

Exploring Knowledge Management Dynamics in International Film Productions: Insights from the Maltese Film Industry

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Abstract: This paper discusses an empirical analysis of the knowledge management in international film productions. It presents the findings of exploratory data research taking place during the research trip to Malta. The research took place between 2023 and 2024 during two film productions undertaken in this country. The main study aim is to indicate which forms of tacit and explicit knowledge management are used in international film productions. To achieve the aim of this study, several research questions were formulated: What is the nature of knowledge sharing in the Maltese Film Industry? Is it tacit or explicit knowledge that is shared? What is the difference between collaboration and knowledge sharing? What factors influence effective knowledge management within an international film crew, particularly in the context of the Maltese film industry? The study established a research hypothesis: The management skills of the film producer and the heads of departments, as well as efficient management of explicit and tacit knowledge, are essential factors in the success of film production. The multicultural differences of the film crew members are noticeable, but they are not considered as a disadvantage or a barrier. The methodology of this paper is based on qualitative research. A survey was used as the research method and the interview questionnaire was chosen as the research instrument. Interviews were carried out between 2023 and 2024. The study identified best practices for knowledge management during international film productions. Preliminary research results have identified factors influencing the effectiveness of knowledge management, as well as barriers related to the initiatives undertaken. Finally, the results obtained highlight the importance of compromise, mentoring and trust. Film production processes require effective knowledge management and efficient, talented film production managers. These individuals should be familiar with the principles of knowledge management and also be open to the cultural diversity of their employees.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing, Film Production, Collaboration, Trust

1. Introduction

In contemporary academic discourse, knowledge management has emerged as a prominent area of scholarly inquiry. Scholars have noted a heightened appreciation for knowledge in present times, as evidenced by the proliferation of literature dedicated to this subject. This corpus encompasses theoretical treatises elucidating the phenomenon's intricacies, alongside empirical investigations shedding light on its practical manifestations. Hence, a consensus may be reached that, at a broad level, knowledge management has been sufficiently comprehended and explicated within academic circles (Miroński, 2010).

The intricacies of data, information, and knowledge are subjects of perpetual exploration and debate, especially within the contexts of knowledge management and information theory (Lei & Yucong, 2021). Despite their ubiquity in everyday language, the precise distinctions among these terms remain elusive, often used interchangeably rather than with precise delineation. Within scholarly discourse, various conceptual frameworks, such as the "pyramid of knowledge" or "knowledge hierarchy", and the "pyramid of information" or "information hierarchy", are employed to structure these cognitive entities, with the DIKW (Data, Information, Knowledge, Wisdom) framework standing as a notable exemplar. The article describes differences between those elements. Furthermore it explores the differences between knowledge sharing and collaboration. The article discusses knowledge management in the multicultural film context. It gives a brief description of Maltese film Industry and focuses on what type of knowledge is shared amongst the film crews participating in multicultural film projects. It provides the evidence that both tacit and explicit knowledge is shared during the film production. The conducted interviews allow to analyse the shared knowledge based on the industry professionals' experience. The methodology based on the literature review provides tools to investigate how to share knowledge amongst film projects multicultural film projects' participants. The article elaborates on the factors influencing effective knowledge management within an international film crew.

2. Difference Between Data, Information and Knowledge

The terms 'data', 'information' and 'knowledge' are among those that are difficult to define because of their original nature. These terms are often used interchangeably in everyday discourse, reflecting prevailing trends rather than precise distinctions. Their elucidation finds particular significance within the realms of knowledge

management and information theory (Lei & Yucong, 2021; Wolski & Gomolińska, 2020). Consequently, within scholarly discourse, the hierarchical structuring of cognitive entities is alternatively referred to as either the “pyramid of knowledge” or “knowledge hierarchy” or as the “pyramid of information” or “information hierarchy”, contingent upon disciplinary orientation. Furthermore, the acronym DIKW, derived from the sequential arrangement of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom, serves as a notable framework within these domains for conceptual organization and analysis. As the final element within the DIKW framework, wisdom pertains predominantly to the philosophical domain, thus its detailed discussion falls beyond the scope of this analysis (Grabowski & Zajac, 2009).

