

The relationship between knowledge management and leadership: mapping the field and providing future research avenues

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Published on Journal of Knowledge Management

FULL TEXT (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-01-2020-0034>

Abstract

Purpose: Effectively handling knowledge is crucial for any organisation in order to survive and prosper in the turbulent environments of the modern era. Leadership is a central element for knowledge creation, acquisition, utilisation and integration processes. Based on these considerations, this study offers an overview of the evolution of the literature regarding the knowledge management-leadership relationship published over the last twenty years.

Design/methodology/approach: A bibliometric analysis coupled with a systematic literature review were performed over a dataset of 488 peer-reviewed articles published from 1990 to 2018.

Findings: We discovered the existence of four well-polarised clusters with the following thematic focuses: human and relational aspects, systematic and performance aspects, contextual and contingent aspects, and cultural and learning aspects. We then investigated each thematic cluster by reviewing the most relevant contributions within them.

Research limitations/implications: Based on the bibliometric analysis and the systematic literature review we developed an interpretative framework aimed at uncovering several promising and little explored research areas, thus suggesting an agenda for future knowledge management-leadership research. Some steps of the paper selection process may have been biased by the interpretation of the researcher. We addressed this concern by performing a multiple human subject reading process whose reliability was confirmed by a Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient value > 0.80 .

Originality/value: To our best knowledge, this is the first study to map, systematise and discuss the literature concerned to the topic of the knowledge management-leadership relationship.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Leadership, Bibliometric analysis, Systematisation of literature, Research agenda.

1. Introduction

Modern organisations face increasing technology development, competitive pressure, and demand shifts. The main thesis of knowledge management theory (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka *et al.*, 2000) is that these organisations can conquer leadership competitive position only if they are able to distinctively manage their patrimony of knowledge (Lin and McDonough III, 2011). Knowledge management (KM) consists of the organisational routines and practices related to ‘handling’ knowledge from its creation or external acquisition, to its internal utilisation and integration across the organisational system (Carmeli *et al.*, 2013; Natalicchio *et al.*, 2017).

This implies that the topic of KM is of interest to several disciplines (Ponzi, 2002). For example, information and management information sciences have mainly focused on knowledge as an object (Gu, 2004) and inquired KM for its instrumental function (Gaviria-Marin *et al.*, 2019). Management and organisational disciplines, on the other hand, have mostly considered knowledge as a process (Gu, 2004) and focused on how it is produced and handled within and between organisations (Rashman *et al.*, 2009). The development of this second perspective (KM-as-process view) represented the basis for the foundation of the theory of KM (Nonaka, 1994) and led to include KM among top management strategic decisions, with a huge influence on firms’ success (Gaviria-Marin *et al.*, 2019; Martins *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, in the last decade the process perspective shifted its focus from the engineering and structural aspects to the social dimensions of KM systems (Gaviria-Marin *et al.*, 2019). The success of KM and its practices is often ascribed to social mechanisms and to an effective adoption and internalisation of such mechanisms by employees and groups (Inkinen, 2016). In addition, an effective KM can occur only if people involved in the process are properly led, engaged, and motivated during the whole process (Bavik *et al.*, 2018; Natalicchio *et al.*, 2017). As a consequence, leadership represents one of the most prominent enablers of KM implementation and success (Ho, 2009; Vera and Crossan, 2004).

Despite the wide agreement concerning the importance of leadership for an effective KM, several scholars (e.g. Rashman *et al.*, 2009; von Krogh *et al.*, 2012) have stressed the need to deepen the KM-leadership relationship and the mechanisms through which this relationship is developed. A first group of motivations for this need is connected to the fact that the KM-leadership relation tends to vary intensely according to the leadership ‘styles’ exerted. For example, the greater effectiveness for KM of a participative and collaborative type of leadership (e.g. Pérez-López *et al.*, 2004) has been questioned with respect to certain cultural contexts, as in the case of collectivistic cultures (e.g. Lee *et al.*, 2018; Ma *et al.*, 2008; Masa’deh *et al.*, 2016). In addition, among collaborative leadership styles there are differences too. Lee *et al.* (2018) in their meta-analysis on empowering leadership, found no confirmation for its positive effect on knowledge sharing, something that has instead been confirmed for transformational leadership (Dong *et al.*, 2017).

A second group of reasons for deeply analysing and discussing the existing literature on the KM-leadership is referred to the current lack of systematisation. Due to the increased pervasiveness of KM in the firm functioning and its results (Heisig *et al.*, 2016), the KM field has recently reached a stable attention in the academic debate as also evidenced by several bibliometric studies (e.g. Gaviria-Marin *et al.*, 2019; Gu, 2004; Ponzi, 2002). In several KM systematic literature reviews, leadership emerges as a relevant factor for an effective KM in general (e.g. Inkinen, 2016; Smith *et al.*, 2008) and within specific KM contexts, such as communities of practices (Bolisani and Scarso, 2014), and public services (Rashman *et al.*, 2009). However, if a significant level of deepening has been reached with regard to the study of the relationship between KM and firm’s sustainability strategies (Martins *et al.*, 2019), intellectual capital management (Serenko *et al.*, 2010), and sustainable open innovation system (Natalicchio *et al.*, 2017), the same cannot be said for the intersection between KM and leadership. As a consequence, a specific focus on the KM-leadership relationship is necessary to systematise what exists on the topic and consequentially propose valuable insights on the existing gaps in order to produce valuable bases for future research (Appio *et al.*, 2014; Caputo *et al.*, 2018).

A third group of motivations is connected with the KM challenges caused by the digital revolution such as the urge to improve the detection of meaningful pieces of information among the vast availability of big data, the necessity to handle an increased level of knowledge inflows, and the need to simplify and personalise KM representation and codification to help users in the data interpretation (Fakhar-Manesh *et al.*, 2019). All these challenges give rise to the need of renewed interests towards analysing through which mechanism leaders of organizations can facilitate and develop the organisational routines that are necessary for effectively managing knowledge in the digital era (Santoro *et al.*, 2018).

The paper's contribution is at least twofold. First, to our best knowledge, this is the first study to systematise existing literature on the KM-leadership relationship. Specifically, our bibliometric coupling analysis highlights four well-polarised clusters with the following thematic focuses: human and relational aspects, systematic and performance aspects, contextual and contingent aspects, and cultural and learning aspects. We investigated each thematic cluster by reviewing the most relevant contributions within them.

Second, we propose an interpretative framework aimed at uncovering several promising and little explored research areas, thus suggesting an agenda for future KM-leadership research, which also take into account the emerging challenges caused by the latest technological evolutions.

The paper is organised as follows. Section two describes the method and protocol adopted for implementing our analysis. The third section presents the bibliometric analysis results while the fourth is dedicated to the cluster analysis and its systematic literature review. The fifth section proposes an interpretative framework aimed at suggesting an agenda for future research. The last section concludes the paper and describes its limitations.

2. Methods

The generalised fast-increasing number of scientific publications poses difficulties in keeping a clear track of the evolution and development of the different fields of study. In response to this, bibliometric methods represent powerful instruments for analysing huge amounts of data regarding the research streams of a specific field of study by mapping all pertinent contributions and elaborating spatial distributions able to highlight the relations between them (Appio *et al.*, 2014; Zupic and Cater, 2015). For these reasons and in order to effectively address the challenges related to the KM-leadership literature described in the introduction, we deemed proper to perform a bibliometric analysis based on the visualisation of similarities (VOS) (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010), along with a systematic literature review (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Using this approach allowed us to combine the comprehensive quantitative inquiry of a bibliometric analysis with the fine-grained and qualitative investigation made possible by a systematic literature review, thus reducing the shortcomings of both approaches (Appio *et al.*, 2014). This mix methodology has already shown to be successful in similar literature-based studies where KM was studied in relation to other constructs such as the fourth digital revolution (Fakhar-Manesh *et al.*, 2019) and the firm's sustainability (Martins *et al.*, 2019).

The systematic literature review proposed in this study bases its scientific solidity on three main reasons. First, the selection of the analysed papers was performed according to a replicable protocol (Cillo *et al.*, 2019; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), as described in section 2.1. Second, the theoretical framework used to analyse the selected papers was not subjectively determined by the authors but organised according to the VOS clustering algorithms results (Appio *et al.*, 2014; Van Eck and Waltman, 2010; Zupic and Carter, 2015), as described in section 2.2. Third, the discussion and interpretation of the topics treated within each cluster followed the guidelines of a systematic literature review, largely used in the KM field (e.g. Martins *et al.*, 2019; Natalicchio *et al.*, 2017), which allowed to perform an in-depth, qualitative investigation of the thematic structure and content of each cluster.

2.1. Data gathering

Similar to what Martin *et al.* (2019) did in their literature review concerning KM and sustainability, our analysis started with an overarching question: *What are the existing relationships between KM and leadership?* Thus, the iterative search process of defining the query for our bibliometric analysis started by focusing on two main terms, “*knowledge management*” and “*leadership*”. However, the concept of KM can either refer to an overall bundle of practices or to a single and specific process concerning KM practices. Thus, in order to grasp the full extent of the field of study object of our analysis, we realised that it was necessary to use additional terms for the query. These additional terms allowed us to embrace an up-to-date and comprehensive definition of KM (Inkinen, 2016; Natalicchio *et al.*, 2017). In particular, we included all the terms related to the KM processes, such as knowledge acquisition (KA_c), knowledge creation (KC), knowledge sharing or transfer (KS), knowledge storage (KSt), and knowledge application (KA_{pp}).

The final result of our iterative query definition process was the following: “*TITLE-ABS-KEY (“knowledge management” OR “managing knowledge” OR “knowledge acquisition” OR “acquiring knowledge” OR “knowledge creation” OR “creating knowledge” OR “knowledge transfer” OR “transferring knowledge” OR “knowledge sharing” OR “sharing Knowledge” OR “storing knowledge” OR “knowledge Application” OR “Knowledge applying”)* AND *TITLE-ABS-KEY (leadership)*”, where “*TITLE-ABS-KEY*” is an operator that performs searches in titles, abstracts, and keywords.

