



## Registration, access and use of personal knowledge in organizations

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### ABSTRACT

Organizations have managed information regarding knowledge of employees using processes such as codification, knowledge mapping, network analysis and personalization. Recently, personal knowledge registration (PKR) has become another way of managing this knowledge. Little is known about how organizations support PKR, and how PKR facilitates the flow of information and knowledge.

This paper examines how different information management professionals access and use PKR. It is a multiple case study, with 43 semi-structured interviews and an analysis of strategic documents. The purpose is to shed light on strategic intentions with PKR, its collaborative tasks and qualities. A conceptual model was built for this purpose. The aim is to better understand how PKR works and to examine how information on education, training and the skills of employees is managed in organizations.

The findings demonstrate that organizational strategies portray elaborate intentions regarding knowledge seeking and sharing, while less emphasis is put on knowledge registration or management. Interviewees expressed lack of appropriate actions to support PKR. Access and use of PKR is limited and the organizations still struggle to manage the PKR of their employees.

### 1. Introduction

Studies in knowledge management (KM), human resource management (HRM) and records and information management (RIM) are extensive and growing. Recently, personal knowledge registration (PKR) has become another way of registering and managing the knowledge of employees (Haraldsdottir, 2018). PKR has evolved from the disciplines of HRM, KM and RIM. The intention of PKR is to generate an overview of accumulated personal knowledge embedded in the employees (Gunnlaugsdottir, 2008b; Hase & Galt, 2011; Henttonen, Kianto, & Ritala, 2016; Macguire, 2005). The need to register intellectual capital has been addressed among human resource (HR) and training managers for some time (Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Haraldsdottir, 2018). The purpose of registration is to gain a better use of valuable knowledge, build interdisciplinary teams and to find instructors for in-house training, as well as for recruitment and development. The term personal knowledge registration and the abbreviation PKR is a consequence of this discourse.

PKR is a system of concepts, processes and methods that can be implemented in different software systems. PKR creates a community of

knowledge, as described by Sigala & Chalkiti (2007) where the acquisition and sharing of knowledge can take place. The term is comparable to the information a person registers in a curriculum vitae (CV), except the information belongs to an organization. PKR is similar to the creation of corporate knowledge directories, company yellow pages and expert networks (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Vuori & Okkonen, 2012). PKR is one type of a knowledge directory in a “cleverly constructed database” as described by Davenport & Prusak (1998). PKR covers a set of information that the individual, in co-operation with a manager, selects and considers relevant while employed (Haraldsdottir, 2016). As such, PKR is personnel records, often related to human resource management systems (HRMS), human resource information systems (HRIS), information registered into the learning and development module of talent management systems (TMS) or human capital management systems (HCM) (Kavanagh & Johnson, 2017).

Registering personal knowledge using PKR creates an overview of collected organizational knowledge and assists employees, in particular HR and training managers, to look for, and find, current and valuable knowledge among their staff.

The aim of this study was to understand in what way organizations

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support PKR and how its use impacts the work of its facilitators; managers of HR, training, information technology (IT), records and information, and quality. An interdisciplinary study was conducted as an analytical framework to enhance the understanding of PKR. The implementation of PKR was analysed by studying existing strategies and multi-professional interviews. Organizational intentions with PKR were identified. Furthermore, an analysis was made of how PKR was being accessed, by whom and how this access was perceived by employees. A conceptual model, demonstrating the above mentioned facilitators of PKR, was created for this purpose. In sum, the paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ1 – How is personal knowledge selected, registered and secured in organizations?

RQ2 – In what way is personal knowledge made accessible to employees?

RQ3 – In what way is personal knowledge made usable for in-house organizational training?

The paper is organized into seven sections. Section two reviews the theoretical background and examines relevant studies while section three introduces the conceptual model. Methodology is presented in section four. Section five contains the key findings. Discussions and summary is covered in section six. The paper concludes with a contribution to theory and practice and an outline for future studies.

## 2. Knowledge directories

KM theories focus on knowledge processes, (Argyris, 1999; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Liebowitz & Beckman, 1998), best practices and sharing work-related experience with co-workers (Christensen, 2007). Optimal usage of work-related knowledge, experience and skills of employees is highlighted (Hansen, Nohria, & Tierney, 1999; Skyrme & Amidon, 1998, Skyrme, 2011). Emphasis is on finding ways to limit time-consuming information searches, redundant work, repetition of unsuccessful tasks or rediscovery of the wheel when employees leave the organization (Calo, 2008; Carmel, Yoong, & Patel, 2013; Leyer, Schneider, & Claus, 2016). Organizations that can efficiently identify knowledge within their ranks and apply it in their operations are more likely to have an edge over their competitors (Migdadi, 2009). A competitive edge is furthermore grounded in the way organizations manage to attract, select, develop and retain their talented employees (Stahl et al., 2012). Likewise, organizations tend to promote their employees' knowledge as their greatest advantage. Training of employees refers to a systematic approach to learning and development to improve individual, team, and organizational effectiveness (Goldstein & Ford 2002). Leyer et al. (2016) stated that the purpose of a process-based social knowledge system was to provide easy access to available knowledge sources, while the knowledge itself was not contained in the system. The same applies to PKR. It is a knowledge directory that includes information regarding knowledge origin, i.e. which employees possess the required knowledge (Leyer et al., 2016, p. 97).

