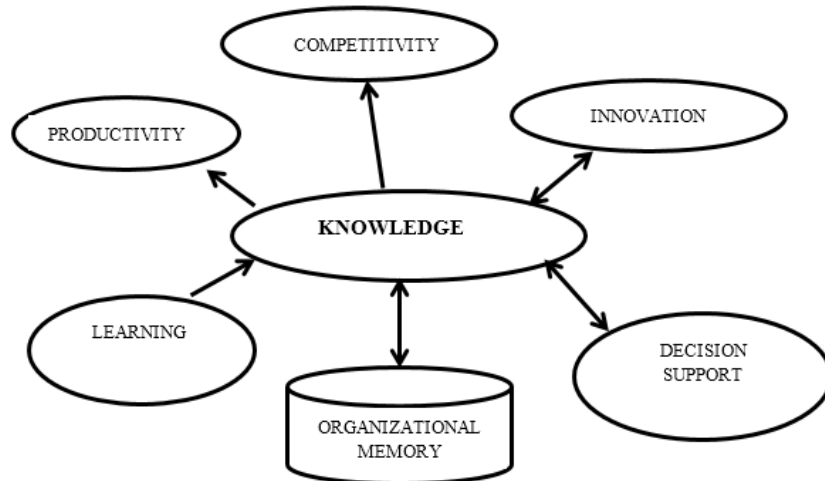
Generally, in all the responses the relations between knowledge, learning and competitive advantage is highlighted. As one of the respondents explains *“Competitive advantage is based almost entirely on knowledge nowadays. The more a company knows, the more it can learn. The opportunities of an organization to learn are considerably increased if it has a knowledge base to manage.”*

4. PRODUCTIVITY
5. DECISION SUPPORT – increasing role of knowledge as a support for decision processes.
6. KNOWLEDGE AVAILABILITY – knowledge bases are easy to use and available to all employees.
7. “KNOWING” – knowledge of the organization.

There is a clear tendency to identify knowledge as the most valuable organizational asset. As one of the respondents put it *“Managing both managers’ and employees’ knowledge is a must nowadays”*. Some of the respondents consider knowledge as being important in the context of the decision-making process; others relate it with the organizational learning process. However, all of them recognize the determinant role of knowledge in achieving a competitive advantage for their companies.

The relations between the recognized categories associated with this theme have been identified as in figure 1.

Knowledge represents the foundation of the modern organization. It is strongly related to innovation and acts as the main source of organization’s productivity and of its competitive advantage. As an asset, it offers extraordinary leverage and increases in returns – acquired mostly by learning, it grows with use (as a result of decision making processes). All organizations should store their knowledge in an active form (a knowledge base) and not in a passive one (a manual of the company, for example).



**Figure 1 Knowledge – the foundation of the modern organization**

*Awareness of Knowledge Management both as a concept and as a management policy is described in term of:*

1. The role of KM in the achievement of organization's objectives

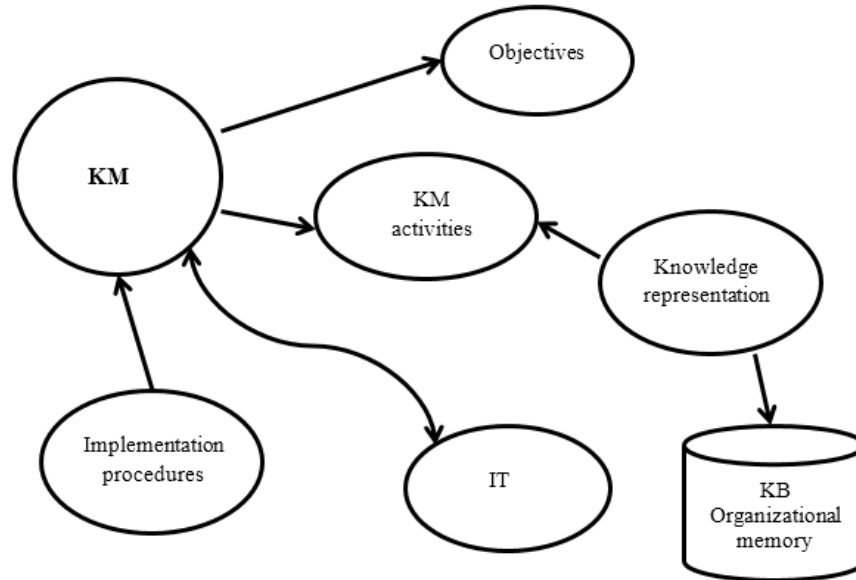
All the respondents are aware of the essential role of knowledge management in the achievement of the company's strategic goals. It is an expected result, although if the organization's strategy is expected to be a result of KM policy. The full awareness of this function of knowledge management as a precursor of the strategy is characteristic for organizations in which a knowledge culture is already in place and movement to a creativity culture has been initiated.

