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Knowledge Management Practice Assessment and the Relationship Between Knowledge Management Practices and Organizational Strategy Development: Empirical Evidence From Turkey

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1. Introduction

Knowledge became one of the most important intangible assets that enable organizations to create core competencies and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. In the business era where knowledge intensive organizations compete to survive, a practical understanding and application of Knowledge Management (KM) is essential for a fast and efficient exchange of information. Several authors (*i.e.*, Handzic *et al*., 2008; Frappaolo, 2008; Sveiby, 2001; Zack, 1999) suggest that organizations which successfully manage their tacit, implicit and explicit knowledge have a greater ability in adapting the dynamic and complex new business environment.

Although KM is a substantially investigated issue, there is still no widespread agreement on what KM actually is, because of its very broad spectrum integrating business strategy and process, organizational community and culture, collaboration, learning, expertise, and technology (Skadiang, 2009; Haggie & Kingston, 2003; Silver, 2000). While knowledge literature offers many studies related to the different dimensions of KM, the research regarding the assessment of organizational knowledge management is very limited. Moreover, a multidimensional standard scale that can be used for greater universality and coherence in several areas is lacking.

Since people can understand different things from knowledge issues and knowledge management (KM), assessment of knowledge management practices has been a controversial issue in management literature. However, different dimensions of KM have to be clarified thoroughly for an effective knowledge management. Choi (2003) claimed that there was a scarcity of studies on a survey scale that might assess the critical attributes of organizational knowledge management and evaluate KM success factors. The study attempts to bridge this literature gap by employing a standardized KM scale that would assess the multidimensional nature and practice of organizational knowledge management among Turkish firms.

The aim of this research is to investigate the reliability and validity of the Knowledge Management Scale developed by The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) as a measurement tool for assessing the extent of organizational knowledge management (OKM)

practices in Turkish firms. In other words, the question of "how KM practices are perceived by Turkish managers in organizations" is tried to be answered. In order to achieve this, a self-administered e-mail survey is selected as the appropriate method for the research and a 16-item KM scale developed by USQ researchers (known as the USQ KMS-16) is used as the measurement instrument. The research also purposes to identify any perceived links and influence between knowledge management practices and the development and execution of organizational strategies.

2. Literature review

"If you can't define something, you can't measure it.
If you can't measure something, then you can't manage it".
Peter Drucker

Since the 1960's, just after Drucker used the terms "knowledge work" and "knowledge worker", there has been a growing interest in knowledge and its management which have been gaining momentum (Wiig, 1997). Although the interest was initially focused on information technology, more recently the nature of the issue has shifted to knowledge management which includes some other aspects of social sciences such as the human, sociology, communications, learning, business and strategy (Stephens, 2001). According to Clarke (2001), whilst knowledge became one of the most strategically important resources, learning was promoted to the most strategically important capability for business organizations with the boost of global competition.

Smith *et al.* (2005) defined organizational knowledge as the validated understanding and beliefs in a firm about the relationship between the firm and its environment. Keskin (2005) defines knowledge as an organized combination of data, integrated with a set of rules, procedures, and operations that have developed through experience and practice. Walczak (2005) provided a similar concept to this definition, but considers an additional issue; high quality decision making.

Knowledge is a key resource in a rapidly changing global market where the development of innovative services, products and solutions is required to attract and retain customers and get ahead of the competition (Spender, 1996). Several researchers (*e.g.*, Schulze *et al.*, 2008; Nilakanta *et al.*, 2006; Nonaka *et al.*, 2006; Nonaka, 1991) who explain the strategic nature of knowledge also emphasize its importance of usage in organizational strategy development processes. Moreover, some others *(e.g.*, Hamel, 2002; Pemberton *et al.*, 2001; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Leonard-Barton, 1998; Nonaka, 1991) claim that "knowledge is the cornerstone of competitive advantage".

McDermott and O'Dell (2001) suggest that it is very unlikely to succeed unless KM initiatives are integrated with business strategy and "related to the development of organizational core capabilities". Dilnutt (2000: 64) states that, "knowledge management brings together the concepts of knowledge work and strategic management, in order to manage the required resources and capabilities through the facilitation of knowledge development, creation, representation, access and transfer". For these reasons, KM as an emerging discipline became crucial for the organizations that seek to improve their efficiency and competitive abilities. It is clear that effective implementation of a sound organizational knowledge management (OKM) strategy is considered mandatory for the organizations in the knowledge economy (Binney, 2001).

For knowledge to be managed more effectively and efficiently, assessment of the critical attributes of OKM and evaluation of KM success factors have to be clarified thoroughly.