This query was performed on the Scopus database, which represents the most comprehensive source of data to retrieve high-quality and peer-review publications for an emergent field of studies (Falagas *et al.*, 2018). The search was limited to journal articles in the English language published up until December 31, 2018. The search produced an initial dataset of 658 papers. In order to ensure the inclusion of all relevant data, a cross-validation analysis was made by applying the same research string on the Web of Science and EBSCO Business Premier databases. This analysis did not identify any missing data, thus confirming the validity of using both our query string and the Scopus database. Next, following the best methodological practices proposed by the literature (e.g. Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), three out of the four authors carried out a screening analysis of the 658 papers independently. Specifically, following consolidated standards in the literature-based studies on KM (e.g. Inkinen, 2016; Martins *et al.*, 2019; Natalicchio *et al.*, 2017; Rashman *et al.*, 2009), the following paper selection protocol (figure 1) was adopted (Cillo *et al.*, 2019):

1) titles, abstracts, and keywords screening. Through this phase 79 papers were removed as not pertinent either to leadership or KM. In particular, some papers (35), although containing the term “*leadership*”, used it only as a synonymous of top management or to indicate a type strategy (e.g. market or cost leadership) (e.g. Raudeliūnienė *et al.*, 2018). Other papers (44), though making a general reference to managing knowledge, did not really focus on KM or on any of its processes (e.g. Bhatnagar, 2017);

2) full texts screening. In this phase the dataset was further polished by reading the full texts of all the remaining papers in order to ensure a strict adherence to the theme object of the study (Caputo *et al.*, 2018). This second screening led to remove another 83 papers. 48 papers were removed as they dealt with leadership only generically in their future research propositions or managerial implications, indicating for example that more attention should be paid to the leadership aspect, without any further suggestion or investigation (e.g. Birnbaum *et al.*, 2018). 35 papers were removed because, though focusing on both leadership and knowledge management, they did not analyse any connection between the two constructs (e.g. Sievert and Scholz, 2017);

3) search for duplication. Finally, 8 papers were eliminated as they represented pure duplications, or insights extracted from other papers already included in the dataset.

For all these screening phases, we used Krippendorff’s Alpha coefficient as a statistical measure of the agreement achieved between the authors. The resulted K was always greater than 0.8, indicating a reliable convergence and strong inter-reliability of the performed selection process.

After performing this screening process, our dataset was reduced to 488 papers (see Appendix 1 for a full list of these manuscripts).

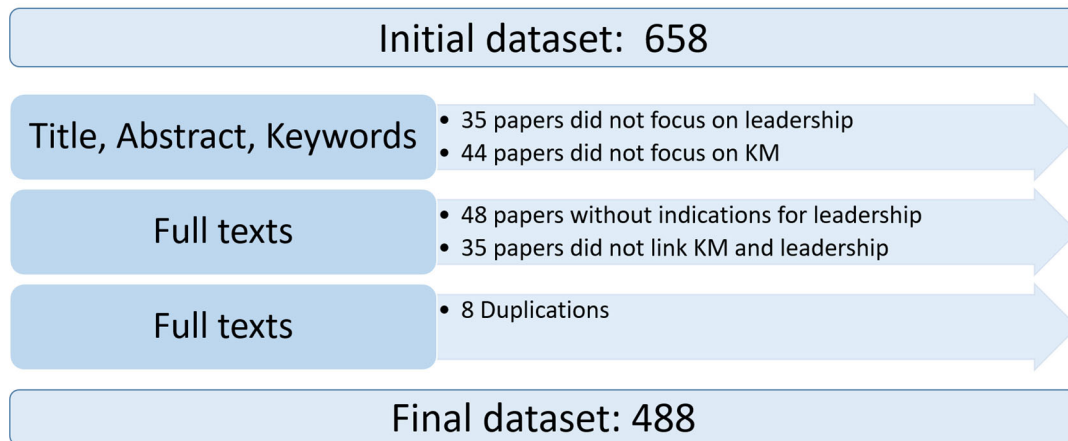


Figure 1. Protocol for selecting papers

2.2. Analysis

Our final dataset of 488 papers was object of the bibliometric analysis. First, we calculated a series of bibliometric activity indicators (see the next section). We used these indicators to analyse our dataset in terms of distribution of papers across years and the most relevant journals (Todeschini and Baccini, 2016).

Subsequently, we moved to the core of our bibliometric investigation by using VOSviewer 1.6.10. The software was used for the similarity analysis and for aggregating papers through bibliographic coupling (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010, 2014). Bibliographic coupling occurs when two papers cite the same third paper in their references (Zupic and Cater, 2015). We decided to use the bibliographic coupling aggregation method due to its ability to detect the developments of a given intellectual structure within a field by highlighting the main theoretical approaches and relationships between papers (Appio *et al.*, 2014; Zupic and Cater, 2015).

VOS algorithms construct a similarity matrix by normalising a co-occurrences matrix of the references (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010). The VOS technique builds a two-dimensional map in which the items 1 to n are positioned to represent, in the axes x and y , their similarity in term of cited references. In particular, VOS performs a set of routines known as: i) translation, in order to spatially centre each point in reference to the origin; ii) rotation, in order to maximize the variance of the solutions; and iii) reflection, in order to correctly locate on the vertical and horizontal axes the coordinates (Appio *et al.*, 2014). The result is a matrix in which items' distance can be interpreted as an indication of the relatedness of the terms. The smaller the distance between the terms, the stronger the terms are related to each other (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010, 2014). Based on this matrix, we implemented the VOS clusterization analysis, which reflects the diversity of the knowledge bases used in the set of papers. Papers belonging to the same cluster are strongly linked each other, thus representing a univocal stream of research or a specific approach to a topic (Appio *et al.*, 2014; Van Eck and Waltman, 2010). In line with the best methodological practices suggested by the literature (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010) the cluster analysis was performed with a minimum cluster size of 10 and a resolution value of 1.00. As suggested for large datasets (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010, 2014), as it is the case of our study, we used a threshold for the minimum link strength of 50. Finally, in order to double-check the goodness of the analysis, each paper inside each cluster was manually examined by two of the four authors in order to confirm the homogeneity and the soundness of the clusterization process (Appio *et al.*, 2014).

The result of the VOS clusterization analysis was a dataset of 450 interconnected papers (92% of the 488 papers dataset) giving the form to a four-cluster structure (see section 4).

Subsequently, always in line with the best methodological practices (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), three out of the four authors independently scored these 450 papers based on their total and normalised citations as well as their relevance for the main topics of each cluster. This step aimed to select a viable amount of papers to be the object of the systematic review presented in section 4. For this final selection phase, we again used Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient as a statistical measure of the agreement achieved. The resulted K was also in this case greater than 0.8, indicating a solid convergence and inter-reliability of the performed selection process. Through this final step, a restricted dataset composed of 40 papers was selected to be systematically reviewed.

3. Results of the bibliometric activity indicators

Our bibliometric analysis confirms a constant growth of attention to the KM-leadership relationship over time. The distribution of papers per year (Figure 2) shows that, from a pre-millennium rate (1998 to 2000) of less than 5 papers per year, the yearly contributions significantly increased in later decades. Although the search was implemented over all the documents published up to December 31, 2018, the first paper detected by our query was published in 1990 and the application of the selection protocol described in section 2.1 reduced the covered period to 1998-2018.

Specifically, the decade 2001 to 2010 has more than 15 papers per year on average, with a breakdown of 10 papers in the first half and about 20 in the second half. The current decade (2011 to 2018) has 35 papers per year on average, with a strong hike in the second half, with over 40 papers per year. Thus, the interest in the leadership aspect of KM is not only theoretically robust (Xue *et al.*, 2011) but also empirically confirmed.

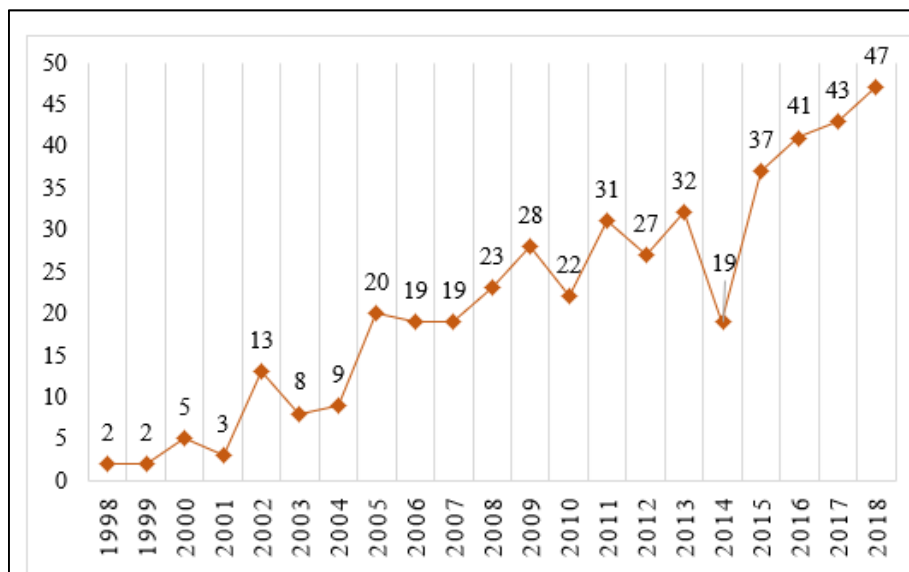


Figure 2 – Number of contributions per year

The most influential journal is the *Journal of Knowledge Management* with more than 50 papers and 2,000 citations, followed, at a great distance, by *Knowledge Management Research and Practice* (Table 1). This rank contains some examples of leadership journals, e.g. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* (12 papers) and *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* (9), showing that leadership scholars pay significant attention to the leader role of managing knowledge.