2. The KM cycle – activities.
3. Knowledge representation – in order to store it and make it available to everyone.
4. KM implementation procedures.
5. Explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge.
6. Investments in information technologies that support knowledge management.

There is also a general tendency to consider investment in information technologies as being knowledge management initiatives. The relation between KM and IT will be explored later in this article. Still, at this point it is important to notice that some managers make no clear distinction between the objective (implement a management policy) and the means (technologies to support it). This may be an explanation of the "over expected" results and, consequently, the deception

associated with these investments. Any information technology represents only an instrument – it can never replace a coherent “articulation” of the context it is supposed to be implemented in.

The relations between categories associated with this theme have been identified as follows:



**Figure 2. Knowledge management in an organizational context**

Knowledge management is characterized mostly in terms of objectives, activities and procedures. As activities, the most “appealing” one seems to be the representation of knowledge, related with the creation of the organizational knowledge base (organizational memory). This is quite expected, as technologies to collect and store knowledge are well developed in many companies. Actually, almost all the respondents highlighted the relation between KM and IT.

#### **4.2. Theme 2 - Knowledge management strategies in Romanian organization – approaches and actual state**

*The existence of a coherent knowledge management strategy was revealed in the following ways:*

1. The lack of a coherent strategy regarding knowledge management at one extreme.
2. The existence of such a strategy (mostly in the cases of multinational companies) at the other extreme.

3. On-going processes related to KM implementation.
4. There is an INTENTION to define and implement a knowledge management strategy.
5. Leadership is open to learning, especially for knowledge workers.

The responses suggest that there are two different contexts in which we can place the current state of the knowledge management organizational strategy. The first one is the case of multinational companies, in which such a strategy exists and it is well communicated. The second one is the case of national companies. Here there are also two situations: either there is no knowledge management strategy, and no intention to implement one; or there is at least an intention to define and implement such a strategy.

***Existing knowledge management approaches and practices were described as follows:***

1. There are KM practices borrowed and not sufficiently adapted to the cultural context, resulting in the delayed achievement of an organization's objectives.  
It is a general tendency for all the managers of multinational companies to complain about the "blind" adoption of knowledge management practices borrowed from other cultures. One position states: *"In our company knowledge management practices were applied from another organizational culture and, perhaps due to this "artificial" implementation, its adoption is very slow and affects the quality of the services that we offer"*. Another opinion is that *"...there are practices from the US culture which are verified automatically and we cannot intervene in any way"*.
2. There are KM practices regarding learning and knowledge sharing – specific to all Romanian organizations.
3. There are KM practices adapted to the cultural model of the organization: learning, technologies, access to the best practices at the group level.

It is interesting that almost all the respondents associate knowledge sharing and learning with their organizational culture. It is worth investigating further to what extent the process of knowledge sharing (especially) envisages explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge.

We found that, in general, there are two main settings within Romanian organizations:

- The multinational companies: The knowledge management strategy of the group is implemented, without any - or at least insufficient - consideration for the cultural particularities. This affects the effectiveness of the knowledge management strategy and, the "voice" of the local managers is ignored.

- The national companies: There is no coherent knowledge management strategy in place. In some cases, there is an intention to apply such a strategy. However, some knowledge management practices are implemented - mostly related to knowledge sharing activities, which are considered to be specific for the cultural context. Hence, there is evidence that, regardless of the awareness of the necessity to manage knowledge, the management initiatives associated to KM are essentially related to “common sense” or the managerial talent of the leadership and are not integrated in a coherent KM strategy.

