



Exploring the Relationship between Ethics and Knowledge Management: A Conceptual Framework for Successful Organizations

Nishant Gaur¹ and Vikas Gupta²

Abstract

This study attempts to identify the ethical concerns inherent in an organization which impacts Knowledge Management (KM). The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of various ethical constructs on KM deliberating on various KM levels, knowledge ownership, KM model and KM practices. Relevant literature has been reviewed by online database search including ProQuest Central, Emerald, SAGE, Business source complete (EBSCO).

The study notes that ethics provides the organization with guiding principles for KM and facilitate effective implementation and execution of KM practices for betterment of employees, organizations and society. The successful organizations are those which create and manage new knowledge where ethics plays a key role. The study suggests a conceptual framework linking ethics and KM. This study offers various dimensions for potential research on numerous constructs of ethics and KM discussed in study. The study also provide platform for future researchers to carry empirical researches and also for developing conceptual model or framework on ethics and KM.

The study suggests a conceptual framework subject to empirical validation. Also, there is a dearth of literature studying the linkage between ethics and KM. The study offers a conceptual approach deliberating the ethical perspective highlighting various ethical constructs impacting KM.

Keywords: Ethics, Knowledge Management, Tacit Knowledge, Explicit Knowledge, Intellectual Capital.

Introduction

In this era, the intellectual capital is the key to success for any organization. The success is conquered by those organizations that create, manage and apply knowledge in their organizational processes, products and services. The competition is severe in this dynamic environment where competitors keep changing their products, services and strategies rapidly. Thus organizations will win when they improve their existing knowledge and create new knowledge. Today, the success of an organization is dependent on its ability to create or acquire new knowledge and application of that knowledge for continuous development of organizational activities.

The organizations use novel, creative and innovative techniques to improve their structure and enhance their performance (Michael et al., 2009). In this endeavor to become successful, these organizations overlook the ethical issues. With globalization, a change in technology, lifestyles and job styles, there is need to address ethical issues as well. Along with technological

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1. Research Scholar, Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University
 2. Assistant Professor, Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University

advancements, world is also encountering compromise on the ethical practices like knowledge hoarding, manipulation and misappropriation. There are various socio economical, technological and legalistic issues which violate ethical practices to be followed. The ethics provides the organization with guiding principles for KM and facilitate effective implementation and execution of KM practices resulting in a win-win situation for all the stakeholders. The aim of this study is to develop a conceptual framework linking ethics and KM.

The study is organized as follows: initial section starts with the introduction followed with the literature review on ethics and KM. The next section discusses research methodology and proposed conceptual framework. Then the study concludes with research limitations and avenues for future investigation.

Literature Review

Ethics

Ethics can be referred as behavioral codes which are considered as right and good by individuals at micro level and society at macro level. Proximal and distal roots of ethics lie in teleology (Hume, 1750; Smith, 1759) and deontology (Kant, 1785). Teleological approach reflects that consequence of an action is indicator of good or bad whereas deontology reflects that action should itself be an ethical indicator. The other approach to ethics is Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics (350BC), according to which it is an individual's behavior which should be ethical and not a result of an action or action itself which reflect ethics. Ethical understanding of a community is dependent on value system embedded in that particular community (MacIntyre, 1985). Ethics is not only a philosophical abstract theory but it also provides a guideline for individual practice as well as collective practice in community (Tseng and Fan, 2011). Individuals as member of a organization and a community are guided to respect ethical norms laid down by organization and society (Tseng and Fan, 2011). Ethics are not created directly by humankind rather ethics are resulted from human nature. The ethics represents ideals embedded in a group or community of people (Peyman Akhavan, 2013). Ethics are referred to good and bad attributes, conducts, intentions or moral duties and commitments towards organization or society, Ethics is a branch of philosophy analyzed as norm based science and it encompasses guiding norms of human behavior and thus it can be distinguished from mathematics or natural sciences (Holden, 2000). Business ethics is referred to as a branch that emphasizes on improvement in moral quality of decision making. Business ethics is largely diverse in terms of attitudes and approaches (Martz and Morgan, 2007).