Journal	NP	TC
Journal of Knowledge Management	51	2341
Knowledge Management Research and Practice	12	123
Leadership and Organization Development Journal	12	186
Learning Organization	12	218

Journal of Management Development	11	167
Leadership & Organization Development Journal	9	310
International Journal of Innovation and Learning	8	82
Industrial Management and Data Systems	6	481
International Journal of Human Resource Management	6	177
Management Decision	6	136
Health Care Management Review	5	98
Human Resource Management	5	242
International Journal of Knowledge Management	5	18
International Journal of Managing Projects in Business	5	22
Journal of Workplace Learning	5	36
School Leadership and Management	5	57
Key:		
NP = number of papers; TC = total number of citations		

Table 1 – Journals with at least five papers published

4. Results of the VOS Analysis and Literature Review

The cluster structure resulting from the VOS analysis consists of a quite dense network (Figure 3), indicating that papers are well connected and use fairly similar streams of literature to infer insights about the KM-leadership relationship. Our results individuate a four-cluster structure, with two clusters, i.e. the red and blue ones, that are very well defined and the other two that tend to slightly overlap each other.

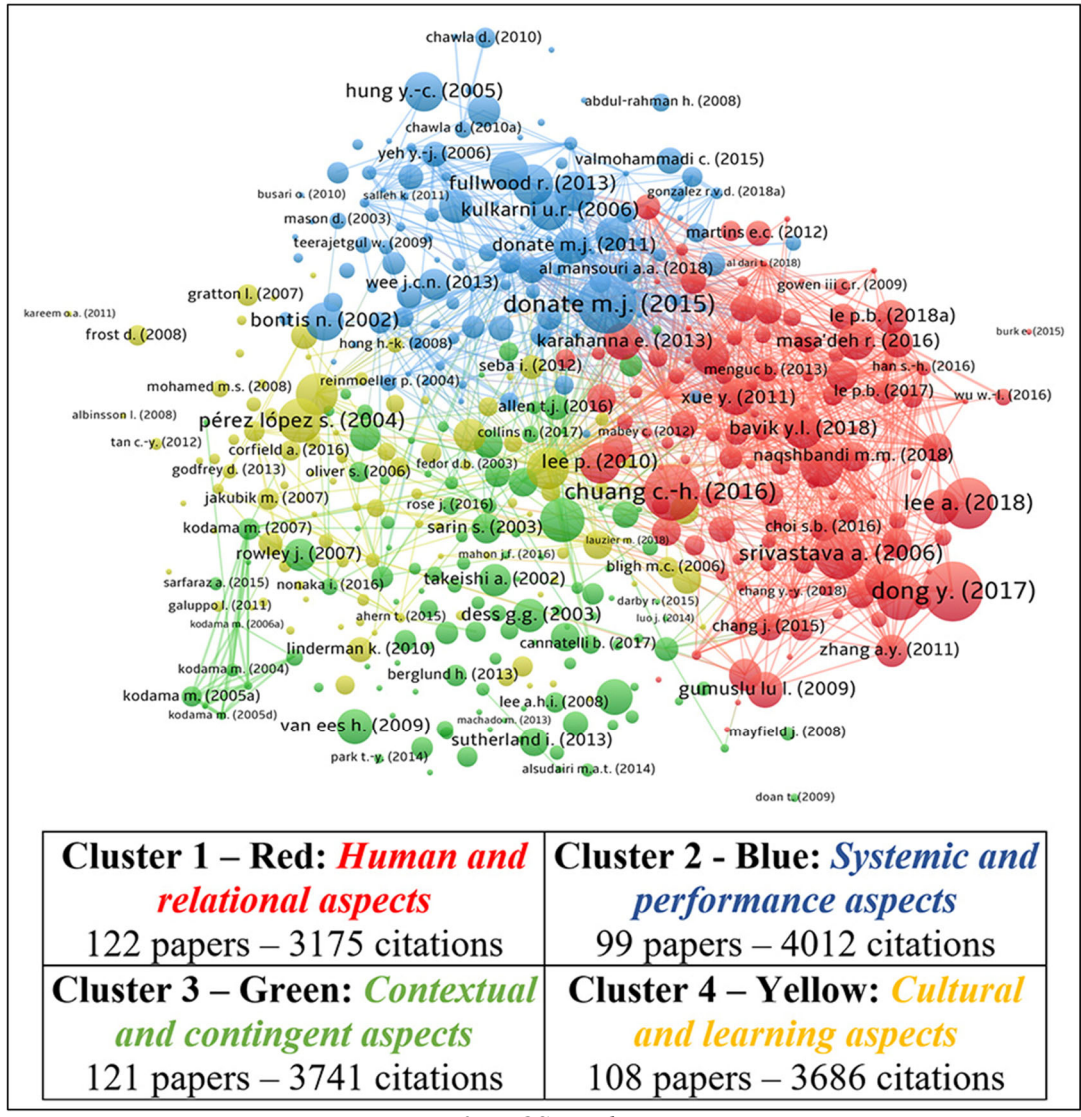


Figure 3 – VOS coupling structure

The cluster map represents the intellectual structure of the KM-leadership relationship field (Appio *et al.*, 2014; Caputo *et al.*, 2018). In addition to focusing on different thematic areas, which are fully reviewed in the following sub-sections, the four clusters use different approaches to interpret the role and meaning of knowledge (Mingers, 2008) and, consequentially, different perspectives to approach KM (Gaviria-Marin *et al.*, 2019), as summarized in table 2.

Cluster	Red: human and relational aspects	Blue: systemic and performance aspects	Green: contextual and contingent aspects	Yellow: cultural and learning aspects

Thematic focus and exemplary references	The focus is on the social process of leading people (e.g. Bavik <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Dong <i>et al.</i> , 2017).	The focus is on the systemic and structural aspects and the organisational mechanisms to manage and exploit knowledge with the maximum level of efficiency and efficacy (e.g. Donate and Sánchez de Pablo, 2015; Kulkarni <i>et al.</i> , 2006).	The general focus is on the procedural aspects of KM; however, specific attention is dedicated to the conditions and contingencies of the ‘space’ in which KM processes occur (e.g. Yang, 2007; Pan and Scarbrough, 1998, 1999).	The focus is on the organisational culture, its impact on the firm system, the social mechanisms and the learning processes it activates at the individual level (e.g. Flores <i>et al.</i> , 2012; von Krogh <i>et al.</i> , 2012).
Knowledge view (Mingers, 2008)	Knowledge is seen as an element of the transitive domain (subjective), intimately tied to the human processes that create it and validated through a fiduciary process based on trust between individuals and/or on factual personal experience and evidence.	Knowledge is seen as an element of the intransitive domain (objective) that exists regardless of individual interventions, and that is therefore objectively measurable.	Knowledge is seen as posed at the crossroad between transitive (subjective) and intransitive (objective) domains. This implies that knowledge, although being the result of a human process, may be affected by the concrete social and cultural contexts in which its management occurs.	Knowledge is seen as an element of both the transitive (subjective) and the intransitive (objective) domain.
Approach to KM (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019)	The cluster approaches KM as a social process.	The cluster approaches KM as an instrument with a strong focus on systemic and engineering aspects.	The cluster adopts a quite marked processual approach to KM, which focuses on both engineering and social dimensions.	The cluster adopts a processual approach to KM though with a strong focus on social mechanisms.

Table 2 – Thematic focus and approaches of the four clusters

4.1. Cluster 1 Red – Human and relational aspects

The red cluster concerns the human aspects of the KM-leadership relationship. Most of the papers adopt a specific theoretical perspective on leadership, with the aim of explaining its influence on several organisational outcomes. Transformational leadership (TrFL) and empowering leadership (EmpL) are heavily inquired paradigms by the most impactful papers. The level of analysis is usually centred on the individual and team level, with the most investigated themes being the direct leader-follower relation (e.g. Masa’deh *et al.*, 2016; Xue *et al.*, 2011), relational aspects in teams (e.g. Carmeli *et al.*, 2013), or combination of both (Dong *et al.*, 2017). A much lower number of contributions analyse the effects of human relations on higher organisational outcomes (e.g. Karahanna and Preston, 2013). The methodological approach adopted is generally quantitative.

As it influences the engagement of followers, which is also crucial for the success of KM processes (Birasnav, 2014), TrFL is a recurring inquired style. Mittal and Dhar (2015) show how TrFL effectively foster employees’ creativity in culture environments that support KS, by developing employees’ confidence in their creative skills. Expanding these results, Dong *et al.* (2017) inquire separately individual members’ and team creativity outcomes. Their study confirms that TrFL promotes both individual creativity skills and KS practices. At the group level transformational leaders foster a team climate that favours KS, enhancing the overall creativity of the group. This climate, in turn, increases the possibilities for individual members to apply their creativity skills.

EmpL is another leadership style strongly inquired due to its capacity of stimulating intrinsic motivation and autonomy in followers (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006). Team performance is the mainly studied object in relation to EmpL. Indeed, EmpL promotes effective KS practices because team members are stimulated to share ideas by an empowering leader giving them a fair recognition for these behaviours (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006). In turn, KS improves team performance as it assists the creation of shared mental schemata among team members, thus allowing a fast execution with less conflicts. KS also improves the acquisition and sharing of a transactive memory, i.e. the idiosyncratic knowledge map possessed by each individual in a team, which allows people to anticipate other member's behaviours. Xue *et al.* (2011) delve more deeply into this EmpL-KS relation by adding an important mediation effect: the psychological attitude to sharing knowledge. At a cognitive level, through the above-mentioned processes an empowering leader favours the intentions/attitudes of followers towards KS. Furthermore, at a behavioural level, EmpL may help team members remove barriers impending actual KS behaviours, such as the fear of losing social status.

Other studies analyse ethical leadership (EthL) and its effect on KS behaviours. Starting from the premise that both EthL and KS are intrinsically pro-social behaviours, Bavik *et al.* (2018) prove that two mechanisms partially mediate the relation between these two constructs. First, transactional means, such as the capacity of a leader to implement a coherent reward/punishment system, extrinsically motivate employees to share ideas. Second, a leader representing an ethical/moral example for employees may act in a transformational sense and enact endogenous transformations in followers' behaviours.

