

Comparing knowledge management and wisdom management

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To provide solutions to the world's global challenges, there is an urgent demand for wise organizations, wise leadership, wise workers, and most importantly, for wise actions. Since the mid-1990s, Knowledge Management (KM) as a discipline and practice has emerged internationally and it went through several phases of development. Similarly, in the last four decades, we experience a growth in wisdom research, and in intense discourses about Wisdom Management (WM) as a possible venue for dealing with wicked problems. The dilemma is, whether the present phase of KM would be able to address the global problems of the world. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the question if WM will complement or replace KM. The purpose is to compare KM and WM. The research methodology is an explorative approach of their main characteristics and concepts in a selected range of literature. The findings are presented in a framework to show the similarities and differences of KM and WM. Keywords: Knowledge Management (KM), Wisdom Management (WM), phases of KM, wisdom economy, wise leaders, wisdom workers, global problems of the world.

1. Introduction

The world faces global challenges (e.g., Barnett, 2015; Lufkin, 2017; Maxwell, 2021). Barnett argues that the world faces problems such as “disease, illiteracy and unduly limited education, climate change, dire poverty, lack of capability and basic resource, misunderstandings across communities, excessive use of the earth's resources, energy depletion and so on and so on” (Barnett, 2015, 89). Experts identified fifty grand challenges for the 21st century (Lufkin, 2017) in the following categories: health and humanity, artificial intelligence (AI), cities and global development, energy, and future of the Internet, media and democracy. According to Maxwell, the world faces ten fundamental challenges to be solved: “the climate crisis; the current pandemic; the destruction of the natural world, catastrophic loss of wild life, and mass extinction of species; lethal modern war; the spread of modern armaments; the menace of nuclear weapons; pollution of earth, sea and air; rapid rise in the human population; increasing antibiotic resistance; the degradation of democratic politics” (Maxwell, 2021, Preface). Therefore, there is an urgent demand for wise leadership, wise workers, wise organizations, and most importantly for wise actions to provide solutions to the world's global challenges.

To tackle the major problems of the world, there have already been great advancements in information and communication technology (ICT), artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, engineering, biology, and in other disciplines. This paper focuses on Knowledge Management (KM). The research problem is, if the current phase of KM would be able to help people and organizations to solve current problems, or if KM would need to move to Wisdom Management (WM). The purpose is to explore and compare KM and WM. The research methodology is an explorative approach of the main characteristics and concepts of KM and WM in a selected range of literature. The findings are presented in a framework to show the similarities and differences of KM and WM.

The rest of the paper is organized in three sections. Section two presents the research question, the objectives, the research framework, and the research method. Section three demonstrates the findings by overviewing the evolutionary stages of KM, and by highlighting the emerging discourses about WM. The discussion and conclusions section, first, presents a framework that demonstrates the multidisciplinary character of KM and WM with their main concepts and theories; next, discusses how the research objectives were met; and finally, concludes about the possible future phase of KM.

2. Research Question, Objectives, Framework, and Methods

The research question is: *Will WM complement or replace KM?* The main purpose of this paper is to compare concepts and theories of KM and WM, in order to find out their similarities and differences. For this purpose, a research framework is presented in Fig.1.

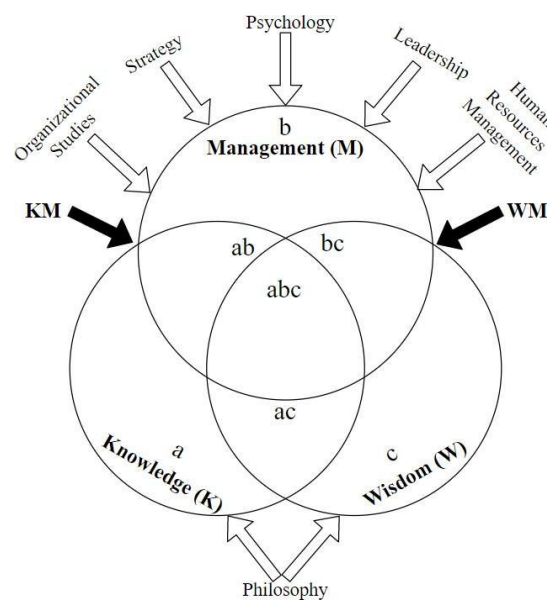


Fig.1. Research framework

The research framework shows the relationships of three concepts: knowledge (K); wisdom (W); and management (M). It also demonstrates the disciplines that are the major foundations and sources of these concepts. This paper focuses on KM and WM.