Victor and Cullen (1964) proposed the concept of organizational ethical climate which focused on one of the important element of work climate. Organizational ethical climate constitutes shared beliefs and values of organizational members which is reflected in their behavior a (Smirich, 1983; Schneider, 2006). Organizational ethical climate reflects people's ethical judgments, intentions and their behavior in determination of right or wrong action at work. Victor and Cullen's model of organizational ethical climate comprises of nine different types of ethical climate including self interest, company profit, efficiency, friendship, team interest, social responsibility, personal morality, company rules and professional codes. These nine ethical climates recognize organizational ethical norms which in turn supports ethical behavior in organization. These nine-ethical climates have stronger relationship with individual ethical behavior (Peterson, 2002).

Peyman Akhavan (2013) identified four dimensions of ethical principles constituting organizational value and justice, commitment and responsibility, Intellectual ownership and trusteeship and team working morale. Organizational values and justice is the most vital aspect of ethical principles constituting collective trust and organizational trust; fair, honest and humble behavior

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of employees; criticism taking and perseverance in works. Other ethical dimension includes responsibility, commitment and loyalty towards organization. It also includes working conscience and being foresighted at work. Intellectual ownership and trusteeship refers to obeying intellectual property rights, maintaining confidentiality and trusteeship. Team working morale refers to ethical conduct while working in a team which involves cooperation, empathy, self-awareness, self-control, affability and council with others.

There are other models of ethics. PRIMES model by Chuck Huff (2010) is a significant model which includes personality, integration of morality, moral ecology and skills. Personality impacts work that people undertake and the way they go about their work (John and Srivastava,1999). Personality is dynamic in nature as it keeps on changing with life experiences. Integration of morality depicts moral commitment which guides action over time. Moral actions are strongly influenced and dominated by surrounding environment which is referred to as moral ecology. Moral skills and knowledge is knowing how about moral actions.

Knowledge Management

KM according to Wig (2002) is referred to as process of identifying the knowledge from internal as well as external environment and utilizing them for decision making in the organization. According to Haines (2001), KM constitutes four components: content, skill, culture and organization. Content refers to explicit or implicit knowledge, skills are abilities to extract that knowledge, culture is environmental framework which encourages knowledge sharing and organization refers to organizing available knowledge. KM is referred as process as well as an objective (Crawford, 2005). KM is also referred to as knowledge conversion, as knowledge is transformed from one form to other. Knowledge conversion takes place through knowledge transformation cycle where tacit and explicit knowledge are transformed into each other. Tacit knowledge refers to personal knowledge which is there in form of experience, idea, know-how of doing a thing in unique manner and has intangible identity as it can't be codified. Explicit knowledge is a form of knowledge which is easy to acquire and transfer, also easy to express both verbally and non-verbally (Yang, 2007). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996) gave a model on knowledge transformation which is mutual conversion process of tacit and explicit knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi model is a four-dimensional model known as SECI model includes socialization, externalization, combination and internalization.

The four dimensions of SECI model can be defined as:

1. Socialization: conversion of tacit knowledge into a new tacit knowledge.
2. Externalization: conversion of tacit knowledge into new explicit knowledge.
3. Combination: conversion of explicit knowledge into new explicit knowledge.
4. Internalization: conversion of explicit knowledge into new tacit knowledge.

The originator of knowledge is an individual employee and knowledge resides in minds of individuals (Polanyi, 1998). Individual's knowledge is the source of their economic mean which leads to reservation of an employee in sharing the knowledge (Michalova and Husted, 2003). Knowledge processing behavior of any individual is determined by their attitude which totally depends of the recognition, appreciation and reward an employee receives. On the other hand, organization provides a platform to its employees for knowledge creation, acquisition, also resources, infrastructure and a reward system for knowledge creation.