However, leadership is not the only factor that affects KM processes. Chuang *et al.* (2016) find a positive impact of formal HRM systems on KAc and KS processes activated by knowledge-intensive R&D teams. Their results challenge researchers to further inquire other factors that may affect team KM processes; for example, could an EmpL strongly focused on followers represent a substitute of formal procedures of HRM? Actually, when HRM formal systems and EmpL co-exist they may weaken each other's benefits, thus opening a debate about using formal versus informal practices to boost team performance.

4.2. Cluster 2 Blue – Systemic and performance aspects

Compared to the red cluster, the blue cluster adopts a quite opposite perspective for investigating the KM-leadership relationship. In fact, a central importance is dedicated to the systemic and organisational aspects of KM, with a strong focus on its outcomes and impacts.

Most of the papers holistically analyse KM (e.g. Wee and Chua, 2013), its antecedents (e.g. Sigh, 2008), its operational functioning (e.g. Kulkarni *et al.*, 2006), and its consequences (e.g. Bontis and Fitz-enz, 2002; Ho, 2009; Ma *et al.*, 2008). The blue cluster is focused on the assessment of the real contribution of KM to organisational performances at several layers and with regard to different types of performances, such as KM system effectiveness (e.g. Sigh, 2008), innovation performance (e.g. Donate and Sánchez de Pablo, 2015), HRM practices performance (e.g. Yahya and Goh, 2002), or global firm performance (e.g. Valmohammadi and Ahmadi, 2014).

Within this cluster leadership is found as one of the key factors for an effective KM implementation. Inkinen (2016), in his literature review, finds that leadership, or any other 'soft' tool of the organisational culture, besides being a key antecedent of an effective KM, should also be integrated with structural arrangements, such as KM units or reward and training systems, in order to produce strong results. As noted by Sigh (2008) and Yang (2010), leadership styles are also relevant. More coercive styles of leadership, oriented towards regulations, suppress creativity and KM engagement of employees. On the contrary, collaborative leadership styles encourage employees to explore new alternatives autonomously and favours engagement.

The cluster also dedicates attention to the effects of KM practices on innovation performance. For example, Donate and Sánchez de Pablo (2015) study the impact of KM practices (KC, KApp, KSt, KS) on product innovation rate. They find that knowledge-oriented leadership, a style that encompasses managerial and reward systems (transactional approach), as well as inspirational and

empowering behaviours for employees (transformational aspects), is the most significant antecedent of all KM practices. However, only KApp and KC significantly improve product innovation rate, while KSt and KS are mostly related to process innovation (p. 367).

Another performance dimension analysed in this cluster is that related to human resource practices. For example, Bontis and Fitz-enz (2002) find that leadership affects the retention rate of key employees both directly and indirectly, through its positive impact on KS practices, thus increasing the returns on human capital. Yahya and Goh (2002) analyse the impact of HRM practices on KM and find that KM success is achievable only if leadership skills are present throughout the entire organisation, especially at the middle management level. The consequence is that a decentralised decision-making approach should be adopted as it provides both adequate training of the soft skills of the employees and adequate opportunities to exercise them.

Finally, some studies analyse the contribution of KM to the global (economic, operative, and market) organisational performance. For example, Valmohammadi and Ahmadi (2014), using a balance scorecard approach, assess eight enablers of KM. KM strategy and organisational culture are the most influential enablers of KM, while the leadership factor, though significant, is not as relevant.

4.3. Cluster 3 Green – Contextual and contingent aspects

The green cluster analyses the KM-leadership relationship using a contextualisation prospective. It specifically emphasises the milieu (*Ba* Japanese word for ‘place’) where knowledge is created, shared, and used (Nonaka *et al.*, 2000).

A large part of the cluster focuses on KM organisational processes occurring in different operational contexts, such as in the hotel industry (Yang, 2007) and university relations (Dooley and Kirk, 2007). While industry contexts are preponderant, even because most influential papers are published on sectoral journals (e.g. *Tourism management*), KM is also analysed across multiple *Bas* or different layers, e.g. a team context, or a formal organisational structure context (Pan and Scarbrough, 1998, 1999), or a strategic level (Dess *et al.*, 2003; Van Ees *et al.*, 2009). The papers of the cluster sometimes do not analyse leadership directly and/or autonomously but include it into the intentions or behaviours of the main actors governing the KM processes.

One of the most comprehensive studies on KM contextualisation is that of Pan and Scarbrough (1998, 1999), which is performed in a large chain of chemical laboratories. Perfectly in line with the epistemological interpretation of knowledge adopted in the cluster, they study KM as a socio-technical system, paying simultaneous attention to the relationships between the individuals working in the system and the system itself. Similar to what will be later proposed by von Krogh *et al.* (2012), they conceive KM at three layers: the infrastructure or objective level, dealing with the types of content-knowledge and how it is stored (KSt), the ‘infostructure’ or the inter-subject level, related to KS practices and rules for people to interact, and the ‘infoculture’ or the subjective level, dealing with the strengths and embeddedness of informal relations related to KC. To effectively develop such a multi-layered system, leadership should focus on overcoming resistance to change, by both working at the individual and interactional levels and removing structural barriers, in order to facilitate communication through the several layers.

Some other papers specifically consider conflicts that may occur in a *Ba*, thus focusing on the inter-subject *Ba* level (‘infostructure’ in Pan and Scarbrough, 1998). For example, Van Ees *et al.* (2009) argue that besides resolving conflicts, board of directors’ effective leadership behaviours should also be directed to integrate and share knowledge (KS) and information deriving from alternatives goals brought forth by coalitions of organisational actors.

Innovation management is one of the most studied operational contexts in this cluster (e.g. Caridi-Zahavi *et al.*, 2016). Smith *et al.* ’s (2008) systematic literature review summarises all factors influencing the ability of a firm to innovate. They show that leadership (considered as the capability to empower and motivate employees) is a fundamental predictor of the ability of the employees to ‘feed’ innovative processes with their ideas, while KM (principally seen as internal KS) plays a mediation role within the relationship between leadership and firm innovation capability. This is

because a leader that facilitates knowledge flows from outside and encourages employees to use it creatively will shape an effective KS culture and this in turn will improve ambidexterity (Lin and McDonough III, 2011).

Innovation management is not the only operational context analysed in the cluster. For example, Yang (2007), by analysing the hotel industry, finds that KS practices are central within the whole KM system because they prevent knowledge from remaining orphan in functional silos, with little benefit for the whole organisation. The study shows how leadership, together with organisational culture, may enhance or hamper KS practices; ‘facilitating’ and ‘mentoring’ roles have the most positive impacts on KS, while playing an ‘innovator’ role has a minor effect. Instead, keeping a tight control of the employees (‘monitoring’) significantly reduces their willingness to share knowledge.

4.4. Cluster 4 Yellow – Cultural and learning aspects

The yellow cluster focuses on the cultural and learning aspects of the KM-leadership relationship. The theoretical focus of a large part of the papers is on organisational culture and environments and how these elements affect KM or vice versa. KM and its sub-processes are sometimes directly considered (e.g. Brewster *et al.*, 2005); more often, KM is analysed within the organisational learning domain. Although no complete common agreement exists, organisation learning is seen quite consistently (e.g. Flores *et al.*, 2012; Pérez-López *et al.*, 2004) as knowledge and information acquisition (KAc), knowledge and information distribution (KS), knowledge and information interpretation and information integration (to some extents, KS and KApp), and organisational memory development (mostly KSt).

Since culture and the learning processes associated to it are strongly shaped by leadership behaviours (Vera and Crossan, 2004), the role of the leadership dimension is quite pervasive in this cluster. As in the blue cluster, leadership is generally assumed as one of the cultural antecedents of organisational learning or KM (Flores *et al.*, 2012). However, leadership is also acknowledged as a shaping factor of the culture (as in Zboralski, 2009), implicitly considered as a requisite for a certain type of culture (e.g. a participative leadership as in Pérez-López *et al.*, 2004), or a facilitator of individual learning (Marcinkus-Murphy, 2012).

The four knowledge conversion processes (through which knowledge can be created) proposed by the *SECI* model (Nonaka *et al.*, 2000) take place in a specific cultural context (*Ba*), which sets the boundaries to the interactions among individuals and, consequently, to the KC potential itself. Furthermore, the *SECI* processes need appropriate knowledge assets (i.e., inputs) to operate as well as generate other final knowledge assets (outputs), which, in turn, can be cyclically and continuously reused for other KC processes. Besides offering a vision and proposing promising knowledge trajectories to be pursued, leadership should effectively govern all the three above mentioned elements, i.e. the *SECI* processes, the *Ba*, and the knowledge assets. In fact, for an effective KM, leaders should constantly monitor, promote, and stimulate the *SECI* processes, continuously control and refine the knowledge assets, and focus on constantly energising the *Ba*, thus creating a cultural context that stimulates and facilitates interactions.

Similar to what theorised by Pan and Scarbrough (1998, 1999), von Krogh *et al.* (2012) expanded the Nonaka *et al.*'s (2000) model comparing the benefits of distributed and centralised leadership styles at three organisational layers.

While these two milestones holistically study the KM phenomenon, other papers more specifically analyse particular cultural aspects that may impact on KM. For example, Seba *et al.* (2012), studying the police force of Dubai, propose a reverse logic, analysing the cultural aspects that may impede a full embeddedness and adoption of KM practices, in particular KS. Leadership needs to promote a participative climate, where contributions are valued in order to prevent employees from not seeing the practical relevance of KS.

Other impactful papers, still study culture but assuming an organisational learning perspective. Flores *et al.* (2012) highlight the importance of the promotion of a collaborative decision-making process and of transformational leadership behaviours. They find that the latter is the most impactful cultural

element for organisational learning as it influences KAc, KS, information interpretation and integration (KC and KApp), as well as organisational memory development (KSt). Collaborative decision making instead impacts only on information integration and interpretation (KS and KApp). Beside impacting at the overall organisational level, culture may also play a role at lower layers (von Krogh *et al.*, 2012), namely at the group level. Bligh *et al.* (2006) indicate that KC within teams effectively occurs when a shared leadership emerges and is the result of a within-group cultural context based on three dimensions: trust, team potency, i.e. the perception of efficiency of the group, and the commitment of its members. This team culture is reachable only if members assume a self-leadership posture, thus taking managerial responsibilities in performing a task and developing intrinsic motivations towards this extra-role commitment.