#### **4.3. Theme 3 - The role of information technologies in knowledge management**

The relationship between knowledge management and information technologies is explored mainly to identify the approach foreseen for knowledge management initiatives. As argued earlier, each approach to knowledge management is associated with a specific group of technologies: the process approach with information technologies used to capture, store and use mostly explicit knowledge and the practice approach with collaborative technologies.

All respondents recognize the determinant role of information technologies in knowledge management.

The different types of information technologies implemented and the measure in which they succeed in acquiring distinctive types of knowledge were labeled using the following categories:

1. Emphasis on collaborative technologies and their role for knowledge management.
2. Emphasis on “classical” technologies (knowledge capture, storage and use) for knowledge management.  
Some of the respondents underline the role of Business Intelligence technologies – to provide information and knowledge for decision-making processes.
3. Knowledge is systematically acquired, from both internal (“experience of employees”) and external (market, customers, competition) sources.

It is important to note that almost all of the respondents believe that existing technologies do not cover all the types of knowledge. No matter which types of technologies are considered to be more important or more present in their organizations, the fact that these technologies disappoint in managing the tacit knowledge is generally acknowledged. As one of the respondents answered: *“It is true that information technologies play an important role in knowledge management, but they cannot manage the knowledge owned by people, which is communicated only in direct ways”*.

Another interesting observation is based on the response “*Today, the most important investments are made in collaborative technologies. Although I recognize their role in creating and supporting knowledge networks, I think that there is an exaggeration. In my company, we are supposed to have professional Facebook accounts. I don’t feel comfortable about this; it should be an option, but not an obligation. It is ok to have the technologies to support communication and collaboration, but it should be my choice to use them or not*”. This is to some extent, a “well-made” point and it is related to a cultural aspect. In a country like Romania, we are more “sensible” to any type of privacy violation. It is an aspect that should be considered in relation to collaborative technologies.

#### **4.4. Theme 4 - Attitudes towards knowledge sharing. The importance of tacit knowledge**

By examining these topics, we aimed to estimate the fondness of local managers for a practice approach in knowledge management. Most of the local companies use Business Intelligence technologies in order to increase the effectiveness of their business processes. As one of the main objectives of Business Intelligence technologies is to support the qualitative process of extracting knowledge and information from data, it seems reasonable to assume that procedures of acquiring explicit knowledge are largely used in these companies. Therefore, the process approach focused on explicit knowledge and extended use of information technologies is supposed to be familiar to Romanian organizations. This corresponds to the first stage (focused on technical systems of knowledge management, which enable locating and capturing knowledge) in the process of becoming a knowledge organization.

The second stage is focused on sharing and transferring knowledge. Therefore, we have concentrated on aspects related with the practice approach, in order to appreciate in which measure Romanian companies have passed to this second stage of implementing a knowledge organizational culture.

*The attitudes and influences related to knowledge sharing were described in terms of:*

1. peer training system in place,
2. online learning,
3. reward system in place,
4. no motivation – but it should be,
5. investments in collaborative technologies,
6. there are no issues to motivate information exchange,
7. knowledge sharing is encouraged – objective: employees performance.

It is interesting to note that learning is considered to be a main factor in encouraging knowledge sharing at organizational level. There is a clear tendency to associate knowledge sharing to a reward system. Additionally, rewards are not exclusively considered in financial terms. In many responses, a favorable response of the others is considered a powerful motivating factor for knowledge sharing.

***As main barriers for knowledge sharing were revealed:***

1. Lack of rewards.
2. Lack of other's interest – *"People are not willing to waste their time listening..."*
3. General lack of time to share knowledge and time to identify colleagues in need of specific knowledge.
4. Use of a strong hierarchy, position-based status and formal power.
5. Ownership of intellectual property due to fear of not receiving just recognition from managers and colleagues – lack of recognition.
6. Lack of trust in people.

It is interesting to note that some of the most common barriers to knowledge sharing in literature, like knowledge hoarding and lack of a social network, do not appear in any of the responses. One possible explanation is that in our collectivist culture, the socialization process (sharing experiences with others) and tacit–tacit knowledge transfer is quite well developed between organizational members. At the same time, the externalization process (the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge) is empowered in a collectivist culture due to the inclination towards high-context communication. In our culture, the social network remains the primary source of information, contrary to the individualist cultures, where media plays this role. On the other hand, almost all of the respondents identified lack of interest and lack of trust as barriers to knowledge sharing. This can also be explained in a cultural context – the great distance to power and the intense uncertainty avoidance makes the explicit – explicit knowledge conversion more difficult.