However, because of the dominant effects of culture, the predilection towards the acceptance and use of knowledge management varies from country to country. Some researchers (*e.g.*, Cohen, 1998; De Long & Fahey, 2000; Andriessen, 2006; Andriessen & van den Boom, 2007; Jelavic & Ogilvie, 2010) conducted studies on the knowledge perceptions of different countries. Cohen's (1998) study identified the differences in the perception of knowledge management in American versus Japanese organizations. The study revealed that "while the west emphasized the re-use of explicit knowledge and the management of projects and markets, the east focused on the creation of tacit knowledge and the management of cultures and communities" (Jelavic & Ogilvie, 2010: 54). Figure 1 exemplifies the traditional US-Japanese differences on knowledge view.

American	**Japanese**
Focus on explicit knowledge	Focus on tacit knowledge
Re-use	Creation
Knowledge projects	Knowledge cultures
Knowledge markets	Knowledge communities
Management and measurement	Nurturing and love
Near-term gains	Long-term advantage

Fig. 1. US-Japanese contrast on knowledge view (Jelavic & Ogilvie, 2010, p. 56)

According to De Long and Fahey (2000: 116), "cultures that are more inclined to rewarding creativity develop differing patterns of interaction around knowledge than cultures that uncover and leverage existing knowledge". Similarly, Andriessen and van den Boom (2007: 647) suggest that "the western knowledge management literature has a tendency to conceptualize knowledge as a physical manifestation or a, substance whereas the eastern literature views it as part of a process". Figure 2 summarizes Andriessen and van den Boom's comparison of metaphors for knowledge in the east and the west.

Origin	**Western literature**	**Asian Philosophy**
Dominant metaphors	-Knowledge as a thing that can be controlled and manipulated. -Knowledge as information that can be codified, stored, accessed and used. -Knowledge as resource that can be created, stored, shared, located, or moved, as that is part of the input-throughput-output system of the organization. -Knowledge as capital that can be valued, capitalized and measured; that is part of the financial flow and requires a return on investment. -Knowledge as thoughts or feelings that is tacit but can be made explicit; that can be communicated and shared.	-Knowledge as spirit and wisdom. -Knowledge as unfolding of truth. -Unity of universe and human self. -Unity of knowledge and action. -Knowledge as illumination or enlightenment of an underlying, deeper reality. -Knowledge as essence-less and nothingness (Japan). -Knowledge creation as a continuous, self-transcending process.

Fig. 2. Metaphors for knowledge in East and West (Jelavic & Ogilvie, 2010, p. 56)

In management literature, KM assessment is still a controversial issue. Although a few researchers (*e.g.*, Choi, 2003; Darroch, 2003; Wickramasinghe, 2003; Maier, 2002; Bennett & Gabriel, 1999) put some efforts in order to assess the critical attributes of OKM, it is observed that there is still a lack of empirical research on *KM assessment* (how to gauge the extent of KM practice) using a standard, multidimensional scale that reflects the breadth and depth of OKM in organizations across industries.

Maier's (2002) study which was conducted on 445 German-speaking companies resulted that KM was mostly an information technology (IT) and information systems (IS) issue. Accordingly, Maier (2002) focused on the pure technological side of KM and suggested that especially all large organizations should have highly complex IT and communication technology systems such as interactive tools, social software and networks. However, Wickramsinghe's (2003) research found that only technological side of KM was not enough for a successful OKM and KM systems were found to be unable to support subjective knowledge.

These results revealed the importance of the organic side of knowledge management rather than the mechanistic side. Another study was conducted by Choi (2003) in which 1,000 questionnaires on 39 attributes were distributed to 1,000 selected firms in the USA. Results of the study showed the importance of a KM-supportive culture, capability of information systems technology, commitment of the top management to KM implementations and KM education and learning (Skadiang, 2009).

Moreover, especially information systems capability was positively associated with KM success although "numerous studies have shown that organizational culture had been singled out as the most critical factor for KM implementation" (Skadiang, 2009: 41). So, Choi's (2003) study has emphasized the importance of both technology and organizational culture for a successful KM management. The last noteworthy study came from Darroch in 2003. Darroch (2003) developed a scale to measure KM behavior and practices in organizations with at least 50 employees in New Zealand. Results of the study confirmed that KM was significantly correlated with strategy, culture and technology.