The research methodology is an explorative approach of the main characteristics and concepts of KM and WM in a selected range of literature. First, the evolutionary stages of KM are presented. The objective is to demonstrate the shifts in focus in each phase of development, and to recognize the characteristics of the current phase of KM. Next, the intense discourses about wisdom economy, wisdom workers, and WM characteristics are explored. The objective is to understand the need for wisdom alongside with knowledge in the next stage of KM to effectively face global challenges ahead.

3. Findings

3.1. Evolution of Knowledge Management

Historical roots of KM could be dated back to late 1980s, when in different forums, conferences, journals, books started to use the term KM. However, internationally KM gained momentum in the mid-1990s (Dalkir, 2011, 15-19). Massingham argues that “There have been several attempts to synthesize the chronology of knowledge management” (Massingham, 2020, 40). He outlines the history of KM (*Ibid.*, 39-43), and presents a timeline of KM history that goes back to 400 BC, to ancient Greek philosophers talking about epistemology and knowledge (*Ibid.*, 42). Similarly, Jashapara (2011, 20-27) takes a historical perspective on KM. He goes back to 3,000 BC, Mesopotamia, 2,300BC Syria, ancient Greece, Rome, and other old civilizations. His point is that archeological findings (e.g., architecture, poems, cave paintings, clay padlets, sacred scriptures, codexes, hand-written books, first printed books) demonstrate writing skills, recording of data, information, and knowledge with the purpose of knowledge sharing.

Other scholars (e.g., Jakubik, 2007; Koenig and Srikantaiah, 2007; Jakubik, 2011; Serenko, 2013; North and Kumta, 2014; Agostini *et al.*, 2020; Serenko, 2021) identified different phases in the development of KM. From the KM theory development perspective, Jakubik (2007 and 2011) identified five distinctive phases as follows:

- (i) foundation of the KM theory in the mid-1990s,
- (ii) the unified model of dynamic knowledge creation,
- (iii) emphasis of the context and the roles of leaders and managers,
- (iv) the justification process of organizational knowledge, and
- (v) the need for a new theory of the knowledge-based firm, with the focus needing to be on situation, process, action, and change.

From a chronological and main focus points of view, Serenko (2013) defined four generations of KM such as:

- (i) prior to mid-1990s: techno-centric view of knowledge processes, knowledge sharing is initiated and driven by management, focus on explicit knowledge;
- (ii) mid-1990s to early 2000s: human factors and intellectual capital become important, organizational learning, social and cultural aspects, knowledge sharing processes are initiated and driven by individual employees as their daily practices;
- (iii) early 2000s-2013: culture and contextual aspects become important, social learning, collaboration, democratization of knowledge, involvement, managing knowledge as a flow; and
- (iv) since 2013: knowledge is seen as a relationship, a shift to the mind economy and intangible knowledge, and to networking organizations.

In a most recent paper, however, Serenko (2021) argues that from research focus and methods perspectives, there could be five phases detected in the KM discipline:

- (i) 1996-2001 initiation,
- (ii) 2002-2006 early development,
- (iii) 2007-2012 rigor and consolidation,
- (iv) 2013-2016 methodological advancement, and
- (v) 2017-2019 maturity phase.

Serenko (2021) concludes: “A unique attribute of the Methodological Advancement and Maturity phases is a high degree of specialization when over half of all studies are conducted in a unique context of specific topics, publication forums, geographic regions and groups of people” (*Ibid.*).

Knowledge Management has evolved through time in close influence from other disciplines and theories. A good example of the influence of different fields of studies on KM are the classification of Koenig and Srikantaiah (2007). They claim that KM has three stages of development:

- (i) Internet, IT, and intellectual capital (IC),
- (ii) human relations (HR), Communities of Practice (CoP), organizational culture, organizational learning (OL), learning organizations (LO), social practices, and
- (iii) content management and taxonomies.