Organizational success relies on ability of an organization to acquire, create and apply that knowledge. KM is the process which helps an organization to be successful. There are various

Table 1: Ethics dimensions and respective indicators

S. No.	Dimensions	Indicators/Areas	Sources
1.	SECI model of KM	A. Socialization	Peyman Akhavan et al. (2013), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996)
		B. Externalization	
		C. Combination	
		D. Internalization	
2.	Levels of KM	A. Personal KM	Goncalo Jorge Morais da Costa et al. (2010)
		B. Organizational KM	
3.	Knowledge ownership	A. Organizational ownership	Isabel Rechberg and Jawad Syed (2013)
		B. Individual ownership	
		C.	
4	KM PRACTICES		
4.1	KM Practice 1: Management leadership and support	A. Top management as role model	Skyrme and Amidon (1997), Davenport et al. (1998), Liebowitz (1999), Holsapple and Joshi(2000), Hassanali (2002), Ribiere and Sitar (2003), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Al-Busaidi and Olfman (2005), Chong (2006), Akhavan and Jafari(2006), Akhavan et al. (2006), Jafari et al. (2007), du Plessis(2007), Foot and Hook (2008), Foss and Minbaeva (2009), Zacket al. (2009), Prieto-Pastor et al. (2010), Foss et al. (2010), Kianto(2011), Andreeva and Kianto (2012), Frost (2014) and Zeinalnezhad et al. (2014), Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Top management encouragement	
		C. Leadership style	
		D. Levels of hierarchy	
		E. Top management commitment	
4.2	KM Practice 2: Culture	A. Vision	Skyme and Amidon(1997), Davenport et al. (1998), Liebowitz (1999), APQC (1999), MeDermott and O'Dell(2001), Stankosky(2001), Hassanali (2002), Wieneke and Phylpo-Price (2003), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Al-Busaidi and Olfman (2005), Hung et al.(2005), Akhaavan et al. (2006), Chong(2006), Bozbura(2007), Du Plessis (2007), Foot and Hook (2008), Foss and Minbaeva (2009), Zack et al. (2009), Prieto- Pastor et al. (2010), Foss et al. (2010), Xu et al.(2010), Kianto (2011), Andreeva and Kianto (2012), Appelbaum et al.(2014) and Frost (2014), Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Level of trust	
		C. Knowledge sharing culture	
		D. Experienced employees sharing knowledge	
		E. Teamwork	
		F. Open communication	
		G. Flexibility and adaptability	
		A. Openness	
		B. Values	
		C. Knowledge sharing culture	
		D. User satisfaction and retention	

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factors which influence KM implementation. These factors are known as KM practices (Sinha et.al, 2015). One of the most important KM practice is culture which represents company values and a necessary ecosystem for other KM activities (Sinha et.al, 2015). KM objectives can be initiated and accomplished if there is a support system from top management (Zeinalnezhad et al., 2014). KM initiative can be a success only when supported by processes and activities (Boyle, 2010). Strategy provides roadmap to pursue KM objectives. To implement KM, organization requires technology, knowledge repositories and expert databases (Leon, 2009). Organizational infrastructure also plays an important role in KM implementation which implies establishing teams to perform knowledge-related tasks. The accomplishment of KM objectives is dependent on resource availability and its allocation (Zheng et al., 2013). Training and development of an employee plays a vital role in successful implementation of KM. To ascertain the effectiveness of KM, there should be assessment through financial and non-financial measurement. The various other KM practices are human resource management, motivational aids, benchmarking, networking and alliance and employee involvement and empowerment (Sinha et al., 2015).

The KM dimensions identified from the literature are listed in below:

Table 2: KM dimensions and respective indicators

S. No.	Dimensions	Indicators/Areas	Sources
1.	SECI model of KM	A. Socialization	Peyman Akhavan et al. (2013), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996)
		B. Externalization	
		C. Combination	
		D. Internalization	
2.	Levels of KM	A. Personal KM	Goncalo Jorge Morais da Costa et al. (2010)
		B. Organizational KM	
3.	Knowledge ownership	A. Organizational ownership	Isabel Rechberg and Jawad Syed (2013)
		B. Individual ownership	
		C.	
4	KM PRACTICES		
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		B. Top management encouragement	
		C. Leadership style	
		D. Levels of hierarchy	
		E. Top management commitment	