Organizational knowledge is defined as either tacit among the employees or explicit when shared with others (Jashapara, 2011; Panahi, Watson, & Partridge, 2013; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2007). Knowledge mapping and organizational networking is helpful in externalizing knowledge (Chan & Liebowitz, 2006). Borgatti & Cross (2003, p. 433) claim that the probability of seeking information from another person is correlated with knowing what that person knows, "know-who", valuing the knowledge, having timely access to it and perceiving it not too costly. Nebus (2006) maintains that the person's choice of contact is influenced by existing relationships (what he terms an advice network). While known relationships, or what Granovetter (1973) terms strong ties, may be comfortable and easy to access, they may also induce hindrances and exclude the best possible and unknown contact persons (Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, 2015). As stated in Borgatti & Cross (2003, p. 442), people may interact with a limited set of co-workers for knowledge seeking, which may be hindering if other people are better

sources. According to Nebus (2006), a partial reason may be that traditional knowledge sources, such as portals of best-practices, internal benchmarking or work-related know-how, need adaption from original use before re-use. Not knowing whom to ask is problematic if the knowledge network is only partially explicit. Moreover, trust and ownership and reciprocal relationships within the organization play a key role in facilitating knowledge sharing (Damodaran & Olphert, 2000; Drucker, 1993; Ford, 2003; Klamma et al., 2007; Newman & Newman, 2015).

Training in organizations produces clear benefits for individuals and teams, organizations, and society (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). Training strategies cohere with business strategies as they improve organizational value (Guthridge, Komm, & Lawson, 2008). Training strategies may therefore be considered a way to advertise the organization as a knowledge approving and supportive workplace. Organizations that use training to a greater extent report higher perceived organizational performance (Delaney & Huselid, 1996). On-the-job training is strongly related to transfer of training and firm performance (Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2014). In their comparison of high performance work systems, Becker & Gerhart (1996) linked strategic training to value creation in HRM. Training was categorized, measured and registered according to job descriptions. Delaney & Huselid (1996, p. 949) acknowledged the value systems of HRM practices, including the registration of employee training into HRMS, where information on individuals and hours could be evaluated. Registration of employees' participation in training originated in HRM theories where it was positively related to organizational performance, progress and prospects (Becker & Huselid, 2006).

## 3. A conceptual model for PKR

In order to better understand how PKR works a conceptual model was built. Based on the perception that managing knowledge is a multi-professional task, the model represents six facilitators of PKR in accordance with the main interview groups of the study (see Table 1) (Franks, 2013, Oliver & Foscarini, 2014; Saffady, 2015). These are employees working in HR and training (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Drucker, 1993), records management (Franks, 2013; Gunnlaugsdottir, 2003; Gunnlaugsdottir, 2008b; Saffady, 2015), IT (Damodaram & Olphert, 2000; Leyer et al., 2016), quality management (Brumm, 1996) and general employees (Goldsmith, Joseph, & Debowski, 2012). These facilitators select and register the personal knowledge. In order for PKR to function, access, usability and security of information are critical success factors. PKR relates to significant elements of knowledge sharing which are social practices and the actual systems that support knowledge sharing (Ackerman, Dachtera, Pipek, & Wulf, 2013; Damodaran & Olphert, 2000; Leyer et al., 2016). Access and usability of PKR is dependent on its purpose and platform as well as user involvement in the development phase (Bano & Zowghi, 2015). The ability to allocate and effectively access and utilise knowledge, relies substantially on its facilitators, who actually create, register, share, and use knowledge (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Goldsmith et al., 2012; Henttonen et al., 2016).

Fig. 1 represents the conceptual model of PKR. It demonstrates the six facilitators and their tasks and the three quality aspects of PKR; access, usability and security. Each task and quality is further described on the right side of the model and in Sections 3.1–3.5.

### 3.1. Selection

Selection is made by employees in cooperation with their manager or HR manager. It includes formal and informal education, work-experience, internal and external training, participation in conferences and webinars; language skills, IT and communicational skills; teaching or writing experience (Haraldsdottir, 2016). These qualifications constitute the knowledge (know-what) of employees registered in PKR. Verification of certificates or similar documents is in the hands of the

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