Similar to Koenig and Srikantaiah (2007), North and Kumta (2014, 37-39) applies the maturity model and argue that KM has four phases of maturity:

- (i) data and symbols as knowledge: IT solutions, data processing,
- (ii) information as knowledge: information processing, search for meaning,
- (iii) process view of KM: knowledge as know-how, organizational knowledge, networking, and
- (iv) practice view of KM: knowledge-based management of organizations.

In brief, from the classifications above it is apparent that, even though computer sciences, IT, ICT have dominated the early stages of KM development, the focus of KM research and practice has shifted towards human practices, relationships, networking, and learning. This trend is validated by a bibliometric analysis of the KM literature by Agostini *et al.* (2020). Their objective was to identify the evolution of topics in KM. They studied 85 KM publications in three periods: 1998-2010; 2011-2014; and 2015-2019. Their findings confirm that social and human themes, social networking, innovation, coopetition are the new emerging topics in the KM literature.

3.2. Discourses About Wisdom Management

Wisdom has always been in the center of philosophical discussions. Nevertheless, since the mid-1980s, we experience a revival of wisdom research in several other disciplines too (e.g., in psychology, education, sociology, organizational studies, human resources management (HRM), strategy, leadership, management). Concurring with this paper, authors (e.g., Karami *et al.* 2020; Karami and Parra-Martinez, 2021; Sternberg and Karami, 2021) point out that wisdom becomes more important than ever before due to the global problems in our society. According to Solé (2017, 55-61), wisdom as a higher degree of knowledge, that makes it possible to act wisely. Similar to this paper, he raises vital questions about the future of KM: Is KM still alive? Is KM dead? Is there an evolution towards WM? Surprisingly, in the KM literature, there has been none or very little attention paid on wisdom (Jakubik and Müürsepp, 2021). Therefore, exploring discourses about wisdom and WM could contribute to the current and to the possible future stage of KM.

In the management literature, wisdom and WM are discussed from different angles (e.g., McKenna and Rooney, 2005; McKenna *et al.*, 2009; Rooney *et al.*, 2010; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011; Müürsepp, 2013a and b; Banerjee, 2014; Ekmekçi *et al.*, 2014;

Nonaka *et al.*, 2014; Solé, 2017; Stebbins, 2017; Bachmann *et al.*, 2018; Jakubik, 2020a; Müürsepp, 2021). From the HRM perspective, authors (McKenna and Rooney, 2005; Rooney *et al.*, 2010) call for more knowledge, research, and understanding of wisdom itself in WM.

From the management and leadership perspective, there are intense discourses about wise and unwise leadership (McKenna *et al.*, 2009; Ekmekçi *et al.*, 2014), practical wisdom in management (Bachmann *et al.*, 2018; Jakubik, 2020a), and about wise (*phronetic*) leadership (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011; Nonaka *et al.*, 2014). This paper argues that we need wise leaders to act wisely and to solve the global challenges of the world. *Who are the wise leaders?* According to McKenna *et al.* (2009, 178-180) wise leaders:

- (i) use reason and careful observations,
- (ii) allow for non-rational and subjective elements when making decisions,
- (iii) value humane and virtuous outcomes,
- (iv) have practical actions oriented towards everyday life, including work, and
- (v) are articulate, understand the aesthetic dimension of their work and seek the intrinsic personal and social rewards of contributing to a good life.

Concurrently, Nonaka and Takeuchi (2011) argue that wise leaders can:

- (i) judge goodness,
- (ii) grasp the essence,
- (iii) create shared contexts,
- (iv) communicate the essence,
- (v) exercise political power, and
- (vi) foster practical wisdom in others.

Ekmekçi *et al.* (2014, 1202) argue that a wise leader should:

- (i) be capable of cognitive complexity and of coping with uncertainty,
- (ii) be a deep thinker and rational, has a capacity to understand and question a situation,
- (iii) reveal creativity and logic in non-rational process, be capable of creative thinking and move relying on instinct in their judgments,
- (iv) have a long-term vision, virtue, and must commit long-term prosperity for humanity, and
- (v) have the capacity to reach people by the use of words, impact and acting are also express all these.