Besides being influenced by it, KM can also be seen as an element affecting culture (Corfield and Paton, 2016). This perspective specifically emerges in relation to organisational change issues where the persistence of leadership's efforts is an often-recalled success factor (e.g. Jacobs *et al.*, 2013).

5. Setting-up a Research Agenda

The bibliometric analysis and literature review presented in the previous sections fill the research gaps suggested by Inken (2016) and von Krogh *et al.* (2012). According to them, a comprehensive systematisation of the KM literature could not be considered complete without a serious consideration of the role of leadership. Furthermore, this systematisation paves the way to several future promising research avenues (RAs) (Caputo *et al.*, 2018; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003).

KM-LEADERSHIP CLUSTERS	Red Cluster – Human approach	Blue Cluster – Systemic approach	Green cluster – Contextual approach	Yellow cluster – Cultural approach
EMERGING KM THEMES				
Business strategy	-	(x)	(x)	X
Intellectual capital				
<i>Human capital</i>	X	(x)	X	X
<i>Structural capital</i>	(x)	X	(x)	X
<i>Relational capital</i>	-	-	X	X
Decision making	X	-	X	X
Knowledge Sharing	X	X	X	X
Organisational learning	(x)	(x)	(x)	X
Innovation	(x)	X	X	-
Productivity	(x)	X	-	-
Competitive advantage	(x)	-	X	(x)
Key: X Strong consideration; (x) Slight consideration; - Lack of a proper consideration				

Table 3 –KM-Leadership future research framework

By crossing our four thematic clusters with the emerging KM themes foreseen by a reworked version of the schematisation elaborated by Heisig *et al.* (2016, p. 1174) (table 3), it is possible to highlight that KM inputs (intellectual capital) and activities (decision making, KS, and organisational learning) are well-addressed by the extant literature, with a prominence given to human capital and KS practices, while KM outcomes (innovation, productivity, and competitive advantage) are less studied. Based on this interpretative framework, for each cluster we propose: a) a set of 'exploitative RAs', i.e. directions that despite having already been investigated, may still present an interesting potential of further development and capitalisation; b) a set of 'explorative RAs', i.e. directions that have been investigated either not or to a very limited extent (table 4).

KM-LEADERSHIP CLUSTERS	FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES (RAs)
RED CLUSTER (HUMAN APPROACH)	<p>Exploitative RAs Decision making and human capital <i>How does leadership, in general and according to diverse leadership styles, differently influence KM activity outcomes at individual and group levels? How can a leader change his/her KM decision-making process according to different target result levels? Are leaders fully aware of the consequences of their behaviours and decisions on different levels?</i></p> <p>Explorative RAs Structural and relational capital <i>How do structural or relational contingencies constraint or enhance leadership behaviours, social mechanisms to manage knowledge, and, more in general, the KM-leadership relationship?</i> Business strategy <i>How does the alignment between business and KM strategies impact on leadership and its outcomes? How can leadership intervene to facilitate alignment between operational, KM and business strategies?</i> Organisational learning, innovation, productivity, and competitive advantage <i>How do different types of leadership perform in terms of organisational routines' evolution and organisational learning processes? Which are the most powerful group level social mechanisms that can increase innovation, productivity, profitability and ultimately competitive advantage?</i></p>
BLUE CLUSTER (SYSTEMIC APPROACH)	<p>Exploitative RAs Innovation and productivity <i>What are the most effective innovation and operative performance indicators through which the effects of KM practices can effectively be measured? What is the role of leadership in making KM practices effectively impact on operative performance outcomes?</i></p> <p>Explorative RAs Organisational learning and competitive advantage <i>How KM practices and its operative outcomes translate into an effective organisational learning and a sustainable competitive advantage? What is the role of leadership in transforming KM outcomes into organisational routines and learning, while, in turn, sustaining the competitive advantage?</i> Decision making and relational capital <i>How can KM leadership inform decision-making mechanisms to improve innovation and operative performances? How do different leadership styles and behaviours impact innovation and operative performances?</i> <i>How can KM leadership shape decision-making processes in order to seize external opportunities for innovation and create an internal learning environment to support the exploitation of these opportunities?</i> <i>How can KM leadership shape sophisticated and fast-adapting decision-making processes which are suitable to address the challenges posed by the 4.0 digital revolution?</i></p>
GREEN CLUSTER (CONTEXTUAL APPROACH)	<p>Exploitative RAs Competitive advantage <i>Which leadership behaviours most effectively contribute to the interplay between KM and entrepreneurial renewal (corporate entrepreneurship) or corporate governance?</i> <i>Which KM leadership behaviours most effectively contribute to strategic management and, in turn, to a competitive advantage?</i></p> <p>Explorative RAs Productivity <i>How can leadership adapt KM systems and practices to diverse knowledge regimes in terms of knowledge and capital intensity or knowledge-driven competition or type of knowledge that is most valuable, in order to positively impact on the operative dimensions of the firm performance?</i></p>
YELLOW CLUSTER (CULTURAL APPROACH)	<p>Exploitative RAs Knowledge sharing <i>How does leadership effectively influence quality and quantity of KS practices? Which are the most effective leadership behaviours in order to develop and signal the organisational importance of KM and KS practices and create a supportive internal environment and culture for these practices?</i></p> <p>Explorative RAs Business strategy</p>

	<p><i>How can leadership promote an appropriate proactive and supportive KM culture which is conducive to aligning business and KM strategies? How can leadership intervene in case of misalignment?</i></p> <p>Explorative RAs</p> <p>Innovation and productivity</p> <p><i>How can the impact of KM and organisational learning on the innovation and operative performance of the firm be measured? To what extent would leadership benefit from transparently connecting KM to business performance? Which cultural and social mechanisms mediate the relationship between KM and firm innovation and operative performance? How can leadership master these mechanisms?</i></p>
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Table 4- KM-Leadership future exploitative and explorative research avenues

5.1. Mastering social aspects to promote KM

The cluster focuses on leader behaviours, decision-making processes and leadership styles and how these factors impact on the relational dynamics of social units and groups. An area that has been little explored concerns how leadership behaviours, and human resource management practices should differ according to the level, individual or group one, at which the analysis is carried out (e.g. Dong *et al.*, 2017; Mittal and Dhar, 2015). Precisely this gap could explain why some studies do not find a direct relation between KM and leadership (e.g. Masa'deh *et al.*, 2016). For this reason, researchers are encouraged to better clarify at which research level their study is conducted, more deeply discern how the leadership impacts on each of these two levels, and investigate the effects resulting from the interactions between them. Summarising this gap may open a set of exploitative RAs aimed at investigating research questions such as: *how does leadership, in general and according to diverse leadership styles, differently influence KM activity outcomes at individual and group levels? How can a leader change his/her KM decision-making process according to different target result levels? Are leaders fully aware of the consequences of their behaviours and decisions on different levels?*

With regard to the explorative RAs, the cluster, though delving into KM mechanisms and dynamics at the level of social groups, fails to explore several contextual dimensions in which these groups are embedded and the consequences of these dimensions on leaders' behaviours. More precisely, there are at least two categories of overlooked contextual conditions. One is related to IC composition and development. In fact, this cluster deeply investigates the structural capital in terms of existing or resulting KM managerial culture, but it only analyses the remaining structural aspects (such as intellectual property, IT system, and organisational structure) and the external and relational contextual aspects (e.g. the distribution channels' structure and the level of brand awareness possessed by the firm) on the surface. As these aspects may significantly bind team performance (Valmohammadi and Ahmadi, 2014) and affect the potential intervention of leadership, researchers should pay more attention to them and to their influence on leadership behaviours and the resulting KM social mechanisms and dynamics. Summarising: *how do structural or relational contingencies constraint or enhance leadership behaviours, social mechanisms to manage knowledge, and, more in general, the KM-leadership relationship?* The second category of overlooked contextual conditions is related to the degree of alignment among business and KM strategies and its impact on leadership effectiveness. In fact, in case of misalignment, any intervention of the leader may result in *ad hoc* solutions, providing only temporary benefits and a little impact on several KM outcomes and ultimately on competitive advantage (Heisig *et al.*, 2016). This aspect is especially relevant in light of the 4.0 digital revolution paradigm, which is allowing KM systems to evolve very quickly, for example in the direction of the digitalisation of the 'objects' involved in a production process (such as machineries, inputs and outputs) and the real time replica of living or non-living physical entities (digital twin technologies), with very strong advantages for employees when assessing advancements and status of the production (Fakhar-Manesh *et al.*, 2019). These great opportunities also imply that operational and production policies may evolve more rapidly than KM strategies and the latter, in turn, may evolve more rapidly than business strategies. Accordingly: *how does the alignment between business and KM strategies impact on leadership and its outcomes? How can leadership intervene to facilitate alignment between operational, KM and business strategies?*

5.2. Leveraging leadership to develop effective KM systems

The blue cluster investigates the systemic and performance aspects of the KM-Leadership relationship by mainly looking into the themes related to KM outcomes (such as innovation, productivity, structural capital) and KM activities (such as KS practices). This cluster is strongly focused on justifying the efforts for the development of a KM system, understanding its main consequences and advantages (Heisig *et al.*, 2016), and investigating how to effectively lead this development. The KM benefits are generally captured in terms of intellectual property capital, new product development, and, more generally, innovation outcomes. Nevertheless, the full set of correlations between KM and firm performance is far to be clearly established (Bontis and Fitz-enz, 2002). In particular, researchers should gauge which KM operative measures are appropriate to catch the real impact of KM practices on specific innovation and operative performance dimensions; as well as in which measure leadership behaviours influence the relationship between KM practices and operative performances. Accordingly, some interesting exploitative research questions could be: *what are the most effective innovation and operative performance indicators through which the effects of KM practices can effectively be measured? What is the role of leadership in making KM practices effectively impact on operative performance outcomes?*

