

3. INTEGRATING THE COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNED INTO KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND PLANS

3.1 Knowledge management strategies

Intensively and largely discussed in academia, knowledge management is still a practice to be developed at strategic levels by many organizations despite the generic approval of its utility. The importance of explicit knowledge management approaches in practice is a constant discussion in the international managerial environment, as the imperative of innovation has become the norm for companies' survival and / or expansion in the last two decades. A particularly important factor favouring the development of the KM discussions has been, undoubtedly, the exponential growth of ICT, which has made simpler the access to information, the knowledge capture, share, and analysis. There are several reasons for adopting knowledge management practices, even in the absence of defined strategies assumed and formalized by managers, such as (OECD/Statistics Canada, 2004):

- a) to accelerate and improve knowledge transfer to new workers;
- b) following merger or acquisition;
- c) to ensure knowledge access to all international sites of multinational organizations;
- d) to improve the capture of knowledge from exterior sources of the organizations;
- e) to protect the organisation from loss of knowledge due to workers' departure;
- f) to identify and/or to protect strategic knowledge present in the organisation;
- g) to capture workers' undocumented knowledge (know-how);
- h) to ease collaborative work of projects or teams that are remote;
- i) to improve sharing or transferring of knowledge with partners in strategic alliances;
- j) to avoid information overload problems within the organisation;
- k) to help managers to focus their attention to key information;
- l) to train workers for specific reasons;
- m) to encourage managers to share knowledge as a tool for professional promotion of their subordinates;
- n) to increase workers' acceptance of innovations / change management strategies and plans;
- o) to update the organisation on KM tools or practices used by competitors;
- p) to capture and / or share knowledge from / with customers.

In the light of the ICT development, KM practices are subject to an unprecedented development, as a direct result of the more facile access to technology as well as its disruptive influence on organisations passing from rigid structures and processes to fluid ones. As noted by Laihonon & Huhtamäki (2020), "organisational fluidity refers to the increasing importance of flexibility and dynamics and decreasing importance of organisational boundaries, structures, processes" visible mainly through "the increased autonomy of individuals" (idem). In such contexts, KM should become more than a set of practices, efficient knowledge strategies needing to be open, dynamic, and considering both organizational objectives, collaborative interfaces, and open data. An important factor in promoting KM systems from tacit tactics to explicit strategies remains, however, the support of the top management through transformational leadership (Novak et al., 2020) – an aspect even more desirable in the case of future organizational learning of the Covid-19 pandemic's lessons. As shown by Hsieh et al. (2020), KM strategies after the Covid-19 pandemic will depend not only on a rigorous collecting of the information about the lessons learned, but also on the usage of an appropriate prediction framework to examine potential implementation.

3.2 Integrating the Covid-19 pandemic's lessons into KM strategies of businesses

Knowledge management is the third most important aspect perceived by Human Resources managers and talents worldwide after well-being and belonging when asked about their organizational preparedness for the future, mainly in the context of the growing usage of machines at work: "75% of surveyed organizations say creating and preserving knowledge across evolving

workforces is important or very important for their success over the next 12–18 months, but only 9% say they are very ready to address this trend” (Deloitte, 2020, p. 63). The new ways of working catalysed by technology and the physical distance required by authorities in order to contain the Covid-19 virus make the knowledge management need even more urgent. However, there are barriers in implementing at, such as various organizational silos, lack of incentives, lack of technology structure, frequent shifting of which people are in what roles at what time and compliance headwinds (Deloitte, 2020, p. 67).

In order for businesses to integrate the lessons learned after the Covid-19 pandemic and mentioned above into functional knowledge management strategies, a comprehensive framework is needed in order to capture and organize tacit knowledge into explicit one that is put in place. Such an approach is possible as a direct consequence of the current accessibility of technology through various digital solutions and is mandatory for companies trying to learn how to pass from post-pandemic survival to agile resilience and reorganization and it could rely on a structure constructed on four major components of KM (figure 1): a) collecting information and organizing a repository of knowledge on b) a collaboration platform that enables c) communication and networking in order to d) create a real culture of knowledge.



Figure 1. Main elements of knowledge management for Covid-19 pandemic's learned lessons

Source: authors

In our opinion, such an endeavour could be accomplished as follows (points a, b and c below are to be defined only if KM is not already a strategic line of action in the organization):

- a) declaring by the top management the knowledge management as a key element of the overall managerial strategy;
- b) including KM as a distinct part of the managerial strategy and of the annual plans of actions;
- c) allocating KM roles to specific employees and/or managers;
- d) creating a distinct Covid-19 pandemic learned lessons platform (or a dedicated section into existing KM platform if it is the case). The lessons learned should be clearly marked where they match functionally (i.e. departments, situations, etc.), even if they can be first categorized in generic dimensions as the ones mentioned above. Correct coding and allocation to the right people is a pre-condition as mentioned by previous research (Mohapatra et al., 2016). User-friendly design of the platform should also be mandatory in order to make the usage as comfortable as possible;
- e) disseminating the importance and the usefulness of the new constructed database constantly in cascade to managers and employees through internal communication actions;
- f) defining who is in charge for completing and updating data in the platform (roles and access levels);
- g) defining who is in charge for promoting the usage of the platform internally;
- h) creating organizational incentives for the completion, update, and usage of the information accessible in the platform;
- i) defining various levels of access to the knowledge from the platform according to management levels and to roles in the enterprise;
- j) building future response capacity based on the Covid-19 pandemic's learned lessons and continuously communicating them as based on these lessons learned;

k) finally, creating and developing a knowledge culture at both organizational and cultural levels starting from the lessons learned.

The limitations of the above proposed solution, beyond the methodological ones (as it is a not tested empirical proposal), derive from the fact that it doesn't integrate concretely the ineffable knowledge acquired on organizational cultures' shifts and relationships with stakeholders, even if they are real as we've seen above. Moreover, some concrete practical information on concrete solutions on how to reduce costs effectively while modelling scenarios that have not existed before could be understood either as simplistic or as too theoretical. Nevertheless, business ecosystems are expected to be transformed after the pandemics and expectations for more responsible organizations are favoured by the pandemic reality – therefore, adequate knowledge is a must.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As in the case of any transformative event that happens at a large scale, hopes are also in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic that at its end, things will go back to the old normal. However, considering the amplitude of the pandemic and the simultaneous existence of technologies that enable collaborations and algorithms at an unprecedented scale, some of the current disruptive changes in the way people work and businesses are managed are to be considered for the future. Knowledge accumulation, integration, and reconfiguration are generic elements to be integrated in every business strategy, but they tend to become even more important after such a challenging test as the one of a pandemic with direct effects on markets, consumers and employees.

For the very first time in the last decades, managers are confronted to the immediate need to integrate "nice to know" concepts as the one of knowledge management into everyday practices and long-term thinking. Our paper is evidence and literature based, and it should be seen more like a manifesto for the integration of KM into managerial strategic thinking and operational acting starting with the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. Platforms, algorithms, digital collaborative solutions are here to stay and the current pandemic has created the ideal framework for putting them to work in order to enhance knowledge collecting, sharing and internalizing: in such times, KM is needed more for survival than for development, therefore it is sensed as urgent. Once integrated into strategy and practices, it will become a source for innovation and development. Finally, future research should go beyond empirical discussions towards surveys on the actual implementation of the lessons learned after the Covid-19 pandemic into business strategies.

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