The review on KM literature reveals that the interest was initially focused on information technology. However, the nature of the issue has shifted to some other aspects of social sciences such as the human, sociology, communications, learning, business and strategy. According to Bollinger and Smith (2001), "a strong, positive organizational culture is vital to learning, development and the sharing of skills, resources and knowledge". Consequently, previous KM research leads us to three dimensions for OKM; OKM strategy, OKM culture and OKM process and technology. In this literature review, it was aimed to synthesize previous research on organizational knowledge management (OKM) as well as to identify and to analyze gaps and key research issues. The following section continues with the empirical part of the study.

3. Methodology

The literature review revealed that there has been limited research about how knowledge management practices are assessed and what their relationship with the organizational strategy development is. This is particularly true in the Turkish business context where there has been little research into Knowledge Management itself. Hence, the nature of the research is exploratory and theory-building.

3.1 Sample and demographics

The study focused on a broad set of Turkish firms in both the manufacturing and the services industries. A total of 1000 firms, namely, the first 500 and the second 500 largest firms announced by Istanbul Chamber of Industry (ISO) annually have composed the sample frame of this research. Since organizational strategy is developed and executed by the firms' owners and senior managers, a database that includes the names and the e-mail addresses of the firms' top executives was obtained.

Because unit of analysis is at the firm level, a single informant is used in the study and the questionnaire was mailed to only one executive from each firm. The questionnaire developed by Erwee *et al.* (2007) was sent to the e-mail addresses of the top managers as a web-link with a covering letter. Three weeks after the initial mailing, a reminder follow-up e-mail was also sent to be able to increase the response rate of the study. The survey was conducted on-line and a total of 171 responses were obtained from the managers of the largest 1000 firms, resulting in a response rate of 17.1 percent. Demographic statistics revealed that the mean firm size was 312 employees while the mean firm age was 22.7 years (Table 1).

Variables	
Firm size (employees)	312
Firm age (years)	22.7

Table 1. Composition of the firms based on size and age

The mean age of the respondents was 35.3. A predominant 69 percent of the respondents were top level managers and the remaining 31 percent was mid-level managers (Table 2).

Position	**Composition**	**Number**	**Percentage**
Top level		118	% 69
Mid-level		53	% 31

Table 2. Composition of the respondents based on the managerial positions

While male respondents were at the majority with 73%, females comprised only 27% of the sample. 21% of the respondents were between 30-40 years of age, whereas, 62% were between 41-50 and 17% were above 51 years of age (Table 3).

Gender/Age	**Composition**	**Number**	**Percentage**
Male		125	% 73
Female		46	% 27
30-40		36	% 21
41-50		106	% 62
51+		29	% 17

Table 3. Composition of the respondents based on gender and age

The sectors in which the majority of the respondents work are, finance and banking, food, drugs, automotive and automotive parts, textile, electronics, and construction as shown in Table 4.

Industry	Composition	Number	Percentage
Finance and Banking		36	% 21
Food		26	% 15
Drugs		24	% 14
Automotive		21	% 12
Textile		19	% 11
Electronics		16	% 9
Construction		12	% 7
Others		17	% 11

Table 4. Composition of the firms based on the industry

3.2 Measurement instruments

Self-administered e-mail survey was selected as the appropriate method for this research. In order to assess the dimensions of KM practices of the organizations, a multi-dimensional standard scale that was consisted of 16 questions (known as the USQ KMS-16 by Erwee *et al.*, 2007) was used as the measurement instrument. Another 6 questions were developed by the researcher and added to the questionnaire in order to investigate the relationship between the knowledge management practices and the development and execution of organizational strategies.

So, the questionnaire is consisted of a total number of 22 questions excluding demographics; 4 questions for OKM strategy, 6 questions for OKM culture, and 6 questions for OKM process/technology. The last 6 questions are employed in order to explore the knowledge management practices' influence on the development of an organization's strategy.

To test for non-response bias, the means of all variables obtained from early and late respondents were examined. According to Spanos and Lioukas (2001: 915), "the rationale behind such an analysis is that late respondents (*i.e.*, sample firms in the second wave) are more similar to the general population than the early respondents". No statistically significant differences were found in all variables.

In order to test representation capability of the respondents for the broader population, the means of early and late respondents on two key demographic variables were compared (Galbreath & Galvin, 2008). The comparison of early and late respondents did not reveal a significant difference on firm size (t=−.319, p=.298) and age (t=−.542, p=.203). Hence, non-response bias was not considered as a serious issue in the study. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale, with anchors of "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree".

