

Exploring the Intersection of Knowledge Management and Spirituality in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the fundamental role of teaching, research, and interaction with society, which are the three main vertices in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. HEIs can enhance their sustainability and competitiveness by effectively managing the knowledge of each collaborator and creating more value. In this way, HEIs lay the foundation for sustainable growth and extend their competitive advantages. However, it requires motivated and committed collaborators aligned with the mission, values, and objectives of the organization. Therefore, we suggest that the incorporation of spirituality can promote innovation, organizational sustainability, and increase knowledge management practices. To address the research gap on the integration of KM and spirituality in HEIs, we conducted a literature review using three databases, Web of Science, Scopus, and EBSCO. The review revealed that the integration of KM and organizational spirituality has not been studied in an integrated way. As such, we present suggestions for future research and practice, emphasizing the need for HEIs to focus on managing knowledge and incorporating spirituality into their practices to enhance their competitiveness and sustainability. Accordingly, this study contributes to the literature by awarding and discussing KM and spirituality as two key components of HEIs. Once, incorporating spirituality can promote innovation, organizational sustainability, and increase knowledge management practices. Moreover, this study provides valuable insights for HEIs to improve their management practices, promote sustainability, and enhance their competitive advantages.

Keywords: Knowledge management; Knowledge management practices, Spirituality, Organizational spirituality, Education, Higher education institutions

1. Introduction

Knowledge is seen as a key source of competitive advantage within an organization (Feiz et al., 2019; Dei and Van Der Walt, 2020), as it provides new opportunities and enables problem solving (Feiz et al., 2019). In this way, and in this knowledge society all organizations operate in a global economy that is characterized by intense competition, economic interdependence and collaboration (Van Laar et al., 2017). Thus, organizations are increasingly humanized and dedicated to determining values at the individual and organizational levels. In this sense, Knowledge Management (KM) is an important topic for organizations and specifically for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), whose continuous improvement strategy involves achieving international standards of quality and excellence, which is only achieved if they practice an effective KM (Moscoso-Zea and Lujan-Mora, 2017).

However, rational knowledge is not enough to ensure that appropriate decisions and actions are taken for organizations to achieve the competitiveness they desire (Rocha and Pinheiro, 2021). In this way, and so that HEIs fulfill their function of contributing to the economic and sustainable development of any country (Madboulya et al., 2021; Roopaa and Gopinath, 2021) it is important to integrate spirituality, since it inspires innovation, enhances productive work, emotional intelligence, employee involvement and loyalty (Alomar et al., 2022). That is, in HEIs, an environment marked by spirituality is favorable to the creation of knowledge, which on the one hand promotes efficient knowledge management and on the other hand enhances trust and promotes sharing (Shahzadi, 2017).

This paper aims to analyze the state of the art of research on KM and spirituality in HEIs. The objectives are to identify existing literature that addresses KM and spirituality in HEIs and to analyze the practices of KM and spirituality in HEIs present in the literature. By achieving these objectives, this work aims to contribute to the understanding of how HEIs can effectively manage knowledge and enhance their competitiveness by integrating spirituality.

2. Insights on Knowledge Management and Spirituality in HEIs

As IHEs represent the highest level of learning and education, as education has as its main focus the student as a whole, with all their facets and dimensions, from intellectual to professional, psychological, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Kassaye, 2018). They are the places where students develop in various areas and where research is

promoted. In other words, they are a community of people committed to studying, to research, in a place that is a universal source of knowledge (Kassaye, 2018). Similarly, they also seek to instill confidence in individuals, in order to increase their motivation, and thereby improve organizational capacity, opportunities to learn and acquire knowledge to obtain positive results (Dei and Van der Walt, 2020).

Moreover, IHEs are one of the few places where knowledge is used by all employees. They are responsible for the production and transfer of knowledge, so they must have a greater concern for knowledge management (Asiedui et al, 2022; Saleh et al, 2018). Rowley (2000) points out that the norms, values, and practices associated with the creation, sharing, and dissemination of knowledge in IHEs are complex, so in line with knowledge management, organizational spirituality also has strategic importance. These should encourage the spirituality of their employees, motivating them to deal with their own knowledge (Lakshmi and Das, 2021). Although IHEs have not yet explored these themes in depth, as other organizations have done (Ramachandran et al, 2009; Ojo, 2016; Marouf and Argarwal, 2016; Lakshmi and Das, 2021; Asiedui et al, 2022), we see from the analysis carried out that there is already a concern with knowledge sharing and with existing knowledge management practices in IHEs. However, with regard to spirituality, this is not so evident.