A prevailing perspective, echoed with minor deviations, posits that data is raw numerical values and facts, information denotes processed data, and knowledge emerges as authenticated information (Dreske, 1981; Machlup, 1983; Vance, 1997). However, the proposition of a hierarchical progression from data to information to knowledge, with each tier distinguished by various dimensions such as context, utility, or interpretability, seldom withstands rigorous evaluation. If we assume that information is a stream of data to which we assign a certain meaning (relevant to the goals we are achieving), then knowledge is an information resource. However, it is a resource organized in a special way - it corresponds to the intentions of its creators and users. In the case of companies competing for rare resources (e.g., orders, grants, popularity support), these intentions can be reduced to gaining a sustainable advantage on competitive market (Jemielniak & Koźmiński, 2021).

3. Intercultural Knowledge Management

Knowledge management, as a young field of management, encompasses the latest methods and techniques to ensure the most effective use of knowledge resources (Kłak, 2020). The basic dimensions of knowledge management are: acquisition, storage, transfer, development, use and creation (Desmarais et al. 2009, p. 219). In this paper the primary focus is on multi-cultural knowledge management. The primary objective of cross-cultural knowledge management is to facilitate the management of knowledge in other areas (e.g. functional areas: marketing, human resources management, production) in an international setting, and ultimately the management of the entire company (Grosskopf & Barmeyer, 2021; Schewe et al., 2022). Properly applied, intercultural knowledge should allow other knowledge to be used more fully in situations of contact with other cultures. For this to happen, it is necessary to go beyond recognising, understanding and accepting cultural differences. People and organisations should strive to treat cultural differences as sources of inspiration, new knowledge and experience. Previous studies suggest that managers should consider cultural differences in management (Luthans & Doh, 2012) and link intercultural management issues to business needs (Chmielnicki & Sulkowski, 2017, p. 51).

4. Maltese Film Industry

The assertion that "Malta has built a reputation as the mini-Hollywood of the Mediterranean" as articulated by journalist Daniel Rosenthal (Rosenthal, 2002) reflects the pre-existing prominence that the archipelago had attained within the realm of the film industry. It was during the early twentieth century that Malta commenced its role as a host to foreign productions, owing to the proficiency of its craftsmen, adept set builders, and model makers. By the late 1960s, this relatively small and newly independent island emerged as a cost-effective alternative to more established production hubs such as Italy, Spain, and France (Guest, 1968), capitalizing on its remarkable landscape versatility capable of simulating diverse geographical terrains. Nevertheless, for a duration spanning approximately four decades, international production activities remained sporadic, primarily due to the absence of adequate infrastructure and service networks required to attract foreign filmmakers (Xuereb, 2023). It was not until the early 2000s that the archipelago solidified its status as a competitive entity within the global film production domain (Graziano, 2015).

5. Methodology

Based on the literature review three research questions were stated: 1) What is the nature of knowledge sharing in the Maltese Film Industry? Is it tacit or explicit knowledge that is shared? 2) What is the difference between collaboration and knowledge sharing? 3) What factors influence effective knowledge management within an international film crew, particularly in the context of the Maltese film industry?

The methodology of this paper is based on qualitative research. A survey was used as the research method and the interview questionnaire was chosen as the research instrument (table 1). In this study, the perception of the respondents serves as the primary unit of analysis. Moreover, the respondents are not directly prompted to

discuss knowledge management and knowledge sharing; instead, they are guided to elaborate on the mechanisms of collaboration and skill-sharing within the Maltese film industry.

The study established a research hypothesis: The management skills of the film producer and the heads of departments, as well as efficient management of explicit and tacit knowledge, are essential factors in the success of film production. The multicultural differences of the film crew members are noticeable, but they are not considered as a disadvantage or a barrier.