***The interest of managing tacit knowledge was expressed in the following ways:***

1. The main focus is on tacit knowledge (in an organization with Asian culture).
2. Discretion.
3. Tacit knowledge is approached only at the level of some departments (HR and IT).
4. An increased preoccupation regarding the tacit knowledge – investments in collaborative technologies.

All the respondents are aware of the importance of tacit knowledge and its value to the organization. However, the efforts to make it visible (to transform it into

explicit knowledge) are, in most of the cases, at the “intended” level. Multinational companies of Asian culture represent an exception. As might be expected, these companies center all their policies regarding knowledge management on tacit knowledge.

#### **4.5. Theme 5 - Attitudes towards organizational learning**

Undoubtedly, there is a strong relation between knowledge management and organizational learning. A knowledge culture model can be implemented only in a learning organization. In fact, knowledge management is considered to be the last phase of organizational learning (after training, learning and performance support). Therefore, it was interesting to see which attitudes of the managers regarding organizational learning and which of the phases of organizational learning reveal the most. Quite unexpectedly, learning appeared quite often in the answers to other questions, related to the role of knowledge or the policies regarding knowledge sharing. It can be concluded that the role of learning is largely recognized and the aim of becoming a learning organization present on the manager’s agenda.

The answers to the direct question regarding the role of organizational learning reinforce this conclusion. The main categories identified are:

1. Learning is encouraged.
2. Courses to improve technical skills.

Most of the companies organize technical oriented courses. The objective is not only the use of information technologies to obtain business information, but also to access the collaborative networks.

3. Introductory courses to the company culture (for multinational companies).

It is interesting to note the attitude of multinational companies. They try to impose their cultural model and, as it was evidenced in previous answers (regarding to the managerial practices in place) without enough concern for the local cultural aspects. As this is a factor of discontent for employees and, as a result, of weaker performances, the adopted solution is to “shape” their employees in the spirit of the company culture. This it wouldn’t be a bad thing, if at the same time efforts to adapt more to the local culture were undertaken.

4. Learning is encouraged especially for employees from the strategic departments and for the knowledge workers.

However, as most of the answers mentioned mainly training activities, it seems that the first two organizational phases of learning receive greatest attention in Romanian companies: training (instructor led training) and learning (self – directed

learning, self – placed learning and double- loop learning). The other two phases – performance support, where learning becomes a by product of performance and knowledge management, which focuses on the use of knowledge for performance, are not sufficiently developed.

#### 4.6. Theme 6 - A vision of a coherent knowledge management strategy

The respondents' visions regarding the knowledge management strategy can be summed up in the following actions:

1. Investments in learning.
2. Creation of a knowledge base.
3. Focus on knowledge sharing:
  - Reward and stimulate knowledge sharing.
  - Better communication regarding the advantages of knowledge sharing.
  - Large investments in collaborative technologies.
4. Reward and stimulate knowledge creation.
5. Promote a collaborative culture.
6. Capitalizing on tacit knowledge.
7. Support of top management.
8. Alignment of culture and reward system.
9. Involvement of everyone.

These actions cover, to a greater or lesser extent, in different measures, all the approaches related to knowledge management. It is, however, important to notice that there is a tendency to focus on aspects related to a cultural change. Even those respondents, who indicated investments in technology as important measures, had first envisaged collaborative technologies to support knowledge sharing through knowledge networks. Another important aspect is the awareness of the essential role of tacit knowledge. Capitalizing on tacit knowledge emerges as a necessary action for almost all the respondents. As one of respondent says *"It is important to create an informal structure of the company, in which people can communicate and tacit knowledge acquired through different knowledge networks"*. Communication is another theme that appears in many responses: *"It is necessary to communicate at all organizational levels the advantages of knowledge sharing"* or *"Everybody should be involved...so, the knowledge management strategy must be, first of all, clearly communicated..."*.

It can be reasonably concluded that, in the context of knowledge management, organizational and human issues are considered to be more important than the technical issues.

All these findings can be summarized in some conclusions regarding a feasible knowledge management strategy for Romanian organizations.