Organizational spirituality is often considered when discussing the organizational culture of IES. Also, spiritual intellectual capital is interpreted as encompassing the spiritual values of the organization, including adaptability, commitment, motivation, trust, responsibility, respect, justice, receptivity, integrity, mutualism, benevolence, humanism, and generativity (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004). These values, in order to be efficiently practiced, must be present in the organizational culture and serve as drivers of proactive, entrepreneurial, and creative behavior capable of leading to innovation and sustainability. Furthermore, IHEs with a more dynamic organizational culture advocate an atmosphere where all employees feel truly integrated, where everyone identifies with their fellow collaborators. If different employees have the capacity for acceptance, a spirit of collaboration, and a sense of responsibility, then we are faced with a voluntary environment for sharing knowledge.

Nevertheless, little attention has been given to the connection between organizational spirituality, that is, an organizational culture marked by higher order values focused on individual well-being, the well-being of others, and knowledge management (Khari and Sinha, 2018). To be effective, spirituality needs to be integrated into the organizational culture and reflected in everyday organizational practices. And this is only possible if the administration and the administrative council adopt it as part of their vision, so that its benefits grow for employees and the organization (Dandona, 2013). That is, organizational spirituality is influenced by the environment, organizational culture, mission, vision, and organizational values (Rocha and Pinheiro, 2020). Likewise, Shahzadi (2017) points out that IHEs that possess an environment marked by spirituality are conducive to the creation of knowledge, promote trust among team members, which increases knowledge sharing.

3. Research Design

We conducted a systematic literature review to address our research goals. A literature review article provides a comprehensive view of the literature related to a topic, identifies current knowledge as well as existing gaps at the research level (Paul and Criado, 2020). The procedure is shown in Figure 1.

4. Analysis of the Results

In this section, we report an in-depth analysis of the systematic review outcomes to provide a comprehensive view of the latest findings and insights regarding KM and spirituality in IES. Through our analysis, we identify the most valuable findings and trends in the literature and offer critical insights that can inform future research and practice. Overall, the research includes themes as spiritual knowledge and intellectual capital in HEIs. A compilation of the research, considering spirituality and KM in HEIs is provided below in Table 1.

Saad and Haron (2013) conducted a qualitative study with a sample of 15 academics to explore and describe the types of knowledge shared among academics in a public university in Malaysia. The authors adopted Van den Hooff and De Ridder's (2004) definition of knowledge sharing as "a process where individuals mutually exchange their knowledge and together create new knowledge" (p. 118). They concluded that categorizing/classifying knowledge is extremely important for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), particularly as academic knowledge producers, as it facilitates the process of capturing, using, sharing, and retrieving the knowledge necessary for faculty.

They found that academics share three types of knowledge: corporate knowledge, social knowledge, and codified knowledge. (i) Corporate knowledge pertains to the organization's core activities and management

procedures, including disciplinary knowledge (knowledge of the discipline and research) and operational knowledge (knowledge of the institution's policies and practices). Social knowledge refers to knowledge related to shared beliefs, ethics, norms, culture, values, entertainment, national political affairs, and common interests, with prevailing knowledge of culture, spiritual knowledge, hobby knowledge, and common interest knowledge. Finally, (iii) codified knowledge is shared electronically (photos, videos, conference slides) and/or in writing (research articles, lecture notes, tutorials, books, among others) (Saad and Haron, 2013).