Table 1: Interview protocol

No.	Survey question
1	What qualities should a professional director/production manager/production coordinator have?
2	Did you have a mentor, who would guide you through the intricacies of your film career?
3	What is important during the a) pre-production b) production c) post-production d) distribution (only for the film director) stage of the film?
4	How do you manage an intercultural film crew?
5	What are the differences between the international and national film production?
6	What was the most difficult film that you had to manage?

Source: Research methodology, own research

The present report scrutinizes the data to discern evidence of knowledge sharing and delineate the facilitating and impeding factors as elucidated through the depiction of knowledge sharing occurrences provided by the participants during interviews. Two research interviews were conducted with film industry professionals from November 2023 to February 2024. The list of these interviews is provided in table 2. The selection process for the initial two participants was predicated on recommendations from Maltese film producers. Subsequently, the results of the interviews were enriched by adding and analysing data compiled by Alony, I., Whymark, G., & Jones, M. L. in their work titled "Sharing tacit knowledge: A case study in the Australian film industry" (Alony et al., 2007). The interviews collected by mentioned authors are listed in table 3. It is noteworthy that the interview protocol didn't include specific questions about knowledge management. Due to the fact that the film professionals were confused when asked the question about knowledge management it was decided that other questions leading to this topic will be used.

Table 2: Completed interviews used in this study

Interviewee	Profession	Type	Date of record	Place of record	Pseudonym/ Citation
1	Director	Interview	19.01.2023	Malta	(Alex-Director, 2023)
2	Production Manager	Interview	26.01.2024	Malta	(Karl-Production-Manager, 2024)
3	First Assistant Director	Interview	29.04.2024	Malta (online)	(Ioan-First-Assistant-Director, 2024)
4	Camera Operator	Interview	06.05.2024	Malta (online)	(Michael-Camera-Operator, 2024)

Source: Own source

Table 3: Interviews used in previous study completed by other authors

Interviewee	Profession	Type	Date of record	Place of record	Pseudonym/ Citation
1	Producer	Interview	14.10.2004	Australia	(Alice-Producer,2004)
2	Production Manager	Interview	04.03.2004	Australia	(Lyn-Production-Manager, 2005)

Source: Alony, I., Whymark, G., & Jones, M. L. (2007) "Sharing tacit knowledge: A case study in the Australian film industry", *Informing Science Journal*, vol. 10, pp 41-59.

Individuals within specific professions are typically well-positioned to offer comprehensive insights into film management, encompassing associated challenges and procedures, particularly concerning knowledge sharing and collaborative endeavours. The interviews conducted were structured around open-ended questions, facilitating extensive probing and contextualization. A selection of these questions is presented in Table 2, although variations were introduced across interviews based on the trajectory of discussion, information provided, and the interviewee's role. Furthermore, it was envisaged that the questionnaire would evolve over time to align with emerging data categories (Alony et al., 2007).

6. Results

The research results allowed to describe the nature of intercultural knowledge management in film productions based in Malta. It also allowed to describe the explicit and tacit knowledge shared amongst the film crews. Furthermore it shows the difference between knowledge sharing and collaboration. Lastly, it points out the three factors that influence effective knowledge management within an international film crew, particularly in the context of the Maltese film industry.

6.1 Intercultural Knowledge Management

The film director when asked whether he changes the style of management when talking to people from different cultures, replied: "I don't know if I would be aware of it if I am. I think just what typically happens is, you know, a film, you're so pressed for, for time and resources. A lot of these things tend to fall away and just become more instinctive. And it's probably a little bit more about the individual" (Alex-Director, 2023).

The film director, in response to a question regarding potential alterations in management style when interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, expressed uncertainty. He suggested that the demands of filmmaking, characterized by time and resource constraints, often lead to such considerations becoming instinctual rather than deliberate. Additionally, he implied that individual differences play a significant role in shaping his approach.