This cluster does not delve into how KM practices and its operative results (in terms of innovation, patents, productivity, etc.) can be capitalised and translated into effective organisational learning routines and, in turn, a competitive advantage sustainable over time. Furthermore, again, how leadership influences the relationship between KM practices and a sustainable competitive advantage still remains scarcely explored. For example, more attention should be paid to the leadership and routinisation of KM practices conducting to innovation as well as to how specific product or process innovation results or patents could stimulate KC processes aimed at enlarging the knowledge patrimony of the firm (Nonaka *et al.*, 2000). Accordingly, the following explorative RAs question could be investigated: *how KM practices and its operative outcomes translate into an effective organisational learning and a sustainable competitive advantage? What is the role of leadership in transforming KM outcomes into organisational routines and learning, while, in turn, sustaining the competitive advantage?* Furthermore, what is missing is a full acknowledgment of the measure in which this relationship between KM and its operative performance dimensions is influenced by the adoption of different leadership decision-making approaches and behavioural styles. This gap may open a further set of explorative RAs aimed at investigating research questions such as: *how can KM leadership inform decision-making mechanisms to improve innovation and operative performances? How do different leadership styles and behaviours impact innovation and operative performances?* Another unexplored research area regards how leadership can impact the decision-making process in order to effectively get access to the external opportunities, for example those resulting from the firm embeddedness into a network of companies or of knowledge workers (Allen *et al.*, 2016), as well as to stimulate the diffuse and collective involvement and effort of all workers and the supportive internal environment that are necessary to fully exploit these opportunities (Pérez López *et al.*, 2004). For this reason, attention should be paid to the social mechanisms that leadership could trigger and manage in order to promote outward-looking KM routines for innovation (Santoro *et al.*, 2018) and develop proper internal organisational routines suitable to actualise and implement the external opportunities (Dooley and Kirk, 2007). In sum: *how can KM leadership shape decision-making processes in order to seize external opportunities for innovation and create an internal learning environment to support the exploitation of these opportunities?*

5.3. Leading the adaptation of KM systems to different knowledge and strategic regimes

The green cluster, with its contextual approach, is the most comprehensive in terms of covered KM themes. It almost fully covers all KM inputs, activities, and outcomes. Most of its contributions investigate the relationship between the management of knowledge and the competitive advantage of the firm. Many studies offer insights about the fact that KM does not relate only to tactical or

operational issues but also to strategic decisions and concerns (Caridi-Zahavi *et al.*, 2016): for example, it is crucial in order to sustain a continuous entrepreneurial renewal (Dess *et al.*, 2003), or to inclusively consider stakeholders' interests (Van Ees *et al.*, 2009). However, little investigation has been carried on which specific KM leadership behaviours and social mechanisms could effectively contribute to these strategic management decisions and processes. More particularly, the current literature seems to simply call KM leadership to support and monitor KM and business strategies (von Krogh *et al.*, 2012), without giving any specific directions on which could be the most effective leadership behavioural approaches. Thus, the following exploitative research questions: *which leadership behaviours most effectively contribute to the interplay between KM and entrepreneurial renewal (corporate entrepreneurship) or corporate governance?* Furthermore, little investigation has been carried on the KM-strategic management relationship (Heisig *et al.*, 2016). Thus, *which KM leadership behaviours most effectively contribute to strategic management and, in turn, to a competitive advantage?*

Furthermore, some relevant contextual dimensions and their influence on the relationship between KM and the operative dimensions (productivity and profitability) of the firm performance are yet to be analysed. In particular, the existing literature does not investigate whether and how the KM effects on the operative dimensions of the firm performance could be influenced by factors such as the level of knowledge or capital intensity of the context (Lee *et al.*, 2018), or the level of knowledge-driven competition, i.e. a higher or lower external pressure to adopt KM, or the type of knowledge (i.e. tacit or explicit) that is most valuable for a certain business context (Heisig *et al.*, 2016). Even less is known about how leadership can impact on these factors. Thus, it is reasonable to propose the following explorative research: *how can leadership adapt KM systems and practices to diverse knowledge regimes in terms of knowledge and capital intensity or knowledge-driven competition or type of knowledge that is most valuable, in order to positively impact on the operative dimensions of the firm performance?*

5.4. Developing and exploiting the potential of a supportive KM culture

Finally, the yellow cluster considers the KM-leadership relationship adopting a comprehensive perspective, with the most inquired KM themes being business strategy, inputs, and activities. Its cultural approach clearly links and harmonises the principal orientations of the business strategy to the KM process and effectively connect the human and relational aspects with the necessity of KM practices routinisation (Flores *et al.*, 2012). Central to this approach is the possibility to structure and develop effective interactions to share knowledge internally. Nevertheless, the quality and quantity of these interactions are quite hard to manage and not always easily measurable (Kulkarni *et al.*, 2006; Zboralski, 2009). With this regard, further studies should investigate how leadership behaviours could effectively stimulate and orientate the frequency and the deepness of KS practices. Furthermore, the real organisational use of the shared knowledge is also relevant. In fact, if workers perceive no value in engaging in KS practice, they will not (Seba *et al.*, 2012). Thus, an exploitative RA could be aimed at investigating the following research questions: *how does leadership effectively influence quality and quantity of KS practices? Which are the most effective leadership behaviours in order to develop and signal the organisational importance of KM and KS practices and create a supportive internal environment and culture for these practices?*

Even though it covers almost all leadership-KM themes, the yellow cluster does not propose any specific indicator able to highlight the impact of a supporting culture for KM and an effective organisational learning on the innovation and operative performance of the firm. Indeed, many studies find that KM outcomes are achieved when an organisational learning has occurred (e.g. Flores *et al.*, 2012) or the overall competitive advantage is enhanced (Pérez López *et al.*, 2004; von Krogh *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, there is not deep investigation about how individual or group level results mediate the relationship between KM culture and firm performance. Therefore, these findings could expand by developing a set of appropriate performance indicators to measure the real impact of KM

on the innovation and operative performance of the firm and to investigate which social leverages and mechanisms are necessary to effectively translate organisational learning into operative performance (von Krogh *et al.*, 2012). Thus, it is reasonable to propose the following explorative research: *how can the impact of KM and organisational learning on the innovation and operative performance of the firm be measured? To what extent would leadership benefit from transparently connecting KM to business performance? Which cultural and social mechanisms mediate the relationship between KM and firm innovation and operative performance? How can leadership master these mechanisms?*

6. Conclusion

Though many contributions have thoroughly assessed and systematised the knowledge about KM (e.g., Heisig *et al.*, 2016; Inken, 2016), to our best knowledge, this is the first study that maps and systematically analyses the literature concerning the relationship between the two fields.

We also propose a tentative research agenda with: a) a set of exploitative RAs, i.e. directions that despite having already been investigated, may still present an interesting potential of further development and capitalisation; b) a set of explorative RAs, i.e. directions that have been investigated either not or to a very limited extent.

This paper has some limitations. First, the application of a protocol to select the papers to be included in our review may have been biased by the interpretation of the researcher. In line with the best methodological practices (e.g. Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), also applied to bibliometric KM studies (e.g. Fakhar-Manesh *et al.*, 2019; Gaviria-Marin *et al.*, 2019), we addressed this concern by using a very clear set of including criteria and performing multiple human subject selection processes whose reliability was confirmed by the fact that Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient always resulted > 0.80 . A second limitation lies in the decision of using Scopus as reference database. This second limitation was addressed by cross-checking the search string results on Web of Science and EBSCO Business Premier databases. Our hope is that this work will trigger a new debate on the role of leadership in shaping KM systems with regard to different conceptual levels (strategy, KM inputs, KM activities, KM outputs and outcomes).

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Appendix 1 – Full dataset (papers are ordered according to the total citation numbers) object of the bibliometric analysis.

#	Authors	Title	Year	Journal	TC
1	Nonaka I., Toyama R., Konno N.	SECI, Ba and Leadership: A Unified Model of Dynamic Knowledge Creation	2000	<i>Long Range Planning</i>	1743
2	Srivastava A., Bartol K.M., Locke E.A.	Empowering leadership in management teams: Effects on knowledge sharing, efficacy, and performance	2006	<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	598
3	Kulkarni U.R., Ravindran S., Freeze R.	A knowledge management success model: Theoretical development and empirical validation	2006	<i>Journal of Management Information Systems</i>	389
4	Dess G.G., Ireland R.D., Zahra S.A., Floyd S.W., Janney J.J., Lane P.J.	Emerging issues in corporate entrepreneurship	2003	<i>Journal of Management</i>	342
5	Bontis N., Fitz-enz J.	Intellectual capital ROI: A causal map of human capital antecedents and consequents	2002	<i>Journal of Intellectual Capital</i>	321
6	Sarin S., McDermott C.	The Effect of Team Leader Characteristics on Learning, Knowledge Application, and Performance of Cross-functional New Product Development Teams	2003	<i>Decision Sciences</i>	263
7	Bierly III P.E., Kessler E.H., Christensen E.W.	Organizational learning, knowledge and wisdom	2000	<i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i>	263
8	Bassellier G., Benbasat I., Reich B.H.	The Influence of Business Managers' IT Competence on Championing IT	2003	<i>Information Systems Research</i>	255
9	Takeishi A.	Knowledge partitioning in the interfirm division of labor: The case of automotive product development	2002	<i>Organization Science</i>	231
10	Yahya S., Goh W.-K.	Managing human resources toward achieving knowledge management	2002	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	225
11	Pan S.L., Scarbrough H.	Knowledge management in practice: An exploratory case study	1999	<i>Technology Analysis and Strategic Management</i>	201
12	Kim W.C., Mauborgne R.	Fair process: managing in the knowledge economy.	1997	<i>Harvard business review</i>	199
13	Kelloway E.K., Barling J.	Knowledge work as organizational behavior	2000	<i>International Journal of Management Reviews</i>	189
14	Yang J.-T.	Knowledge sharing: Investigating appropriate leadership roles and collaborative culture	2007	<i>Tourism Management</i>	180
15	Pérez López S., Manuel Montes Peón J., José Vázquez Ordás C.	Managing knowledge: The link between culture and organizational learning	2004	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	177
16	Pan S.L., Scarbrough H.	A Socio-Technical View of Knowledge Sharing at Buckman Laboratories	1998	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	157
17	Hung Y.-C., Huang S.-M., Lin Q.-P., Tsai M.-L.	Critical factors in adopting a knowledge management system for the pharmaceutical industry	2005	<i>Industrial Management and Data Systems</i>	155
18	Yeh Y.-J., Lai S.-Q., Ho C.-T.	Knowledge management enablers: A case study	2006	<i>Industrial Management and Data Systems</i>	154