4.2	KM Practice 2: Culture	A. Vision	Skyme and Amidon(1997), Davenport et al. (1998),Liebowitz (1999),APQC (1999), McDermott and O'Dell(2001), Stankosky(2001) , Hassanali (2002), Wieneke and Phylpo-Price (2003), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Al-Busaidi and Olfman (2005),Hung et al.(2005), Akhaavan et al. (2006), Chong(2006), Bozbura(2007), Du Plessis (2007), Foot and Hook (2008), Foss and Minbaeva (2009), Zack et al. (2009), Prieto- Pastor et al. (2010), Foss et al. (2010), Xu et al.(2010), Kianto (2011), Andreeva and Kianto (2012), Appelbaum et al.(2014) and Frost (2014), Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Level of trust	
		C. Knowledge sharing culture	
		D. Experienced employees sharing knowledge	
		E. Teamwork	
		F. Open communication	
		G. Flexibility and adaptability	
		A. Openness	
		B. Values	
		C. Knowledge sharing culture	
D. User satisfaction and retention			
4.3	KM Practice 3: Information technology	A. KM systems	Skyrme and Amidon(1997), Davenport et al.(1998), APQC(1999), Alavi and Leidner(2001), Al-Busaidi and Olfman(2005), Wong and Aspinwall(2005), Hung et al. (2005), Akhavan et al (2006), Akhavan and Jafari (2006), Chong (2006), du Plessis(2007), Zaim et al.(2007), Leon (2009), Xu et al(2010) , Kianto (2011), Andreeva and Kianto (2012), Filstad(2014) and Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Technological tools	
		C. Collaborative tools	
		D. Repositories	
		E. Capturing explicit knowledge	
		F. Managing information overload	
		G. Simplification of knowledge infrastructure	
		H. Knowledge bases	
		I. Platform independence	
4.4	KM Practice 4: Strategy and purpose	A. Objectives and goals for KM	Skyrme and Amidon (1997),Davenport et al. (1998),Liebowitz(1999), APQC (1999),Zack (1999), OECD (2003),Wongand Aspinwall (2005), Akhavanet al. (2006), Bozbura (2007),du Plessis (2007), Zack et al.(2009), Xu et al. (2010) andAndreeva and Kianto (2011),Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Explicit documentation of KM rules	
		C. Written KM policy	
		D. Alignment of KM strategy with business strategy	
		E. Supporting business goals	
4.5	KM Practice 5: Measurement	A. Financial measures	Davenport et al. (1998), APQC (1999), Holsapple and Joshi (2000), Hassanali (2002), Wienekeand Phylpo-Price (2003), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Hung et al. (2005), Chong (2006), du Plessis (2007), Zaim et al. (2007), Zacket al. (2009), Mitchell and Boyle (2010) and Andreeva and Kianto(2012),Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Non-financial measures	
		C. Value of intellectual capital	
		D. Assessment of return on investment	
		E. Performance indicators	
		F. Knowledge related success criteria	

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4.6	KM Practice 6: Organizational infrastructure	A. Infrastructure for KM	Davenport et al. (1998), Liebowitz (1999), Hassanali (2002), Al-Busaidi and Olfman (2005), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Akhavan and Jafari (2006), Akhavan et al. (2006), Jafari et al. (2007), du Plessis (2007), Xu et al. (2010) and Andreeva and Kianto (2011), Sinha et al. (2015)
4.7	KM Practice 7: Process and activities	A. Process for knowledge capture B. Classification and sharing C. Knowledge sharing policies and activities D. Methods and standards for knowledge creation	Skyrme and Amidon (1997), Davenport et al. (1998), Holsapple and Joshi (2000), Bhatt (2000), Stankosky (2001), McElroy (2003), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Akhavan and Jafari (2006), Foot and Hook (2008), Foss and Michailova (2009), Foss et al. (2010), Xu et al. (2010) and Mitchell and Boyle (2010), Sinha et al. (2015)
4.8	KM Practice 8: Motivational aids	A. Incentives for KM B. Reward systems C. Recognition for contributions to KM D. Assessing KM initiatives for performance appraisal E. Motivational aids for KM	Davenport et al. (1998), Liebowitz (1999), Yahya and Goh (2002), Al-Busaidi and Olfman (2005), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Akhavan and Jafari (2006), du Plessis (2007) and Prieto-Pastor et al. (2010), Sinha et al. (2015)
4.9	KM Practice 9: Resources	A. Financial resources for KM B. Non-financial resources for KM C. Providing sufficient time for KM	Mentzas (2001), Yahya and Goh (2002), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Hung et al. (2005), Akhavan et al. (2006), Chong (2006), Akhavan and Jafari (2006), Bozbura (2007), Jafari et al. (2007), du Plessis (2007), Zacket al. (2009), Xu et al. (2010), Andreeva and Kianto (2012) and Zheng et al. (2013), Sinha et al. (2015)
4.10	KM Practice 10: Training and Education	A. Awareness programs	Davenport et al. (1998); Holsapple and Joshi (2000), McDermott and O'Dell (2001), OECD (2003), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Chong (2006), Bozbura (2007), Kianto (2011) and Paethorpe (2014), Sinha et al. (2015)