The production manager asked the same question replied: "I don't think the problems come with cultures because we in the industry are totally used to be around people from all over the world" (Karl-Production-Manager, 2024). Karl indicates positive outcomes of intercultural collaboration: "You find that most people from most countries are great people with extensive experience that you can learn from" (Karl-Production-Manager, 2024). Karl highlights the favorable results stemming from intercultural collaboration by emphasizing the inherent value of individuals from various backgrounds. He expresses that individuals from diverse countries typically possess considerable expertise, presenting opportunities for mutual learning and growth.

Alex as a film director tells his experience with directing cast in an intercultural film project: "Because I'm not fluent in Maltese, I had an enormous benefit that I never really had opinions about how my actors are saying their lines exactly. But what I'm more attentive to is what is being communicated non verbally in their performance. What are their eyes doing? What's their body language doing? How are they breathing? Those are the things I'm looking at when I'm watching my monitor. And I think that those things say a lot more about a character's emotional state in a scene than just how they read a line" (Alex-Director, 2023).

The multicultural dimension significantly influences intercultural communication dynamics. As the author underscores, non-verbal communication emerges as a pivotal component within this context. Non-verbal cues, encompassing gestures, facial expressions, body language, and vocal tone, often convey nuances of meaning that transcend linguistic barriers. In intercultural interactions, where verbal language may pose challenges due to differences in language proficiency or cultural nuances, reliance on non-verbal communication becomes particularly important. These non-verbal signals serve as a universal language that bridges cultural divides, facilitating understanding among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, recognizing and interpreting non-verbal cues accurately is essential for effective intercultural communication, enabling individuals to navigate cultural differences and establish meaningful connections across multicultural contexts.

6.2 Explicit Knowledge

"I like to think that a lot of times the script is going to direct the film. That applies a lot to the actors, but it even applies to the department heads. If you've written something, that has a kind of a gravity, if it has a momentum, if it has a clarity, those are marks of a good writing. But I think it also, It generally kind of leads people along the same thought process" (Alex-Director, 2023).

The director refers to the film script as the most important document during film production. It contains vital information for all film departments. Throughout the film the director can go back to the script and refer his and his colleagues' ideas to the script. In this sense script can be considered as the main database of the film production. Script changes affect most of the film departments, and has to be debated with the heads of departments. Major script changes have impact on film budget, scheduling, casting, location choice etc.

6.3 Tacit Knowledge

The subsequent quotation distinctly delineates the characteristics of tacit knowledge exchange and its magnitude within the MFI. The collaborative dynamics on a film set entail a substantial dependency on the sharing of knowledge among individuals.

"Now with that said there are things you need to be dead clear on. And that's just for every director to decide about what those things are. It's just impossible to say in the abstract what they are on a given film or in a particular scene. Like I said, what I'm hoping is that the script is directing people. I'm hoping it's really dead clear in the script. And sometimes you find that it's not. And you have to take a moment and to say, I know you had a different idea about this, but here's what I need. And to express yourself very clearly, and when you're in production, which is different than when you're in pre-production. On pre-production, you can have a five or ten minute conversation about it" (Alex-Director, 2023).

The aforementioned quotation can be interpreted as either information sharing or knowledge sharing. Nonaka posits that while the message may initially convey factual data or information, its significance extends beyond mere content. When interpreted or internalized within a broader context, this information transcends into knowledge (Nonaka, 1994).

From the quote above it can be concluded that tacit knowledge complements explicit knowledge. People on the film set rely on the script as the most important database of the filmmaking. Unfortunately this database misses some of the details or contains some mistakes, which are critical to the film production process. Exchanging tacit knowledge allows to eliminate those mistakes and make correct decisions.

Another quote from the Alony et al. (2007) studies provides an understanding about the nature of communication on the film set: "a perfect example is probably ah, a costume designer going to a designer, and saying "what colour are you going to paint that wall in the set, because I really want her to wear this dress..." and he'll say "Oh I'm going to paint it orange" and she'll say "this dress is perfect for the sequence, absolute perfect for the sequence, and it won't look good against that orange wall." And that is the sort of collaboration you have to have, I mean these are all incredibly talented, highly volatile, very creative people and um, they've all got a vision but as long as they've all got the same vision then it works" (Alice-Producer, 2004).