4. Analysis and results

Data obtained from 171 managers were analyzed by SPSS 18.0 version. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation which indicated .82 Cronbach's-alpha reliability yielded three factors as in the original instrument; namely OKM culture, OKM strategy and OKM process/technology. Consequently, all dimensions showed consistency

with the original scale and these findings revealed the validation of the scale for the Turkish sample.

This implication has also supported the efforts of testing a new organizational knowledge management scale for extensive variety of populations. The variables were observed to be moderately correlated which indicates that each variable is distinct and it makes a unique contribution to the overall model. Variance inflation factors (VIF) were also below the score recommended as problematic, which is 10. So, multi-collinearity was not likely to be a problem in this data set. Correlations for all the variables with descriptive statistics and the factor pattern of the measurement instrument are presented in Table 5 and Table 6, respectively.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Firm size	171	312.07	737.61	—					
2. Firm age	171	22.71	33.45	.11	—				
3. Respondent age	171	35.34	.73	.19**	.08	—			
4. OKM strategy	171	3.98	.49	.20**	.24**	.05	—		
5. OKM culture	171	3.49	.53	.16**	.07	.18**	.29**	—	
6. OKM technology	171	3.27	.61	.35**	.23**	-.19*	.08*	.21**	—

*P <0.05 **P <0.01

Table 5. Correlations among variables

The influence of knowledge management practices in developing organizational strategies was also investigated by regression analysis. Regression analysis found significant relationships between all knowledge management dimensions, and organizational strategy development. The results can be seen in Table 7.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the reliability and validity of the Knowledge Management Scale developed by University of Southern Queensland (USQ) as a measurement tool for assessing the extent of organizational knowledge management (OKM) practices in Turkish firms along with the exploration of OKM practices' influence in developing organizational strategy. Exploratory factor analysis yielded three factors as in the original instrument; namely OKM culture, OKM strategy and OKM process/technology. So, the most important finding of the study can be considered as all dimensions showed consistency with the original scale and these findings revealed the validation of the scale for the Turkish sample. In organization literature, information systems and technology were the main issues associated with knowledge management. And the other dimensions that could influence an effective management of knowledge were generally omitted. However, knowledge is a unique, valuable and inimitable resource that affects profitability and performance of the organizations and it should be analyzed from a larger perspective (Taylor & Lowe, 1997). The proponents of Knowledge Based View (KBV) perceive organizations as a body of knowledge (Spender, 1996). Theorists (*e.g.*, Dehning & Stratopoulos, 2003; Barney & Wright, 1998; Foss, 1996) consider the firm as a heterogeneous knowledge production entity and stress that knowledge, especially tacit knowledge, is the very source of sustainable competitive advantage. The findings of the study concur with the extant literature that posits knowledge as a strategic resource rather than a simple IT or an IS issue. According to the results, managers acknowledge KM to be a core part of their organizational strategy and

Table 6. Factor pattern of USQ Knowledge Management Scale

		Factor Loadings		
		1	2	3
Factor 1: OKM Culture				
Employees are actively encouraged to make contributions to the organization's knowledge.		.798		
Employees are actively encouraged to use the organization's knowledge.		.761		
The organization has a strong culture of performing work to a high standard.		.735		
Employees are actively encouraged to look for new ideas internally.		.693		
Employees actively use new ideas to improve organizational performance.		.634		
The organization actively supports the formation of close working relationships among employees.		.582		
Factor 2: OKM Strategy				
Managing knowledge is a core part of the organization's strategy.			.902	
The organization has strategies to implement its KM capabilities externally.			.817	
Priorities are established for addressing goals that improve organizational performance.			.764	
In managing knowledge, goals that improve organizational performance are purposely identified.			.729	
Factor 3: OKM Process/Technology				
Acknowledged subject matter experts' among employees are rewarded by the organization for their expertise.				.756
The organization invests resources to ensure its information can be trusted.				.694
Periodically reviewing the quality of its knowledge resources is a formalized process in the organization.				.651
The organization deliberately identifies optimal external practices.				.607
The organization measures employees' contributions to its knowledge resources.				.593
Transferring optimal practices among employees is a formalized process in the organization.				.556
Percentage of explained variance		29.8	20.6	19.3
Total variance	69.7			
Factor's Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient		.86	.79	.77
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy	.735			
Barttlet's test of approx. Chi-Square Sphercity	1996.72**			

**$P < 0.01$

Dependent Variables	Adjusted R^2	F	β	P values
OKM Culture	0.69	874.49	0.83	0.001*
OKM Strategy	0.62	537.62	0.79	0.001*
OKM Process/Technology	0.46	486.78	0.68	0.014*

*p<0.05 Predictors: (Constant), Organizational strategy development

Table 7. Regression analysis results

they affirm that knowledge needs to be effectively shared in the organization and integrated with business strategy. Obviously, these findings confirm the strategic nature of knowledge and its management.