4.11	KM Practice 11: Human resource management	A. Human resource practices for KM	Yahya and Goh (2002), Wienekeand Phlypo-Price (2003), Wong and Aspinwall (2005), Foot and Hook (2008), Foss and Minbaeva (2009), Prieto-Pastor et al. (2010), Zheng et al. (2013) and Palethorpe (2014),Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Human development practices	
		C. Recruitment for KM initiatives	
		D. Selection methods	
		E. Staffing	
		F. Remuneration	
4.12	KM Practice 12: Benchmarking	A. Benchmarking within same industry	Drew (1997), O'Dell and Grayson (1998), Moffet et al. (2003), Hung et al. (2005), Chong (2006), Akhavan and Jafari (2006), Xu et al. (2010), Andreeva and Kianto (2011) and Zeinalnezhadet al. (2014), Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Benchmarking outside the industry	
		C. Adoption of best practices	
4.13	KM Practice 13: Networking and alliance	A. Knowledge acquisition outside the organization	OECD (2003), Community Innovation Survey IV (2005), Bozbura (2007), Xu et al (2010), Andreeva and Kianto (2012), Zheng et al. (2013), Palethorpe(2014), Filstad(2014) and Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Internal networks for KM	
		C. Membership of industrial bodies	
		D. Customer feedback	
		E. Partnership and collaboration with vendors	
4.14	KM Practice 14: Employee involvement, training and empowerment	A. Autonomy	O'Brien and Crause (1995), Ward (1997), Martinez (1998), Ulrich (1998), Verespej (1999), McCune (1999), Wilson and Asay (1999), Ryan and Prybutok (2001), Moffett et al. (2003), Zack et al. (2009), Kianto (2011) and Appelbaum et al. (2014),Sinha et al. (2015)
		B. Promotion of experimentation	
		C. Involvement in decision making (KM)	
		D. Control over the pace of work	
		E. Empowering knowledge workers	

Source: Compiled by authors

Ethics and Knowledge Management

It is necessary to have ethics in KM as KM practices might be unfair and unjust because focus of an organization is on profits and not on individuals (Glisby and Holden, 2003). Individuals as a member of organization, is guided to follow ethical conduct. In KM, knowledge ownership is managed and regulated by organization and knowledge process engagement is also encouraged. Ethical approach to KM is built on trust, fairness and justice as they stimulate individuals to participate in KM process. Trust prevents employees from knowledge hoarding (DeLong and Fahey, 2000). Trust facilitates sharing and creation of knowledge (Burchell and Cook, 2008). Trustworthiness among individuals in a group impacts the extent to which knowledge is shared. Where there is trust in an organization, individual can depend on organization to care for them. Trust enables colleagues and managers to freely share knowledge instead of hiding or

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protecting that knowledge. Patel and Ragsdell (2011) quoted the need for a fair and ethical behavior. Tseng and Fan (2011) highlighted the importance of an ethical organizational climate for facilitating knowledge processes. The ethical approach to KM supports an organization to engage individuals in knowledge process and also to build database acquiring and retaining individual knowledge and experience (Liebowitz, 1999). Fair KM practices rewards individuals for their knowledge contributions (Bakerville and Dulipovici, 2006). According to Sen (1993), firms that treat its employees well are richly rewarded for it. Organizations rewarding individuals with incentives for knowledge contribution encourages fairness (Bock et al., 2005). Knowledge processing behavior can be motivational when it leads to recognition, promotion, and salary hike and also increases their expertise and knowledge base (Wang and Noe, 2010). Also, KM practices need to be just. The knowledge which individual possesses is an intellectual capital of the individual and organizations may refrain from trying to control it (Chen and Choi, 2005; Gorman, 2004). According to Da Costa et al. (2010) just atmosphere is where individuals feel driven to share, create and process knowledge.