The constant changes in film production process and the dynamic film environment require crew members to be open-minded, flexible and communicative. Film is a gathering of multitalented artists, who need to collaborate on many different levels in order to finish the product which is the distributed film. The quote above shows that knowledge sharing and collaboration are the key factors of any film production process.

6.4 Knowledge Sharing

"My friends told me about an amazing fund out of Germany through the public television broadcasters at "xxx"¹. They have a program, whose name in German, I can't recall now how it's pronounced, but essentially it's a television program that gets some kind of financing under the prerogative to essentially program films from the European community that demonstrate a unique aspect of a European culture" (Alex-Director, 2023).

The film director gives an example of knowledge sharing without collaboration. In this example the knowledge exchanged is information about a fund provided by a German television. During the information transfer the sender of the information is active and the receiver of the information remains passive. The receiver gets the information, and it is then at their discretion whether they choose to utilize it or not.

Another useful example of knowledge sharing is provided by the cinematographer Ioan. On one of the projects due to unforeseen circumstances he needed to change his role from the first assistant director to downloader

¹ The name of the broadcast company is hidden for research purposes

“My boss called me at night and says: you're gonna go download tomorrow. I said to him: I've never done this before. And he's like: you'll be fine. There's someone who's going to teach you everything over the phone” (Ioan-First-Assistant-Director, 2024). This example shows evidence of knowledge sharing in which the receiver is taught over the phone about his new responsibilities on the film set. Later he says: “I ended up showing up the set. I called Nicola, who's the downloader that just left that production and he told me everything, how to do this job. So I picked it up pretty quick. Yeah, I've been doing it since” (Ioan-First-Assistant-Director, 2024). Ioan after this experience became the professional downloader, it proves that a simple conversation in which knowledge sharing occurs can change the direction of someone's professional career.

6.5 Collaboration

“I had met a young producer, we were probably about the same age. When I was trying to sell my first film at co-production markets back in 2017. He just started out a company called “xxx”² out of Berlin. He just kind of tracked up, we had a great conversation back then in 2017. Obviously my first went on a big journey between 2017 and 2021 when it came out. But he remembered the project, he saw the film, he loved it, he kept in touch. His company had an amazing track record in those intervening years and they made great co-productions like the film “xxx”³, which was a big hit at Cannes, a year or two ago. Our film fit with what they were looking for” (Alex-Director, 2023).

In this example it's clearly seen that sometimes the collaboration doesn't start from the beginning. At first the director and the film producer communicated on one of the film markets in 2017. They kept in touch between the four years and it resulted in collaboration. The newest film of the director was coproduced by the company of the mentioned producer, as the result of four years of exchanging information and knowledge.

“You get very close to people who you work with, you form very strong bonds, more than the average people who work in an office environment do because you spend so much time together” (Lyn – Production-Manager 2005). The close relationships built in-between the crew members and the time that they spend together is a great environment for collaboration. Often the strong bonds last after the project, which means that most probably the collaboration will also last longer.

6.6 Compromise

Regarding the information exchange, it's crucial to think about the two sides of collaboration and what is their aim in information sharing. The next example gives an overview on the reasons behind collaboration: “Then essentially the trade is that you're giving them the free to air broadcast rights in Germany for whatever one or two years, I forget what the term is. Essentially it was a pre-sale for public television in Germany, for a Maltese language film, which is amazing and very rare. The amount of money makes a huge difference for us. But in the bigger scope of filmmaking, that's probably a pretty small fund. So for them, I think it's, it's kind of a low risk proposition, but for us it's like game changing” (Alex-Director, 2023). In this example the director of the small-budget Maltese film gets part of the funding of his film from the German broadcaster while the other side of the collaboration gets an exclusive broadcast rights in Germany for two years. The provided example shows that both sides of collaboration need to benefit from it.