Although to have wise leaders is important, we need intelligent workers and wisdom workers to act wisely when facing wicked problems. *Who are the intelligent workers?* Jakubik (2020b, 67) argues that “human intellect is more than knowledge, the intellectual worker is more than a knowledge worker and intellectual work is more than knowledge work”. Jakubik presents the similarities and differences between knowledge work and intellectual work, as well as between knowledge workers and intellectual workers (Jakubik, 2020b, Table 1, 68-69). Intelligence is important as it connects knowledge with wisdom. *Who are the wisdom workers?* According to Pink (2006) a wisdom worker is a creative individual who combines cognitive and emotional skills, is a talented communicator and has the ability to engage others. Stebbins (2017) argues: “The knowledge worker seeks to accumulate more qualifications from the outside. The wisdom worker has a more balanced inward/outward perspective, understanding her (*sic.*) obligations to herself (*sic.*) and

others” (Stebbins, 2017, 4). The author of this paper believes that a wisdom worker is guided by wisdom, human values, morals and virtues in his or her actions.

There are intense discourses about the characteristics of knowledge economy, wisdom economy (Dobson, 2010; Stebbins, 2017) and WM (Müürsepp, 2013b; Banerjee, 2014; Ekmekçi *et al.*, 2014; Nonaka *et al.*, 2014; Müürsepp, 2021). It is essential to understand what WM is when we are moving from the knowledge economy to wisdom economy. Dobson (2010) and Müürsepp (2013b) discuss the characteristics of the knowledge and the wisdom economy. They argue that, the *knowledge economy*:

- focuses on increasing skills and knowledge,
- is innovative,
- wants more,
- demands qualifications,
- is competitive,
- has the goal of hoarding knowledge, and
- it is grasping and selfish.

On the other hand, the *wisdom economy*:

- is ethical,
- considers social values,
- value judgements are attached to knowledge,
- is reflective,
- wants innovations with purpose and considers their consequences,
- understands ‘*enough*’,
- demands attitude and aptitude,
- is collaborative,
- reinforces sharing of knowledge,
- values community work and relationship-based actions that build self-esteem and skills,
- is gracious, and
- it is socially responsible.

Similarly, Stebbins (2017) argues: “We are moving from the information and knowledge ages into the emerging age of wisdom. This age will lead us to a Wisdom based economy” (Stebbins, 2017, 3-4). Furthermore, he points out that the *wisdom economy*:

- will be more focused on bringing forward the unique gifts of each person,
- understands the concept of ‘*enough*’,
- asks who profits should we gain the world but lose our humanity,
- understands that a person isn’t defined by her or his possessions,
- defines prosperity as a state of sufficiency,
- insists on qualities,
- will recruit for attributes as well as for aptitude,
- is both technological and human,
- uses technology as a tool and more interested in how IT is deployed, understanding the need for humanity, or the highest good of all concerned,
- is collaborative, looks to ‘we’,
- is reflective.

What is WM? Wisdom management is a newly emerging concept. “The concept of wisdom management seems to be gaining momentum” (Müürsepp, 2021, 21). However, it is not even clear what wisdom is. According to Müürsepp, “wisdom helps to connect knowledge with action. However, wisdom is not just know-how. The concept contains more and covers the emotional part of human life, including morality and creativity” (Müürsepp, 2021, 26). Wisdom is definitely a human quality that develops throughout the life. To better understand wisdom as a concept, Sternberg and Karami (2021) offer a 6P framework with the purpose of unifying different aspects of wisdom. Their integrative framework has the following elements: “(a) Purpose of wisdom, (b) environmental/situational Press that produce wisdom, (c) nature of Problems requiring wisdom, (d) cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and conative (motivational) aspects of Persons who are wise, (e) psychological Processes underlying wisdom, and (f) Products of wisdom” (*Ibid.*, 4). They conclude that “wisdom always has been important but today is perhaps at least as important as, or more important than ever because problems that once were local have become global” (Sternberg and Karami, 2021, 15).