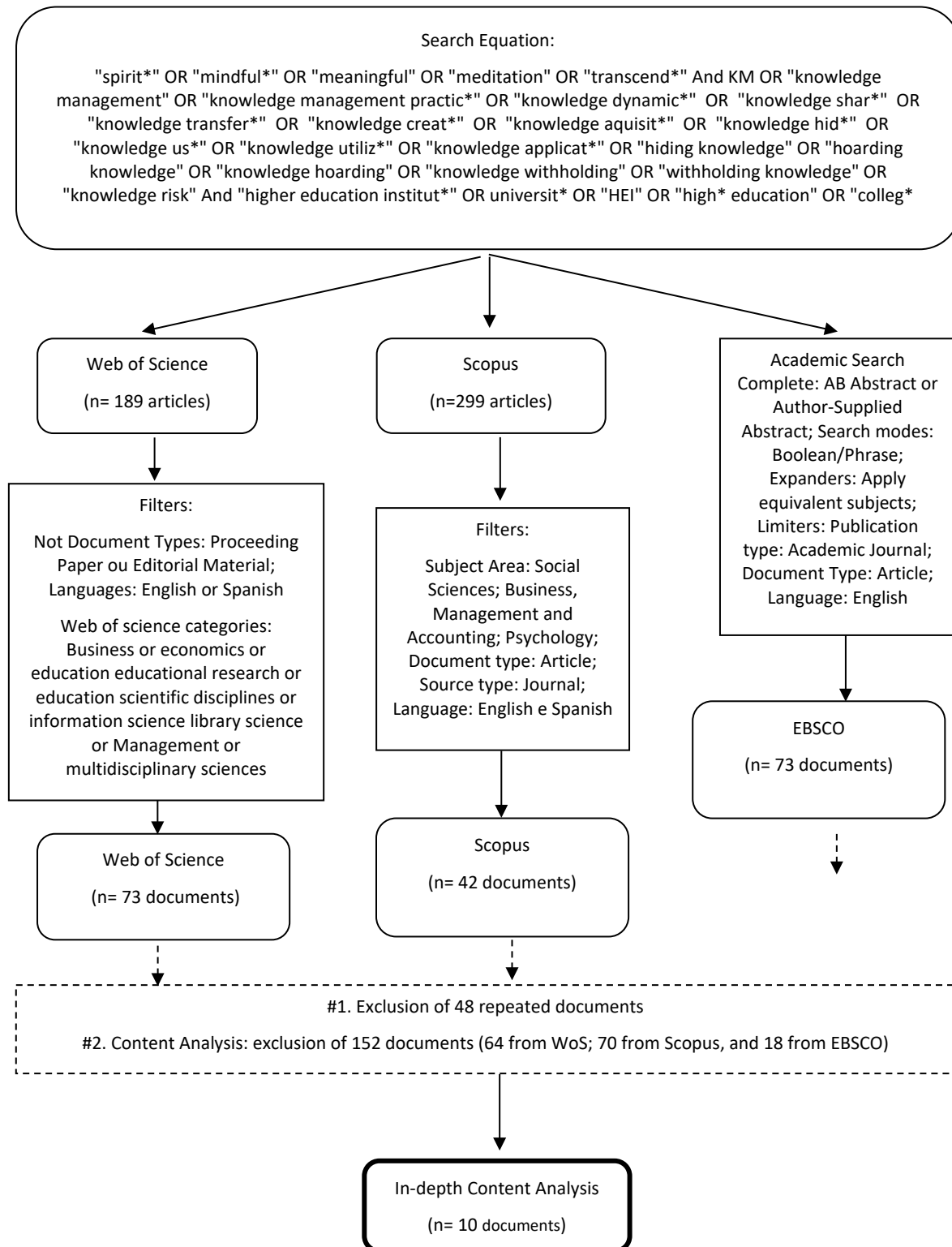


Figure 1: Structure of the Systematic Literature Review

Feiz et al. (2019) conducted a study on the effect of knowledge sharing on the psychological empowerment of faculty members at an Iranian university. They distributed three questionnaires to 350 faculty members and found that knowledge sharing positively affects psychological empowerment and organizational memory. The authors suggest that planning for knowledge sharing among faculty members can improve resource management and develop knowledge-based skills. They also encourage universities to incentivize knowledge sharing to increase confidence, effectiveness, and productivity among faculty members.

Nawaz et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of a systematic knowledge management approach in universities due to their role in creating and transferring knowledge and dependence on and vulnerability to knowledge erosion. Their study focuses on knowledge management practices in Europe, Asia, and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, analyzing perception, gathering, creation, sharing, dissemination, and retention of knowledge. Using a quantitative methodology and a sample of professors, the authors conclude that there are similarities between most of the practices analyzed, except for knowledge gathering and retention, where considerable differences exist. Furthermore, the authors suggest the need for integrated knowledge management systems in universities.