The ethical issues pertaining to implementation of KM system indulge socio economic aspect, technical aspect and legalistic aspect. The socio economic issue from the perspective of KM system implementation carries a hidden agenda. The underlying motivation to implement KM system is to capture the knowledge of the employees to carry out retrenchment in the organization (Bryant, 2006). Technical people involved in designing and implementing of KM system can act as a whistleblower and can make management aware about the involved unethical aspects. Legalistic aspect is a concerned area which emphasizes on the determination of knowledge with ownership right of individual or organization (Baskerville and Dulpovici, 2006).

The various unethical practices in KM comprises of knowledge hoarding, manipulation, misappropriation, property and privacy right conflict, and autonomy in knowledge sharing. Knowledge specifically tacit knowledge is personal in nature and it is not evenly distributed in the organization. Knowledge sharing is dependent on owner's willingness to share with the organization. When employee avoids knowledge sharing with organization, it results in knowledge hoarding. The knowledge is sometimes suppressed, amplified, deleted and omitted to serve some personal interests and sometimes driven by emotion leading to manipulation and misappropriation of knowledge. In knowledge based view of the organization, each organization is the integration of individual employee's knowledge and its application to achieve organizational objective. This view lacks in defining ownership right over knowledge of individual employee and organization.

Research Methodology

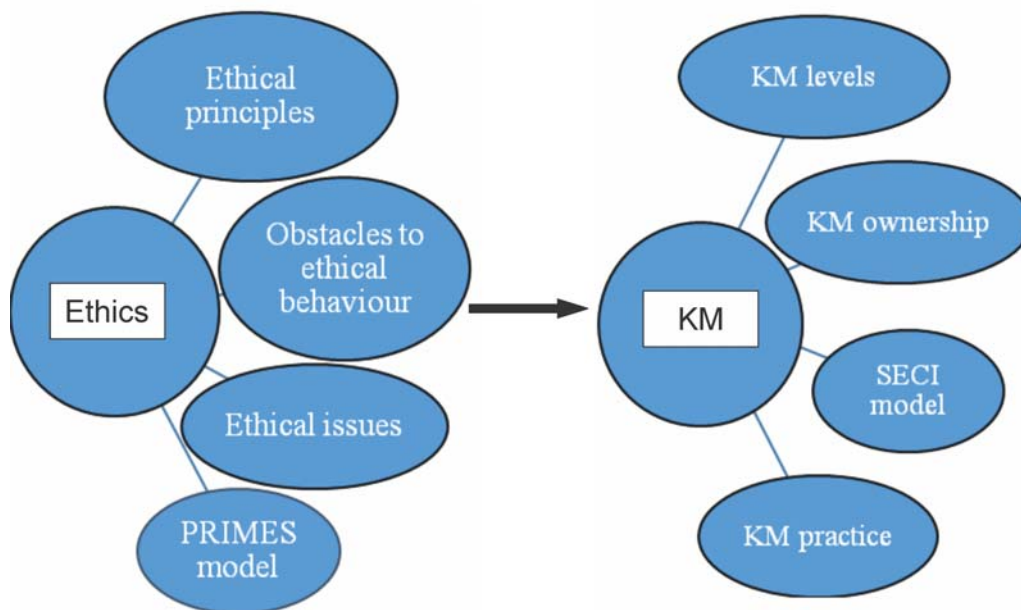
To examine the relationship between ethics and KM, required data is gathered from literature. This study has performed detailed analysis of literature and articles to develop a deeper understanding of the concepts. Data for this research was gathered in till June 2017 through series of searches through extant literature. Research papers concerning KM and ethics were accessed utilizing social sciences databases. The databases used for research are: ProQuest Central, Emerald, SAGE, Business source complete (EBSCO).