As it was argued earlier, two different circumstances for knowledge management strategies in the Romanian business environment were identified: the case of national companies and the case of multinational companies. Since it can reasonably be claimed that the latter group imposes knowledge management strategies, only the former case will be discussed further. Not that the case of multinational companies isn't worth attention – there are many issues to be examined, most of which related to cultural aspects. Actually, the results of the data analysis regarding these companies seem to be consistent with the assumption made at the beginning of this article: knowledge management theories and practices must be viewed and reviewed in the context of local cultures. However, this research envisioned mainly Romanian organizations.

The first necessary step is to define a KM strategy and communicate it to all the members of the organization. This implies positioning knowledge management in relation to overall business strategy – a vision that will specify the role that knowledge management should play to a range of behaviors within the organization.

A feasible knowledge management strategy should be built on the “status quo” in these organizations: the existence of information technologies that allow the capture, storage and use of knowledge, the manager's motivations to manage knowledge and the fondness of employees of the learning processes. Learning appears in almost all the answers and to each question addressed by this reflection guide. As a result, it can be concluded that organizational learning by itself but also in relation with knowledge management demands a special place in any knowledge management strategy.

One possible explanation of the emphasis the respondents put on learning lies in a cultural determination. As was argued before, the combination process (explicit to explicit knowledge conversion) is more difficult in an intense uncertainty avoidance cultural context. And as this process can be associated with learning, the need to associate learning to a viable knowledge management strategy is understandable.

As this study shows, there are two main directions in which efforts to implement knowledge management strategies should be concentrated:

- **Right technology** - Investments in new *collaborative technologies*, as they have a strong impact, especially in knowledge creation, sharing and dissemination activities and opened new channels for KM through “the collaborative intelligence”.

- **Cultural change** - A viable knowledge management strategy must be tailored to the cultural profile of the organization. Furthermore, it should be integrated within the broader strategic vision of establishing a knowledge cultural model and moving further, to a creativity cultural model.

## 5. Conclusions

This article has attempted to explore the way Romanian organizations deal with the process of transition to a knowledge culture and the issues they face with respect to knowledge management strategy implementation.

In order to respond to the main research objectives, we conducted a piece of qualitative research, inviting local managers to reflect on some aspects related to knowledge and its management in an organizational context. As knowledge management is not just about knowledge, but primarily about people, we have considered this approach to be the most appropriate one. The managers' attitudes and behaviors related to knowledge and knowledge management have led to several valuable insights.

One of the main findings of this article concerns the current state of knowledge management implementation in Romanian organizations. Regardless of the awareness of the necessity to manage knowledge, the management initiatives that can be associated to KM are essentially related to "common sense" or the managerial talent of the leadership and are not integrated in a coherent knowledge management strategy. However, the intention to implement such a strategy seems to be on the managers' agenda.

Another result of the research is related to the nature of knowledge management approaches in place or most likely to be embraced by Romanian organizations. Most of the companies own information technologies in order to capture, store and use (especially in the decision making processes) knowledge. As a result, explicit knowledge is well managed and the assumption that a knowledge management process approach can be easily implemented seems reasonable. At the same time, the potential usefulness of tacit knowledge is largely recognized and there are some efforts directed to a better sharing of knowledge at the organizational level. Furthermore, the learning process is highly valued, both at the individual and organizational level. Thus, practices related to the management of tacit knowledge might be naturally adopted.

Cultural aspects and their influence to knowledge management were well thought out in all stages of the analysis, as knowledge management theories and practices

have to be viewed and reviewed in the context of local cultures. A deeper exploration of cultural perspectives on knowledge management in East – European countries in order to define a more suitable approach of this process would be very valuable.

However, all the underlying themes discussed in this article have broader implications for the management of knowledge. Each of these themes can be explored further and more deeply. An important research direction appears to be, from the results of this article, the relation between organizational learning and knowledge management in different cultural contexts.

The main limitations of this research derive from the small number of the research participants (only 24) and their affiliation to a group that benefited from instruction in knowledge management theory.

Nevertheless, our objectives were reached. We have acknowledged some of the issues organizations face with respect to knowledge management and prevailing attitudes of managers regarding this subject. Their analysis helped to detect the main aspects affecting the establishment of an organizational knowledge culture.

As a further future research objective we envisage the design of a knowledge management strategy roadmap for Romanian companies.

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