Leon and Vătămănescu (2015) explores how storytelling is used as a knowledge strategy among faculty members in Romanian HEI. The qualitative study involved 29 professors who were selected through snowball sampling, based on their two-year professorship and professional experience in the private sector. They highlight the critical role of human and structural capital in knowledge creation, acquisition, and sharing, and recommend storytelling as an easy-to-implement and cost-effective knowledge strategy.

The authors propose storytelling as a knowledge strategy that is easy to implement and has lower costs compared to other strategies. Storytelling involves the sharing of various types of knowledge, such as cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. Cognitive knowledge encompasses an understanding of the work environment by transmitting tacit and explicit knowledge based on shared mental models. Emotional knowledge enables employees to know what others expect of them, promoting cultural adaptation, while spiritual knowledge transmits norms and values from generation to generation, allowing employees to internalize organizational culture and stimulate its adaptation. Storytelling allows faculty members to share their experiences inside and outside the classroom, demonstrating availability and openness to hearing their colleagues' experiences.

In sum, the study by Leon and Vătămănescu (2015) highlights the importance of leveraging storytelling as a knowledge strategy in HEIs. This strategy has the potential to bridge the gap between explicit and tacit knowledge by creating a platform for knowledge sharing, thus promoting innovation and strategic renewal. It is crucial for HEIs to recognize and prioritize storytelling as an effective knowledge strategy to unlock the full potential of their intellectual capital. By doing so, they can cultivate a culture of collaboration and learning that fosters the development of a knowledge-based society.

Bejinaru (2017) and Bratianu and Bejinaru (2017) propose a new construct of intellectual capital structure using the multi-field theory of knowledge and the concept of non-linear integrators. They identify knowledge strategies that can increase intellectual capital in HEIs. The authors introduce three new categories of intellectual capital: rational, emotional, and spiritual. They suggest that HEIs should focus on analyzing emotional and spiritual intellectual capital.

The authors propose four knowledge strategies that can increase intellectual capital. These strategies include creating knowledge through a rewards system to encourage research, sharing knowledge to increase operational intellectual capital, acquiring new knowledge from external sources, and exchanging knowledge within a university network through the exchange of students and faculty. The goal is to identify and overcome barriers to knowledge sharing in order to improve university strategies and increase intellectual capital. However, they also suggest that further research is needed to understand the impact of these strategies on intellectual capital and to develop ways to implement them in HEIs according to their mission and vision (Bejinaru, 2017; Bratianu and Bejinaru, 2017).

Bratianu and Vătămănescu (2018) provided a new approach of the entropic knowledge dynamics and investigate the impact of the decision-making process. Through a quantitative methodology using a survey of 700 management and business administration students, they present the multifield theory of the knowledge based on the energy metaphor of knowledge. They attribute to the three forms of energy: mechanical, thermal, and electric, the three forms of knowledge: rational, emotional, and spiritual. The entropic dynamics of knowledge assumes that these three forms of knowledge are in continuous interaction, and any one of them can transform into any form of knowledge. In this context, for Bratianu and Vătămănescu (2018), the decision-making process

is not purely rational but results from the contributions of rational, emotional, and spiritual knowledge, as well as the entropic dynamics of each of these. The authors' findings suggest that the decision-making process should consider the entropic nature of knowledge, as it could lead to more effective decisions.

Pavlidou et al. (2021) address concerns about business education, which often focuses on instructional design and individual disciplines rather than developing students' holistic knowledge and long-term employability skills. The authors draw on the domain of knowledge management and dynamic knowledge theory to approach business education as a dynamic field of knowledge composed of three forms of interaction: rational, emotional, and spiritual knowledge, following the work of Bratianu and Bejinaru (2019a) and Bratianu and Bejinaru (2019b). Moreover, Pavlidou et al. (2021) emphasize that hybrid learning environments stimulate different aspects of rational, emotional, and spiritual knowledge due to the diversity of learning modes and sources, which guides teachers to use knowledge structure as a guide to assess student experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of knowledge and to consider its role as an essential force in business education, which challenges traditional teaching methodologies.