Management is a practice-oriented concept. Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is typical for management practices (Bachmann *et al.*, 2018; Jakubik, 2020a). Wisdom management is a human practice; when in everyday actions knowledge is applied wisely, with ethical and moral considerations, to different problems and in different contexts. McKenna and Rooney (2005), who define wisdom as the highest form of knowing, discuss the role of wisdom in management. They claim that “*wisdom has to be seen* not as a form of knowledge, because doing so renders wisdom (knowledge) as a set of reified notions that are only loosely connected to conduct or practice, rather than *as a set of attributes and skills that allow people to use knowledge effectively and humanely, that is, as a way of being*” (*Ibid.*, 18, emphases added). They, however, express their concerns and they “caution that just as knowledge management is limited by a lack of theoretical completeness in relation to knowledge, it is likely to be the case that wisdom management will be weakened by a lack of knowledge about wisdom. It would be unfortunate and an opportunity lost if an emerging enthusiasm for wisdom in management is met by this fate” (*Ibid.*, 24). The author of this paper shares McKenna and Rooney’s (2005) concerns and urges for more research about wisdom, and about the relationship of KM and WM.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings show that there are several disciplines contributed to KM and WM. Authors (e.g., Dalkir, 2011, 8-9; Jashapara, 2011, 10-14; Massingham, 2020, 34-86) argue that KM has a multidisciplinary character. Therefore, it is difficult to provide one single definition of KM. Consequently, KM could be defined from different perspectives. Jashapara (2011, 13) provides examples of KM definitions from integration of information systems (IS) and HRM, HRM process, IS, and from strategy perspectives. Overview of the evolution of KM (*cf.*, section 3.1.) demonstrated that its current stage focuses on human practices, relationships, networking, and learning. Because of this shift from an IS to a HRM practices perspective, this paper adopts that KM is “any process or practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge, wherever it resides, to enhance learning and performance in organization” (Swan *et al.*, 1999, 669).

Similar to KM, WM is multidisciplinary too. The findings (*cf.*, sections 3.1. and 3.2.) reveal that concepts and theories from different disciplines contribute to KM and WM. As a synthesis of these findings, Fig. 2 presents the main disciplines, concepts, and theories that influenced KM and WM. The figure shows the similarities and differences of KM and WM.