The searches were conducted using these key words: knowledge management, ethics, knowledge management and ethics, knowledge management ethics, knowledge management practices, knowledge and ethics, knowledge sharing and ethics, knowledge creation and ethics, and knowledge practices and ethics. These searches were repeated using above mentioned search strings in these databases. A systematic literature review was carried and a selection criterion for papers was well specified (ethical perspective in KM). The research papers selected for the study used the term: knowledge management and/or ethics in their title. Moreover, references

of all research papers selected were scanned to identify relevant research on topic. All research papers were analyzed from the perspective of the theme of the study. This is followed by the abstract scanning of all the papers. If the abstract didn't match the theme of the study, they were excluded for further study. This has led to 219 papers. Next step was detailed examination of papers. After the thorough examination, 56 papers were finalized and were further analyzed and summarized. After conducting this process, various KM and ethics dimensions were identified. The detailed scanning, analysis and research resulted in 17 dimensions of KM and eight major dimensions of ethics. Further various indicators for each dimension of ethics and KM were identified (refer table 1 and table 2).

Conceptual Framework

Ethics in today's world provides the organization with guiding principles of KM and facilitates effective implementation and execution of KM practices for the success of employees, organizations and economies. Victor and Cullen model (1964) of ethics did not include many aspects to form a complete ethical framework like ethical issues from socio economic aspect, technical and legalistic aspect. PRIMES Model by Chuck Huff (2010) also ignored many important aspects relevant to KMS of an organization. Similarly dimensions of ethical principles mentioned by Peyman Akhavan (2013) lacked in many aspects relevant to KM in any organization. These models lack in mentioning obstacles in ethical behavior for KM. This study focuses on developing a conceptual framework linking ethics and KM. The study is an attempt to identify the various ethical and KM dimensions keeping their linkage in mind which has not been explored earlier. The suggested framework depicts the impact of ethics(independent variable) on KM. We present the abstract view of research model in figure 1, reflecting determinants of ethics impacting different determinants of KM. According to the suggested framework in figure 2, there are various determinants and indicators of ethics which are required by an organization for successful implementation of KM process, KM levels, KM ownership and various KM strategies. **Abstract view: Knowledge Management dependence on Ethics**



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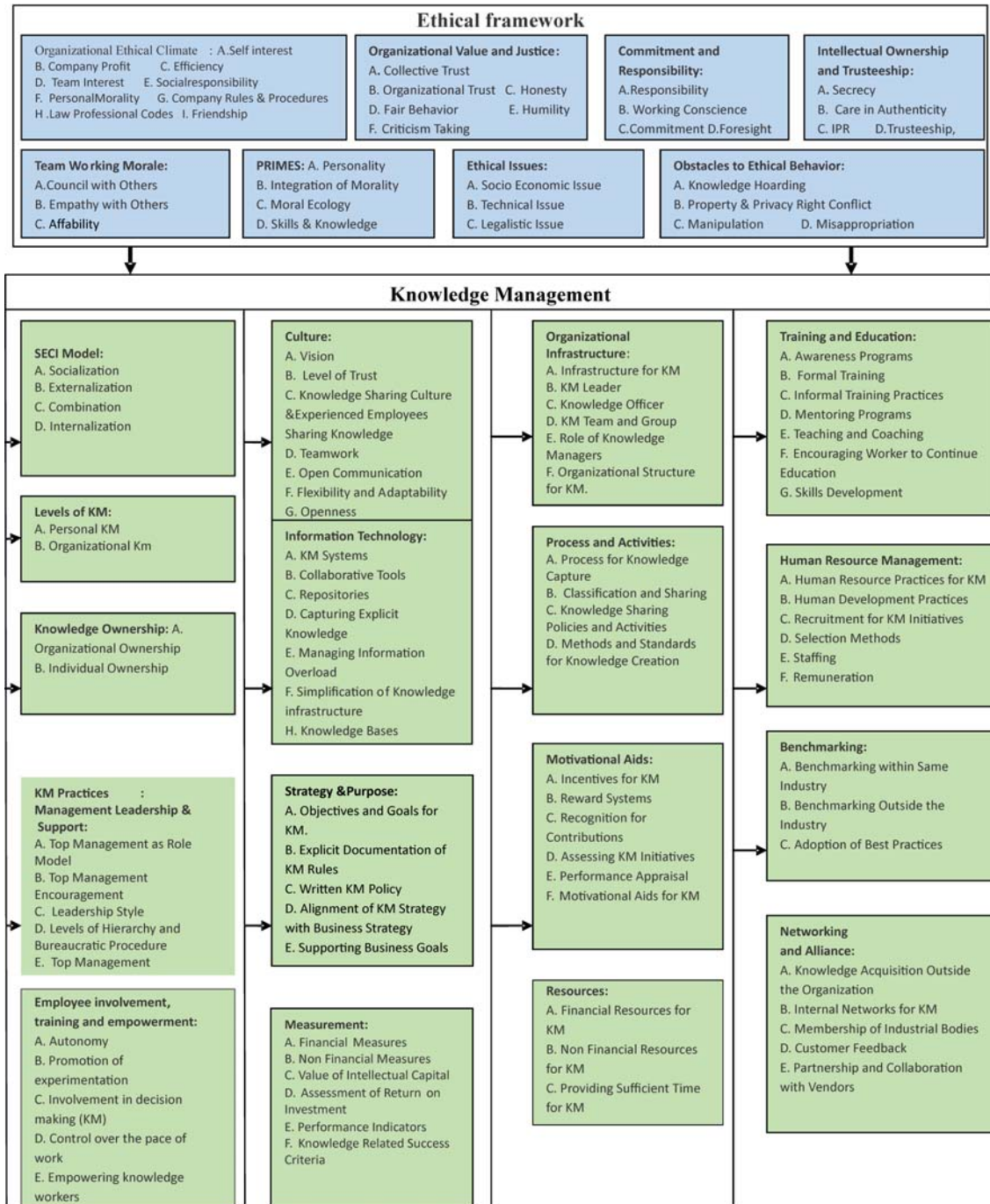