Power and Handley (2019) developed an interdisciplinary model of best practices in UK HEIs with a focus on teaching, learning, and the student experience. This model brings together six enablers that promote interdisciplinarity: (i) Positioning: Interdisciplinarity should be positioned outside the curriculum, which allows for the reduction of disciplinary barriers and removes some knowledge niches; (ii) People: Authentic leadership and selection of support group members; (iii) Environment: Spaces, resources, and infrastructures; (iv) Rewards: Target measures, talent management, incentives, and clarity of impact; (v) Conduct factors: Mutual respect, intellectual fusion; and (vi) Communication: Articulation in terms of benefits, values, impact, challenges, barriers, and facilitators of interdisciplinarity. However, the authors consider that more research is needed to validate this model, including integrated research that allows for an understanding of the implications of this model within British HEIs involving all stakeholders and also the commercial sector so that interdisciplinarity progresses.

Alwaheeb et al. (2020) provide a comprehensive review of studies that explore the relationship between organizational commitment and knowledge sharing in order to develop a conceptual framework that links these two concepts in HEIs. The analyzed literature reveals a lack of evidence on how organizational commitment influences knowledge sharing in the context of HEIs in Malaysia. In other words, there is still a gap in knowledge sharing in HEIs that could be filled if institutions motivate knowledge-sharing behavior and promote it (Alwaheeb et al., 2020). Likewise, the authors suggest that academics need to focus on increasing the level of organizational commitment to improve knowledge-sharing behavior, as well as workplace spirituality, which will ultimately enhance the effectiveness and performance of HEIs. However, according to the authors, there may be other organizational factors that can influence knowledge sharing, and these should be examined in future studies (Alwaheeb et al., 2020).

Table 1: Knowledge Management Practices and Spirituality Dimensions.

Studies	Knowledge Management	Spirituality
Alwaheeb et al. (2020)	Knowledge Sharing	Workplace
Bejinaru (2017)	Knowledge Creation, Sharing, Acquisition	Individual and Workplace
Bratianu and Bejinaru (2017)	Knowledge Creation, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Acquisition	Individual and Workplace
Bratianu and Vătămănescu (2018)	Knowledge Creation, Sharing, Acquisition	Individual and Workplace
Feiz et al. (2019)	Knowledge Sharing	Individual
Leon and Vătămănescu (2015)	Knowledge Creation, Sharing, Acquisition	Individual and Workplace
Nawaz et al. (2020)	Knowledge Creation, Sharing, Perception, Collection; Dissemination, Gathering	Workplace
Pavlidou et al. (2021)	Knowledge Creation, Sharing	Individual and Workplace
Power and Handley (2019)	Knowledge Sharing	Individual
Saad and Haron (2013)	Knowledge Sharing	Individual and Workplace

5. Discussion

The presented analysis of the results explored the relationship between KM and spirituality in HEIs providing valuable insights. It highlights the need for systematic knowledge management approaches to manage and transfer knowledge effectively, thereby improving resource management and developing knowledge-based skills. The study also emphasizes the critical role of human and structural capital in knowledge creation, acquisition, and sharing, and recommends storytelling as an easy-to-implement and cost-effective knowledge strategy that promotes innovation and strategic renewal. The proposed knowledge strategies, including creating knowledge through a rewards system, sharing knowledge to increase operational intellectual capital, acquiring new knowledge from external sources, and exchanging knowledge within a university network, can increase intellectual capital in HEIs, but further research is needed to understand their impact and to develop ways to implement them according to mission and vision.

The outcomes indicate that most authors do not examine organizational spirituality and KM together in HEIs. However, Leon and Vătămănescu (2015) present storytelling as a knowledge-sharing strategy, indicating that through it, educators share rational, emotional, and spiritual knowledge. In contrast, Bejinaru (2017), Bratianu and Bejinaru (2017), and Bratianu and Vătămănescu (2018) integrate these two constructs into their work. When presenting the main knowledge strategies to increase the potential of HEIs and operational intellectual capital, they refer to KM practices that interconnect with spiritual intellectual capital.