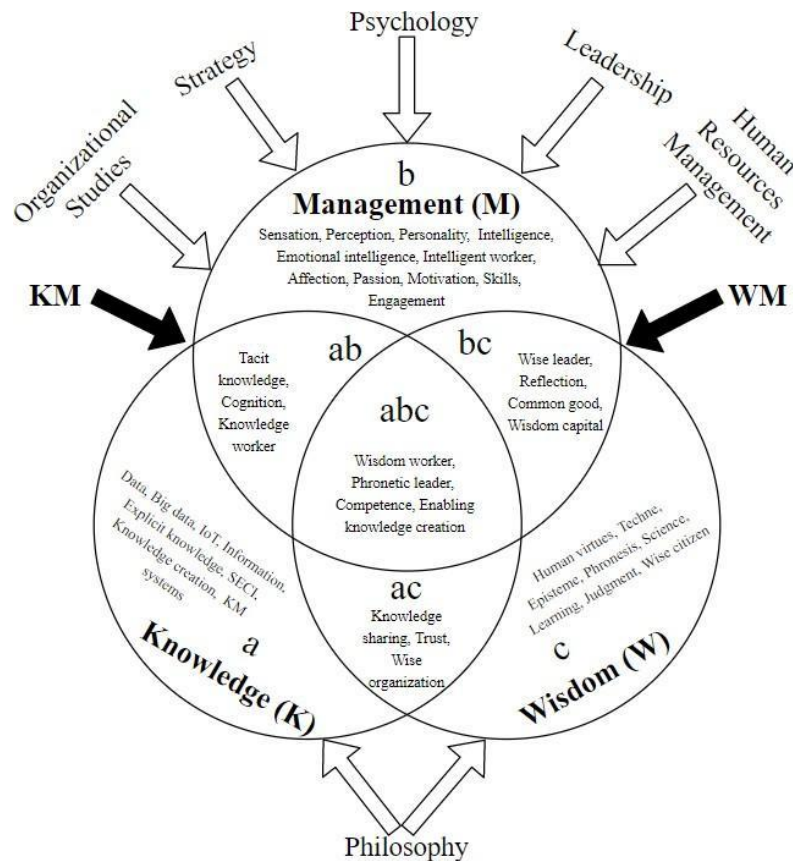


Fig. 2. Comparing Knowledge Management and Wisdom Management

This paper addressed the research problem whether the present phase of KM would be able to address the global problems of the world. The research question was: *Will WM complement or replace KM?* Next, the author of this paper reflects on how the research purpose and objectives were met and she provides a brief conclusion.

The main purpose and objectives of this paper were:

- (i) to compare concepts and theories of KM and WM, in order to find out their similarities and differences - This purpose was achieved by: exploring a selected range of literature; finding out KM development phases, its current focus; presenting the discourses about WM; identifying characteristics of key concepts (e.g., wise leadership, intelligent worker, wisdom worker, knowledge economy,

wisdom economy, WM); and by synthesizing the findings in a framework (i.e., Fig. 2).

- (ii) to demonstrate the shifts in focus in KM development phases – The objective was achieved by presenting different categorizations (e.g., historical, theoretical, research, inter-organizational) of KM development.
- (iii) to recognize the characteristics of the current phase of KM – Findings in section 3.1. showed that the current phase of KM is human practices, relationships, networking, and learning oriented.
- (iv) to understand the need for wisdom alongside with knowledge in the next stage of KM to effectively face global challenges ahead – Section 3.2. met this objective by focusing on a necessary shift from knowledge to wisdom economy.

To conclude, the following main points could be added:

- (i) The solutions of the global problems of the world (*cf.*, Barnett, 2015; Lufkin, 2017; Maxwell, 2021) would need not only knowledge but wisdom as well. There is an urgent demand for wise leadership, wise workers, wise organizations, and first of all, for wise actions,
- (ii) In the current phase of KM research and practice, the focus is not anymore on computer sciences, IT, IS but rather on human practices, relationships, networking, and learning (*cf.*, Jakubik, 2007; Koenig and Srikantaiah, 2007; Jakubik, 2011; Serenko, 2013; North and Kumta, 2014; Agostini *et al.*, 2020; Serenko, 2021),
- (iii) Since the mid-1980s wisdom research has intensified in psychology (*cf.*, Karami and Parra-Martinez, 2021; Sternberg and Karami, 2021), education, philosophy (*cf.*, Maxwell, 2021; Mürsepp, 2021), organizational studies, strategy, management (*cf.*, Bachmann *et al.*, 2018; Jakubik, 2020a), leadership, and in HRM (*cf.*, McKenna *et al.*, 2009),
- (iv) Need for intelligent workers (*cf.*, Jakubik, 2020b), wisdom workers (*cf.*, Pink, 2006; Stebbins, 2017), and wise leaders (*cf.*, McKenna *et al.*, 2009; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011) has increased,
- (v) Wisdom is a set of attributes and skills that allow people to use knowledge effectively and humanely, that is, as a way of being (*cf.*, McKenna and Rooney, 2005),
- (vi) We are moving from the knowledge economy to the wisdom economy (*cf.*, Dobson, 2010; Mürsepp, 2013b; Stebbins, 2017),
- (vii) The multidisciplinary character of KM and WM (*cf.*, Fig. 2) shows that theories and concepts from wide range of disciplines well support the evolutionary character of KM and WM,
- (viii) The next phase of KM, should move toward a better understanding of wisdom and WM (*cf.*, Ekmekçi *et al.*, 2014; Jakubik, and Mürsepp, 2021).

This exploratory research is based on a limited number of sources that were selected by the author. Important sources might be unintentionally ignored. Therefore, as future research a more systematic literature review of the current stage of KM and WM could be conducted. Empirical research, about how the current KM practices related to wisdom and practical wisdom in different contexts, would enrich the findings of this paper. Furthermore, there would be a need for more debate about this topic.

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