You don't need to take all of the notes, but it's a quite rigorous application process and it's competitive and in the particular year that we were applying was more competitive than at other times, so I would take their advice seriously. I mean, just like in anything, you never want to take one hundred percent of people's notes, and you never want to take zero. You see, you're kind of foolish to do either of those things, so, you know, it was that kind of process” (Alex-Director, 2023).

In this excerpt director indicates that acquiring knowledge is a long and complicated process. There is a long way for the receiver to understand the sender's message and then to transfer that into action. The sender needs to be patient and understanding of receiver's beliefs, knowledge and opinions. Especially in art, where the information sent is a lot of the times subjective it's easy for misunderstandings and arguments.

² The name of the company is hidden for research purposes

³ The name of the film is hidden for research purposes

6.7 Mentoring

“Communication is paramount. So being patient and clear is very important. Being able to say what you want to say with a few words, especially if you're talking over radio, you have to be able to condense your idea or to get the message across. And yeah, I think that's important is to be patient with people and to understand that, especially if you're one of the more senior people in a department that you're constantly going to have newer people and you have to be aware that that knowledge trickles in gradually, so they're not going to know all the lingo immediately. You have to be patient to explain things clearly enough, but to also help them like understand what's the specific term that you're using mean and help them learn that so that next time you can just say that one word and they'll know” (Michael-Camera-Operator, 2024).

Michael in his interview underlines the importance of mentoring. Mentor has to be patient and excellent in communicating. It's really important that he communicates his ideas thoroughly and briefly. Patience is the factor that helps older crew members with communicating with trainees, a lot of the times trainees need more time to process information and to learn the professional language specific for the film set.

6.8 Trust

When asked about what are the biggest limitations of intercultural film production, production manager replied: “Of course you have problems along the way, be it a language barrier, be it cultural differences. Speaking in the position I'm in, I think getting to know the people is extremely important. You have to know the people who built their trust. Once you build trust, no matter where you come from, there's an element of security” (Karl-Production-Manager, 2024).

Karl highlights the importance of trust as the key factor gluing together the intercultural film production. When asked about the primary challenges encountered in intercultural film production, the production manager candidly addressed key limitations. However, speaking from his vantage point within the production realm, he emphasized the paramount importance of establishing genuine connections with the individuals involved. According to him, investing time and effort in understanding the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of the team members is essential. Building trust emerges as a critical factor in fostering a collaborative environment wherein individuals feel valued and supported. Once trust is cultivated, irrespective of cultural origins, a sense of security permeates the production process, enabling smoother coordination and enhanced teamwork.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the knowledge management practices within the international film productions, particularly focusing on the context of the Maltese film industry.

All the researched questions were answered in the “Results” section. The nature of knowledge sharing in the Maltese Film Industry is based both on tacit and explicit knowledge. The findings indicate that effective knowledge management in international film productions requires a combination of tacit and explicit knowledge sharing. While explicit knowledge, such as that contained in scripts and production documents, provides a framework for the production process, tacit knowledge plays a crucial role in adapting to dynamic situations and making informed decisions. The results from the interviews confirmed the moderate relevance of the factors assumed in the research hypothesis to the effective functioning of the film crew and the success of film projects.

Article answers the question about differences between collaboration and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the study demonstrated the interconnectedness of collaboration and knowledge sharing in the film industry. Collaborative efforts among filmmakers, producers, and crew members facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, leading to more innovative and successful productions. Through qualitative research methods including interviews, the study explored factors influencing effective knowledge management within an international film crew. The results obtained focus the importance of compromise, mentoring and trust. The multicultural dimension of film crews adds complexity to knowledge management, but it also presents opportunities for learning and collaboration. The study revealed that successful film productions rely on strong interpersonal relationships and effective communication methods to navigate cultural diversity and achieve common goals. This study offers valuable insights for filmmakers, production managers, and industry stakeholders, by identifying best practices and highlighting the importance of cultural competence and collaboration. Moving forward, continued research in this area can further enhance the understanding of effective knowledge management strategies in the evolving landscape of global film production.

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