Furthermore, it is observed that Bejinaru (2017) and Bratianu and Bejinaru (2017) address the main knowledge strategies for increasing the potential of IES and operational intellectual capital, which are related to knowledge management practices. Therefore, it can be inferred that they are among the few authors who, in the same work, articulate the two constructs: knowledge management and organizational spirituality. Bejinaru (2017) and Bratianu and Bejinaru (2017) emphasize the importance of emotional and spiritual knowledge in knowledge creation, as they contribute to a culture that encourages research efforts and stimulates new ideas in science, technology, and business. This perspective aligns with the idea that knowledge management and organizational spirituality should be viewed in an integrated manner. Organizational spirituality may serve as the primary motivator for employees to act on their individual capacity to increase organizational effectiveness and reinforce knowledge management tools and techniques (Lakshmi and Das, 2021). Thus, spirituality serves as the foundation for ethical and committed behavior within and outside of HEIs.

The theoretical and practical contributions of this literature review are significant. The review highlights the importance of knowledge management and spirituality in HEIs and provides evidence that HEIs must adopt a culture that supports knowledge dynamics. The findings of this review have important implications for policymakers, educators, and researchers who are interested in the effective functioning of HEIs. Policymakers should pay more attention to the organizational culture and leadership style in HEIs to ensure that these institutions can promote knowledge dynamics effectively. Additionally, educators should be encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences, and researchers should be supported in their efforts to explore the complexities of knowledge management and spirituality in HEIs. Furthermore, the results of this analysis have significant implications for the effective functioning of HEIs and can be used to inform future research in this area.

6. Conclusions

HEIs face intense competition and rapidly changing behaviors. To thrive, HEIs must decide between a more creative, dynamic, and collaborative approach that enhances their longevity and competitiveness or a more passive and stagnant one. Implementing coherent and interconnected knowledge management and spirituality practices is a path they must undertake to choose the former option. Thus, to assess the state of research on KM and spirituality in HEIs, we conducted a study using three databases. We aimed to determine whether the literature integrates these two themes and to identify the most focused KM and spirituality practices in the literature.

Effective KM in HEIs is crucial, as it allows us to gauge how knowledge can be created, shared, transferred, stored, and reused to achieve organizational goals. Thus, it is essential to analyze the KM practices used in HEIs. However, research on such practices in isolation are insufficient. Thus, it is important to incorporate the concept of organizational spirituality, which can lead to a better organizational climate and greater sustainability. Both constructs should work together rather than in separation. Unfortunately, most authors do not integrate these concepts in their analysis. Therefore, KM and organizational spirituality should be studied together, as they feed into each other, resulting in a more beneficial outcome for HEIs. Leaders should promote effective KM and

develop practices that contribute to a work environment guided by spiritual values. Our analysis also revealed that this area remains relatively unexplored, despite its potential importance in the future of HEIs.

Notwithstanding of the research contribution, it has limitations, namely, the small number of documents analyzed. Thus, it is necessary for example, to search in other databases and try other search terms.

In conclusion, our study emphasizes the importance of integrating KM and organizational spirituality in HEIs. Doing so can lead to a more competitive and sustainable institution. However, further research is necessary to better understand how to effectively integrate these concepts into HEIs.

7. Future Research Avenues

The current literature on the integration of KM and spirituality in HEIs has several research gaps. Future research suggestions can enhance understanding of the integration of KM and spirituality in HEIs and its influences. Hence, this research offers valuable contributions to the literature, and offering below insights and recommendations for future research and practice.

Firstly, future studies should focus on the identification and analysis of the relationship between spiritual knowledge and intellectual capital in HEIs. For example, to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between spiritual knowledge and intellectual capital would be beneficial in facilitating the creation, utilization, sharing, and transfer of knowledge in HEIs.

Secondly, future studies should examine the role of leadership in promoting the integration of KM and spirituality in HEIs. Leaders can play a crucial role in fostering a culture of spirituality and knowledge sharing in organizations. Therefore, research should investigate the characteristics of effective leaders in HEIs who facilitate the integration of KM and spirituality, as well as the potential barriers to this integration.

Thirdly, future research could explore the impact of cultural differences on the integration of KM and spirituality in HEIs. HEIs operate in a globalized world, and each country has its cultural and social specificities, which may impact the integration of spirituality and KM. Hence, comparative studies between different countries could provide insights into the cultural and institutional factors that affect the integration of KM and spirituality in HEIs.

Finally, future studies should investigate the impact of KM and spirituality on the well-being and job satisfaction of employees in HEIs. Given the importance of well-being and job satisfaction in organizational performance, it would be valuable to explore how the integration of KM and spirituality could contribute to these outcomes.

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