Figure 2: Source: Compiled by authors

Conclusion

The main aim of the study is to examine the impact of ethics on KM. Ethics appears as a relatively new area in KM. Thus, the authors have tried to encapsulate various ethical parameters in KM. The various ethical parameters are organizational ethical climate, organizational values and justice, commitment and responsibility, intellectual ownership and trusteeship, team working moral, ethical issues, PRIMES and obstacles to ethical behavior.

This study has tried to fill up the gap of lack of literature in linking ethics and KM. The authors have realized that literature supports the need of ethics in KM but a comprehensive framework linking the two concepts has never been discussed. The study focuses on ethical issues specifically from KM perspective. There are also deliberations on various obstacles to ethical behavior in KM. These issues span complex areas like knowledge hoarding, manipulation, misappropriation and privacy rights. The socio economic, legal and technical issues have also been discussed. The management of knowledge can be effective in an organization if individual's personality, his surrounding, commitment towards morality and moral skills are studied in depth. The authors support the ideology of moral and ethical actions while implementing KM. When all these parameters of ethics are embedded in the fabric of an organization, it supports KM processes, KM practices and synergizes individual and organizational knowledge. The KM system that supports ethical action is a new application area, which results in organizational success. The moral or ethical action is not a general thing person does while doing other tasks. Moral action is inherited in a way that how someone goes about work, the path chosen, the objectives to be achieved and skills possessed. Thus an ethical KM system is required in which KM system incorporates various ethical aspects.

Research Implications and Future Study

Establishing and implementing a link between ethics and KM may result in ethical conceptualization of KM. Individuals in an organization play a vital role in designing and implementation of KM. This should be integrated in theory and practice of KM. For practical implications, managers should understand that adoption of KM processes will not guarantee success until supported by the ethical framework. Managers should focus on implementing ethical norms and assessing their impact on the KM initiatives including creating, acquiring and sharing knowledge with shared values and beliefs. The conceptual framework presented in the study can be further tested empirically.

Moreover, many other conceptual models can be designed and developed on the various dimensions and indicators of KM and ethics discussed in the study. In future, studies assessing the impact of each ethical dimension in KM processes can be interesting area for research. On the basis of identified themes, a number of potential research questions can be done in future. This study provides a basis for development of new conceptual as well as empirical studies for researchers. The research findings will provide individuals and organizations a better understanding of the linkage. KM systems can be implemented and executed more successfully in those organizations where there is more emphasis on ethics by the organizations.

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