Another noteworthy result is OKM culture factor's high explanatory power (29.8 percent) in the total variance. Literature also suggests that organizational culture which promotes learning, development and the sharing of skills, resources and knowledge is a key component of OKM. The survey findings affirm the dynamics of other OKM elements such as the "process of socialization, the sharing of knowledge as a natural, on-going part of work and the synergy and collaborative efforts of employees" (Skadiang, 2009: 107).

The research also revealed that knowledge was a strategic variable to organizations since a clear and significant relationship between each of the organizational knowledge dimension and organizational strategy development was found. The data indicated that OKM culture have the strongest influence on strategy development which means organizations may especially use their internal knowledge creating resources such as employees, managers, organizational culture and climate to execute their strategies, and to formulate and evaluate them. Strategic side of knowledge should not be ignored by organizations. Undoubtedly, high explanatory power of OKM culture reflects the crucial role of the OKM culture components such as organizational culture (Stewart, 1991; Biren *et al*., 2000; Sindell, 2001), group characteristics (Moorhead & Griffin, 1995), process of socialization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), compensation structure and rewards for new ideas (Quinn *et al*., 1996; McDermott & O'Dell, 2001; Tiwana, 2002), supportive social atmosphere (Davenport *et al*., 1998; Figallo & Rhine, 2002), trust, honesty and collaboration (Bollinger & Smith, 2001; Behrend & Erwee, 2007), expertise and creativity (Amabile, 1999), and open communication and knowledge exchange (Badaracco, 1991; Perez & de Pablos, 2003; Collison & Parcell, 2006) in developing organizational strategy. Davenport *et al.* (1998) delineate knowledge as a fuzzy and invisible asset that is closely linked to the human brain. This valuable asset can only be revealed through sharing with others.

Taking a knowledge (centric) view of an organization can also help in understanding: what the organization does; what its core competences are; and where value adding occurs. It should not be forgotten that many companies (*e.g*., Google, Apple, Virgin) have created knowledge by their human related skills, distributed knowledge with their IT technologies in order to increase their creativity, and produced know-how as a source of core competency. It is obvious that the balance between knowledge and resources will continue to shift towards the knowledge and perhaps knowledge will not only be the most important factor in creating competitive advantage for the organizations but also will be the unique asset in determining the standard of living for nations. Based on the results on the study, it should be noted that, in order to make the organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage and superior firm performance, the firms need to focus on the elements of OKM culture and provide a balance between the technological and human-related resources rather than make all their investment to the IT and IS issues. This suggestion can be deemed as the most important managerial implication of the study.

Lastly, the measurement tool used in this study is found to be a reliable measure for KM assessments within the context of Turkish companies. It is also believed that USQ KMS-16 as a multidimensional standard knowledge management scale can be used for greater universality and coherence in organization literature. However, applying the instrument on more extensive variety of populations would not only increase the validity of the scale but it would also help the future researchers to add supplementary questions to address the items that were not specifically highlighted in the USQ KMS-16 questionnaire. With some felicitous modifications, the USQ KM scale could be used, on a macro level, as a benchmark by researchers, industry associations, professional bodies or government agencies to analyze OKM practice across selected industries.

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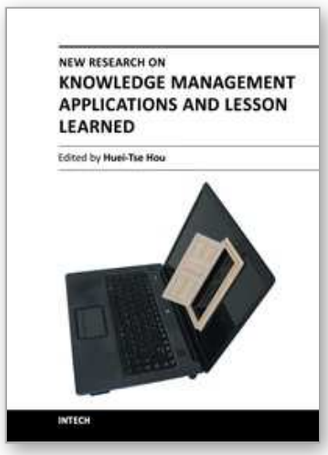

New Research on Knowledge Management Applications and Lesson Learned

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Due to the development of mobile and Web 2.0 technology, knowledge transfer, storage and retrieval have become much more rapid. In recent years, there have been more and more new and interesting findings in the research field of knowledge management. This book aims to introduce readers to the recent research topics, it is titled "New Research on Knowledge Management Applications and Lesson Learned" and includes 14 chapters. This book focuses on introducing the applications of KM technologies and methods to various fields. It shares the practical experiences and limitations of those applications. It is expected that this book provides relevant information about new research trends in comprehensive and novel knowledge management studies, and that it serves as an important resource for researchers, teachers and students, and for the development of practices in the knowledge management field.

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