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Knowledge Management – from its Inception to the Innovation Linkage

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Abstract

Knowledge management started to be perceived as a scientific discipline relatively recently. Since its beginnings in the 1990s, the interest for this research field has been constantly growing especially in the past two decades. However, it seems that the peak of interest has already passed. In this paper, we provided the review of the most important research documents that are related with this topic, all collected from the Web of Science. The most important scholars and journals in the field are identified via documents and citations among them. In addition, the purpose of this paper is also to analyse the existing linkage between knowledge management and innovation. For this purpose, a network of keywords was constructed with keywords performing as actors in the network and the co-occurrence as a relation. The network obtained of keywords is undirected and weighted by the number of documents in which adjacent keywords which co-occurred on the topic of knowledge management. The content analysis with traditional network analytic techniques was used. In other fields, similar methods were already applied; however, this is the first attempt to construct this kind of research in knowledge management related to the topic of innovation. The results revealed significant linkage between knowledge management and innovation in the documents which were analyzed. We believe that the network analytic procedures used in this paper provide an excellent tool to study such a relevant phenomenon.

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1. Introduction

The phrase “knowledge management” was firstly used in the last decade of previous century. This two-word expression can be understood in several connotations. There exist many similar but also contrastive definitions. For instance, Davenport already in 1994 postulate knowledge management as “the process of capturing, developing, sharing, and effectively using organizational knowledge” (Davenport, 1994). Later Duhon (1998) provided another definition: “Knowledge management is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously un-captured expertise and experience in individual workers.” However, to understand the inside of knowledge management as a scientific discipline we must to review the work of the authors in the last period.

Serenko & Dumay (2015a) categorized knowledge management discipline “as at the pre-science stage with progression towards normal science”. Moreover, they produced a list of scientific documents on the topic of knowledge management. They called the list as citation classics since they used citations count and consequently a cut-off citation cut as the inclusive criteria. In their opinion, citation classics compose “the core of the knowledge management body of knowledge” (Serenko & Dumay, 2015b).

According to Heisig (2015), there is absolutely no doubt that the knowledge management has multidisciplinary character. As a research field, it includes many topics and disciplines. Holsapple & Wu (2008) listed and described some of them: strategy, management information systems, human resource management, organisational behaviour and others. In this paper, we focus on the relation between knowledge management and innovation. The impact of innovation on knowledge management and vice versa has come with several connotations. Today's environment for organizations is intensively competitive and therefore innovation has become indispensable counterpart of knowledge management (Jiao et al., 2014; Babnik, Trunk Širca & Dermol, 2014; Natek & Lesjak, 2011; Arzenšek, Košmrlj & Trunk Širca, 2014). In the past, some prominent authors (e.g. Nonaka, 1994; Kogut & Zander, 1996; Grant, 1996) already emphasized knowledge transfer as a source for innovation. They were followed by du Plessis (2007) who clarify the role of knowledge management in innovation as an aid to addressing its complexity. She defined major roles that knowledge management plays in innovation. The role of sharing a tacit knowledge as a resource for innovation is among the most important (Babnik & Trunk Širca, 2014; Natek & Lesjak, 2013). Crook, et al. (2008) explained the procedure of knowledge management process and innovation topics. On the other hand, Durmus-Ozdemir & Abdulkhoshimov (2017) explored the mediating role of innovation on the knowledge management process and performance.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, to investigate development of knowledge management as a scientific discipline, and second, to analyse the linkage between knowledge management and innovation. The content analysis with network analytic techniques is used to achieve the goal. In the other fields some similar methods were already applied, for instance Mariano & Walter (2015), Dermol & Čater (2013), Balkumar et al. (2014). However, this is the first attempt to construct that kind of research in the field of knowledge management related with innovation topic.

The rest of the paper consists of the following sections. Section 2 describes the methodology used in the paper, the method of collecting the data and basics of social network analysis. Section 3 shows the results with some descriptive statistics of downloaded documents on knowledge management topic and the use of network analytic techniques. Section 4 provides the discussion part, while the last section concludes.

2. Research methodology

This section provides the methods for selecting and analyzing the documents in this paper. The process was carried out in three different stages.

2.1. Collecting the dataset

Documents examined in this paper were collected from the Web of Science (WoS) platform in June, 2016. It constitutes one of the most important and complete research platforms available for searching this kind of research documents. The search for documents on the topic was conducted using a keyword “knowledge management”. We initially identified and downloaded 7553 documents which were consistent with the required condition. The dataset

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