19	Skyrme D., Amidon D.	The Knowledge Agenda	1997	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	153
20	von Krogh G., Nonaka I., Rechsteiner L.	Leadership in organizational knowledge creation: A review and framework	2012	<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	148
21	Ayas K., Zeniuk N.	Project-based Learning: Building Communities of Reflective Practitioners	2001	<i>Management Learning</i>	139
22	Gumusluolu L., Ilsev A.	Transformational leadership and organizational innovation: The roles of internal and external support for innovation	2009	<i>Journal of Product Innovation Management</i>	129
23	Van Ees H., Gabriellsson J., Huse M.	Toward a behavioral theory of boards and corporate governance	2009	<i>Corporate Governance: An International Review</i>	129
24	Donate M.J., Sánchez de Pablo J.D.	The role of knowledge-oriented leadership in knowledge management practices and innovation	2015	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	125
25	Lee P., Gillespie N., Mann L., Wearing A.	Leadership and trust: Their effect on knowledge sharing and team performance	2010	<i>Management Learning</i>	125
26	Donate M.J., Guadamillas F.	Organizational factors to support knowledge management and innovation	2011	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	115
27	Ho C.-T.	The relationship between knowledge management enablers and performance	2009	<i>Industrial Management and Data Systems</i>	115
28	Fullwood R., Rowley J., Delbridge R.	Knowledge sharing amongst academics in UK universities	2013	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	111
29	Bligh M.C., Pearce C.L., Kohles J.C.	The importance of self- and shared leadership in team based knowledge work: A meso-level model of leadership dynamics	2006	<i>Journal of Managerial Psychology</i>	111
30	Xue Y., Bradley J., Liang H.	Team climate, empowering leadership, and knowledge sharing	2011	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	107
31	Singh S.K.	Role of leadership in knowledge management: A study	2008	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	106
32	Brewster C., Sparrow P., Harris H.	Towards a new model of globalizing HRM	2005	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	104
33	Oliver S., Reddy Kandadi K.	How to develop knowledge culture in organizations? A multiple case study of large distributed organizations	2006	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	103
34	Politis J.D.	The relationship of various leadership styles to knowledge management	2001	<i>Leadership & Organization Development Journal</i>	102
35	Karahanna E., Preston D.	The effect of social capital of the relationship between the cio and top management team on firm performance	2013	<i>Journal of Management Information Systems</i>	95
36	Carmeli A., Gelbard R., Reiter-Palmon R.	Leadership, Creative Problem-Solving Capacity, and Creative Performance: The Importance of Knowledge Sharing	2013	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	94
37	Eppler M.J., Sukowski O.	Managing Team Knowledge: Core Processes, Tools and Enabling Factors	2000	<i>European Management Journal</i>	94
38	Zhang A.Y., Tsui A.S., Wang D.X.	Leadership behaviors and group creativity in Chinese organizations: The role of group processes	2011	<i>Leadership Quarterly</i>	93
39	de Vries R.E., Bakker-Pieper A., Oostenveld W.	Leadership = communication? The relations of leaders' communication styles with leadership styles, knowledge sharing and leadership outcomes	2010	<i>Journal of Business and Psychology</i>	93

40	Rowley J., Kupiec-Teahan B., Leeming E.	Customer community and co-creation: A case study	2007	<i>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</i>	93
41	Smith M., Busi M., Ball P., Van Der Meer R.	Factors influencing an organisation's ability to manage innovation: A structured literature review and conceptual model	2008	<i>International Journal of Innovation Management</i>	92
42	Kakabadse N.K., Kouzmin A., Kakabadse A.	From tacit knowledge to knowledge management: Leveraging invisible assets	2001	<i>Knowledge and Process Management</i>	90
43	Mason D., Pauleen D.J.	Perceptions of knowledge management: A qualitative analysis	2003	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	87
44	Chuang C.-H., Jackson S.E., Jiang Y.	Can Knowledge-Intensive Teamwork Be Managed? Examining the Roles of HRM Systems, Leadership, and Tacit Knowledge	2016	<i>Journal of Management</i>	85
45	Mittal S., Dhar R.L.	Transformational leadership and employee creativity: Mediating role of creative self-efficacy and moderating role of knowledge sharing	2015	<i>Management Decision</i>	79
46	Dooley L., Kirk D.	University-industry collaboration: Grafting the entrepreneurial paradigm onto academic structures	2007	<i>European Journal of Innovation Management</i>	78
47	Birasnav M.	Knowledge management and organizational performance in the service industry: The role of transformational leadership beyond the effects of transactional leadership	2014	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	76
48	Flores L.G., Zheng W., Rau D., Thomas C.H.	Organizational Learning: Subprocess Identification, Construct Validation, and an Empirical Test of Cultural Antecedents	2012	<i>Journal of Management</i>	74
49	Nguyen H.N., Mohamed S.	Leadership behaviors, organizational culture and knowledge management practices: An empirical investigation	2011	<i>Journal of Management Development</i>	73
50	Nambisan S., Wilemon D.	Software development and new product development: potentials for cross-domain knowledge sharing	2000	<i>IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management</i>	73
51	Hoon Song J., Kolb J.A., Hee Lee U., Kyoung Kim H.	Role of transformational leadership in effective organizational knowledge creation practices: Mediating effects of employees' work engagement	2012	<i>Human Resource Development Quarterly</i>	71
52	Marcinkus Murphy W.	Reverse mentoring at work: Fostering cross-generational learning and developing millennial leaders	2012	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	69
53	Zboralski K.	Antecedents of knowledge sharing in communities of practice	2009	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	69
54	Crawford C.B.	Effects of transformational leadership and organizational position on knowledge management	2005	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	67
55	Wee J.C.N., Chua A.Y.K.	The peculiarities of knowledge management processes in SMEs: The case of Singapore	2013	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	65
56	Wei C.C., Choy C.S., Yew W.K.	Is the Malaysian telecommunication industry ready for knowledge management implementation?	2009	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	64
57	Carmeli A., Atwater L., Levi A.	How leadership enhances employees' knowledge sharing: The intervening roles of relational and organizational identification	2011	<i>Journal of Technology Transfer</i>	63
58	Kets De Vries M.F.R.	Leadership group coaching in action: The Zen of creating high performance teams	2005	<i>Academy of Management Executive</i>	63

59	Dong Y., Bartol K.M., Zhang Z.-X., Li C.	Enhancing employee creativity via individual skill development and team knowledge sharing: Influences of dual-focused transformational leadership	2017	<i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	60
60	Gloet M.	Knowledge management and the links to HRM: Developing leadership and management capabilities to support sustainability	2006	<i>Management Research News</i>	59
61	Birasnav M., Rangnekar S., Dalpati A.	Transformational leadership and human capital benefits: The role of knowledge management	2011	<i>Leadership & Organization Development Journal</i>	58
62	Jacobs G., Van Witteloostuijn A., Christe-Zeyse J.	A theoretical framework of organizational change	2013	<i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i>	57
63	Sutherland I.	Arts-based methods in leadership development: Affording aesthetic workspaces, reflexivity and memories with momentum	2013	<i>Management Learning</i>	56
64	Badri M.A., Selim H., Alshare K., Grandon E.E., Younis H., Abdulla M.	The Baldrige education criteria for performance excellence framework: Empirical test and validation	2006	<i>International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management</i>	54
65	Politis J.D.	Transformational and transactional leadership enabling (disabling) knowledge acquisition of self-managed teams: the consequences for performance	2002	<i>Leadership & Organization Development Journal</i>	54
66	Martins E.C., Meyer H.W.J.	Organizational and behavioral factors that influence knowledge retention	2012	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	53
67	Yang J.-T.	Antecedents and consequences of knowledge sharing in international tourist hotels	2010	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	53
68	Seba I., Rowley J., Delbridge R.	Knowledge sharing in the Dubai Police Force	2012	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	51
69	Lin H.-E., McDonough Iii E.F.	Investigating the role of leadership and organizational culture in fostering innovation ambidexterity	2011	<i>IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management</i>	51
70	Linderman K., Schroeder R.G., Sanders J.	A Knowledge Framework Underlying Process Management	2010	<i>Decision Sciences</i>	50
71	Peterson H.C.	Transformational supply chains and the 'wicked problem' of sustainability: Aligning knowledge, innovation, entrepreneurship, and leadership	2009	<i>Journal on Chain and Network Science</i>	49
72	Jain V., Wadhwa S., Deshmukh S.G.	Supplier selection using fuzzy association rules mining approach	2007	<i>International Journal of Production Research</i>	49
73	Ma Z., Qi L., Wang K.	Knowledge sharing in Chinese construction project teams and its affecting factors: An empirical study	2008	<i>Chinese Management Studies</i>	48
74	Hsu S.-H., Shen H.-P.	Knowledge management and its relationship with TQM	2005	<i>Total Quality Management and Business Excellence</i>	47
75	Yang L.-R., Huang C.-F., Hsu T.-J.	Knowledge leadership to improve project and organizational performance	2014	<i>International Journal of Project Management</i>	46
76	Grimaldi M., Cricelli L., Rogo F.	A methodology to assess value creation in communities of innovation	2012	<i>Journal of Intellectual Capital</i>	46
77	Tchokogué A., Bareil C., Duguay C.R.	Key lessons from the implementation of an ERP at Pratt & Whitney Canada	2005	<i>International Journal of Production Economics</i>	46

78	Handzic M.	Integrated socio-technical knowledge management model: An empirical evaluation	2011	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	45
79	Cater III J.J., Justis R.T.	The Development of Successors From Followers to Leaders in Small Family Firms: An Exploratory Study	2009	<i>Family Business Review</i>	45
80	Lakshman C.	Organizational knowledge leadership: A grounded theory approach	2007	<i>Leadership and Organization Development Journal</i>	45
81	Sun P.	Five critical knowledge management organizational themes	2010	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	44
82	Gratton L., Voigt A., Erickson T.	Bridging faultlines in diverse teams	2007	<i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i>	44
83	Kodama M.	New knowledge creation through leadership-based strategic community - A case of new product development in IT and multimedia business fields	2005	<i>Technovation</i>	44
84	Inkinen H.	Review of empirical research on knowledge management practices and firm performance	2016	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	43
85	Viitala R.	Towards knowledge leadership	2004	<i>Leadership & Organization Development Journal</i>	43
86	Jakubik M.	Exploring the knowledge landscape: Four emerging views of knowledge	2007	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	42
87	Kodama M.	Innovation and knowledge creation through leadership-based strategic community: Case study on high-tech company in Japan	2007	<i>Technovation</i>	42
88	Søndergaard S., Kerr M., Clegg C.	Sharing knowledge: Contextualising socio-technical thinking and practice	2007	<i>Learning Organization</i>	40
89	Fedor D.B., Ghosh S., Caldwell S.D., Maurer T.J., Singhal V.R.	The Effects of Knowledge Management on Team Members' Ratings of Project Success and Impact	2003	<i>Decision Sciences</i>	40
90	Pinho I., Rego A., Cunha M.P.	Improving knowledge management processes: A hybrid positive approach	2012	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	39
91	Lord R.G., Shondrick S.J.	Leadership and knowledge: Symbolic, connectionist, and embodied perspectives	2011	<i>Leadership Quarterly</i>	39
92	Edge K.	Powerful public sector knowledge management: A school district example	2005	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	39
93	Osarenkhoe A.	A study of inter-firm dynamics between competition and cooperation - A coopetition strategy	2010	<i>Journal of Database Marketing and Customer Strategy Management</i>	38
94	Dasgupta M., Gupta R.K.	Innovation in organizations: A review of the role of organizational learning and knowledge management	2009	<i>Global Business Review</i>	38
95	Parolia N., Goodman S., Li Y., Jiang J.J.	Mediators between coordination and IS project performance	2007	<i>Information and Management</i>	38
96	Gottschalk P., Terje Karlsen J.	A comparison of leadership roles in internal IT projects versus outsourcing projects	2005	<i>Industrial Management & Data Systems</i>	38
97	Masa'deh R., Obeidat B.Y., Tarhini A.	A Jordanian empirical study of the associations among transformational leadership, transactional leadership, knowledge sharing, job performance, and firm performance: A structural equation modelling approach	2016	<i>Journal of Management Development</i>	37

98	Wu J., Chen X.	Leaders' social ties, knowledge acquisition capability and firm competitive advantage	2012	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Management</i>	37
99	Magnier-Watanabe R., Benton C., Senoo D.	A study of knowledge management enablers across countries	2011	<i>Knowledge Management Research and Practice</i>	37
100	Leach L.S., Myrtle R.C., Weaver F.A., Dasu S.	Assessing the performance of surgical teams	2009	<i>Health Care Management Review</i>	37
101	Li G., Shang Y., Liu H., Xi Y.	Differentiated transformational leadership and knowledge sharing: A cross-level investigation	2014	<i>European Management Journal</i>	36
102	Menguc B., Auh S., Uslu A.	Customer knowledge creation capability and performance in sales teams	2013	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	36
103	Lewis D.	Five years on – the organizational culture saga revisited	2002	<i>Leadership & Organization Development Journal</i>	35
104	Farris G.F., Cordero R.	Leading your scientists and engineers 2002	2002	<i>Research Technology Management</i>	35
105	Faraj S., Kudaravalli S., Wasko M.	Leading collaboration in online communities	2015	<i>MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems</i>	34
106	Kim Y.-M., Newby-Bennett D., Song H.-J.	Knowledge sharing and institutionalism in the healthcare industry	2012	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	34
107	Lakshman C.	Postacquisition cultural integration in mergers & acquisitions: A knowledge-based approach	2011	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	34
108	Chawla D., Joshi H.	Knowledge management initiatives in Indian public and private sector organizations	2010	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	34
109	Simonin B.L., Özsoymer A.	Knowledge processes and learning outcomes in MNCS: An empirical investigation of the role of HRM practices in foreign subsidiaries	2009	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	34
110	Lakshman C.	Organizational knowledge leadership: An empirical examination of knowledge management by top executive leaders	2009	<i>Leadership and Organization Development Journal</i>	34
111	Lee A.H.I., Chen H.H., Tong Y.	Developing new products in a network with efficiency and innovation	2008	<i>International Journal of Production Research</i>	32
112	Smith P.A.C.	Knowledge sharing and strategic capital. The importance and identification of opinion leaders: The importance and identification of opinion leaders	2005	<i>Learning Organization</i>	32
113	Ingelgård A., Roth J., Styhre A., Shani A.B.R.	Dynamic learning capability and actionable knowledge creation: Clinical R&D in a pharmaceutical company	2002	<i>The Learning Organization</i>	32
114	Berglund H., Sandström C.	Business model innovation from an open systems perspective: Structural challenges and managerial solutions	2013	<i>International Journal of Product Development</i>	31
115	Sutanto J., Tan C.-H., Battistini B., Phang C.W.	Emergent leadership in virtual collaboration settings: A social network analysis approach	2011	<i>Long Range Planning</i>	31
116	Teerajetgul W., Charoenngam C.	Factors inducing knowledge creation: Empirical evidence from Thai construction projects	2006	<i>Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management</i>	31
117	Retna K.S., Ng P.T.	Communities of practice: Dynamics and success factors	2011	<i>Leadership and Organization Development Journal</i>	30
118	Frost D.	'Teacher leadership': Values and voice	2008	<i>School Leadership and Management</i>	30

119	Söderlund J.	Competence dynamics and learning processes in project-based firms: Shifting, adapting and leveraging	2008	<i>International Journal of Innovation Management</i>	29
120	Pham N.T., Swierczek F.W.	Facilitators of organizational learning in design	2006	<i>Learning Organization</i>	29
121	Kodama M.	Customer value creation through knowledge creation with customers: Case studies of IT and multimedia businesses in Japan	2005	<i>International Journal of Innovation and Learning</i>	29
122	Chang J., Bai X., Li J.J.	The influence of leadership on product and process innovations in China: The contingent role of knowledge acquisition capability	2015	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	28
123	Kidd J., Li X., Richter F.-J.	Learning and trust in supply chain management	2003	<i>Management Decision</i>	28
124	Ward A.	Getting strategic value from constellations of communities	2000	<i>Strategy & Leadership</i>	28
125	Liu Y., DeFrank R.S.	Self-interest and knowledge-sharing intentions: The impacts of transformational leadership climate and HR practices	2013	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	27
126	Teerajetgul W., Chareonngam C., Wethyavivorn P.	Key knowledge factors in Thai construction practice	2009	<i>International Journal of Project Management</i>	27
127	Gowen III C.R., Henagan S.C., McFadden K.L.	Knowledge management as a mediator for the efficacy of transformational leadership and quality management initiatives in U.S. health care	2009	<i>Health Care Management Review</i>	27
128	Martin J.S., Marion R.	Higher education leadership roles in knowledge processing	2005	<i>Learning Organization</i>	27
129	Wei Choo C., Johnston R.	Innovation in the knowing organization: A case study of an e-commerce initiative	2004	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	27
130	Reinmoeller P.	The knowledge-based view of the firm and upper echelon theory: exploring the agency of TMT	2004	<i>International Journal of Learning and Intellectual Capital</i>	27
131	Iles P., Yolles M.	Across the great divide: HRD, technology translation, and knowledge migration in bridging the knowledge gap between SMEs and Universities	2002	<i>Human Resource Development International</i>	27
132	Han S.H., Seo G., Yoon S.W., Yoon D.-Y.	Transformational leadership and knowledge sharing: Mediating roles of employee's empowerment, commitment, and citizenship behaviors	2016	<i>Journal of Workplace Learning</i>	26
133	Valmohammadi C., Ahmadi M.	The impact of knowledge management practices on organizational performance: A balanced scorecard approach	2015	<i>Journal of Enterprise Information Management</i>	26
134	Huang Q., Davison R.M., Liu H., Gu J.	The impact of leadership style on knowledge-sharing intentions in China	2008	<i>Journal of Global Information Management</i>	26
135	Cavaliere V., Lombardi S., Giustiniano L.	Knowledge sharing in knowledge-intensive manufacturing firms. An empirical study of its enablers	2015	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	25
136	Loke S.-P., Downe A.G., Sambasivan M., Khalid K.	A structural approach to integrating total quality management and knowledge management with supply chain learning	2012	<i>Journal of Business Economics and Management</i>	25
137	Jayasingam S., Ansari M.A., Jantan M.	Influencing knowledge workers: The power of top management	2010	<i>Industrial Management and Data Systems</i>	25
138	Abdul-Rahman H., Yahya I.A., Berawi M.A., Wah L.W.	Conceptual delay mitigation model using a project learning approach in practice	2008	<i>Construction Management and Economics</i>	25

139	Bundred S.	Solutions to silos: Joining up knowledge	2006	<i>Public Money and Management</i>	25
140	Tung H.L., Chang Y.H.	Effects of empowering leadership on performance in management team: Mediating effects of knowledge sharing and team cohesion	2011	<i>Journal of Chinese Human Resources Management</i>	24
141	Lampel J., Scarbrough H., Macmillan S.	Managing through Projects in Knowledge-based Environments. Special Issue Introduction by the Guest Editors	2008	<i>Long Range Planning</i>	24
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