Sharing as Power: Keys Strategies for Breaking Knowledge Silos

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Abstract: This paper develops an integrative framework proposing actionable strategies for dismantling knowledge silos within corporate environments. Guided by a qualitative methodology, data was gathered from knowledge management (KM) professionals across physical and digital domains using a triangulation approach. The findings illuminate the critical importance of executive-level engagement and sustained commitment to KM initiatives, while simultaneously highlighting the fundamental role of interpersonal trust in overcoming barriers to collaboration and intellectual exchange. We identify five key strategic approaches that demonstrate symbiotic relationships across two organizational movements—Top-Down and Bottom-Up—which, when implemented cohesively, can effectively mitigate detrimental knowledge silos and enhance cross-functional knowledge flows. This work contributes original perspectives to the currently limited literature on addressing intra-organizational knowledge barriers. By situating knowledge silos and knowledge hiding within the broader context of knowledge risks, this study emphasizes the importance of comprehensive knowledge risk management in sustaining knowledge-driven innovation and organizational effectiveness. For future research, we propose investigating optimized technological systems that can effectively support and reinforce embedded knowledge-sharing routines within organizational contexts.

Keywords: Knowledge silos, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge hiding, Knowledge risks, Knowledge risks management

1. Introduction

Organizational knowledge is a critical strategic asset that drives competitiveness and innovation in today's dynamic business environment (Bratianu, 2015; Nakash et al. 2023; Serenko and Bontis, 2016). However, knowledge silos—where expertise and information remain confined within specific departments or units—pose a substantial threat to organizational effectiveness. These silos hinder knowledge accessibility, obstruct collaboration, and limit the organization's capacity for innovation and adaptation (Bolisani and Handzic, 2015; Bundred, 2006; Connelly et al. 2012; Offsey, 1997; Zhao et al. 2019).

One of the primary drivers of knowledge silos is the "knowledge is power" syndrome, wherein employees deliberately withhold critical knowledge to maintain individual leverage within the organization (Toma and Butera, 2009). This behavior not only weakens collaborative efforts but also results in redundant work and inhibits knowledge-driven innovation (Nakash and Bouhnik, 2022). To counteract these risks, organizations must cultivate a culture that discourages knowledge hoarding and actively promotes knowledge sharing as a means to enhance business performance (Pereira and Mohiya, 2021).

Despite the well-documented negative consequences of knowledge silos—such as reduced efficiency, diminished innovation, and decreased competitiveness (Fenwick et al. 2012; Hwang and Krackhardt, 2020)—there remains a notable gap in applied research on practical strategies for overcoming them. Existing literature primarily focuses on the adverse effects of knowledge silos, yet actionable solutions remain underexplored, particularly from the perspective of knowledge management (KM) professionals.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining strategies recommended by KM professionals to dismantle knowledge silos and enhance knowledge sharing within organizations. By leveraging insights from practitioners, this research aims to develop practical interventions that foster collaboration, knowledge transparency, and organizational learning. Beyond improving knowledge accessibility, these initiatives are crucial for mitigating knowledge risks—such as knowledge loss, redundancy, and fragmentation—that can compromise organizational resilience and long-term sustainability (Bratianu, 2018; Durst et al. 2019; Durst and Zieba, 2020).

The findings of this study will culminate in the development of a model designed to optimize the use of core business knowledge while mitigating associated risks. Implementing these strategies will enable organizations to strengthen their innovation capabilities, enhance adaptability in a rapidly changing environment, and sustain their competitive advantage. Furthermore, integrating knowledge risk management (KRM) practices will be essential to safeguarding knowledge assets and ensuring their continued strategic value in an increasingly knowledge-driven economy.

This paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 provides a theoretical background to the research topic. Following this, Section 3 details the research strategy and methodology adopted. Section 4 presents the results, and Section 5 concludes with key insights, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

Knowledge is broadly defined as a valuable organizational resource that exists in two primary forms: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is structured, codified, and easily transferable through formal channels such as documents and databases, whereas tacit knowledge is embedded in personal experience and intuition, making it difficult to articulate and share (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Knowledge sharing refers to the process through which individuals exchange knowledge to enhance collective understanding, decision-making, and innovation. This exchange can occur formally, through structured repositories and training, or informally, via interpersonal interactions and collaboration. Effective knowledge sharing is essential for organizational learning and performance but is often hindered by various barriers (Haas and Hansen, 2007; Ipe, 2003; Kaushal and Nyoni, 2025).

The phenomenon of knowledge silos is closely intertwined with knowledge hiding, defined as the deliberate concealment or withholding of knowledge that individuals possess (Serenko and Bontis, 2016). Knowledge hiding can manifest in various forms, such as evasive hiding (avoiding sharing knowledge), playing dumb (pretending not to know), or rationalized hiding (justifying why knowledge is not shared) (Connelly and Zweig, 2015; Connelly et al. 2012; Gagné et al. 2019; Hernaus et al. 2019). This behavior is detrimental to organizational performance as it impedes knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation, often leading to the creation of knowledge silos (Burmeister et al. 2019; Connelly et al. 2019).

Research indicates that knowledge hiding often arises from individual motivations such as self-preservation, strengthening personal reputation, or perceived lack of reciprocity in knowledge exchange (Burmeister et al. 2019; Cerne et al. 2015; Chatterjee et al. 2021; Connelly et al. 2012; Siachou et al. 2021). Individuals may hide knowledge to maintain control over expertise that gives them power or leverage within their team or organization, further contributing to the formation of knowledge silos (Restubog et al. 2020).

The consequences of knowledge hiding extend beyond individual actions to affect team dynamics and organizational culture. When knowledge is hoarded or concealed, it creates barriers to effective communication and collaboration, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for innovation, and reinforcing knowledge silos (He et al. 2021; Restubog et al. 2020). Moreover, the presence of knowledge hiding behaviors can erode trust among team members and hinder the development of a supportive and cooperative work environment (Connelly et al. 2019).

Organizational factors, such as leadership style and organizational culture, play crucial roles in either exacerbating or mitigating knowledge hiding behaviors. Leadership that emphasizes transparency, open communication, and knowledge sharing norms can create an environment where hiding knowledge is discouraged and sharing is rewarded, thus breaking down knowledge silos (Connelly et al. 2012). Conversely, cultures that prioritize individual achievements over collective goals may inadvertently encourage behaviors that perpetuate knowledge hiding and the creation of knowledge silos (Cerne et al. 2015).

The presence of knowledge silos and knowledge hiding behaviors introduces significant knowledge risks that can undermine an organization's ability to sustain its competitive advantage. Knowledge risks refer to threats associated with the loss, mismanagement, or misuse of critical organizational knowledge (Durst and Zieba, 2019; Durst et al. 2019). These risks can manifest in various ways, including knowledge loss due to employee turnover, fragmentation of expertise across isolated teams, and the deterioration of organizational memory over time (Bratianu, 2018; Durst and Zieba, 2020; Nakash and Bouhnik, 2022).

Effective KRM is crucial for mitigating these threats and ensuring the long-term sustainability of knowledge assets. It involves identifying, assessing, and addressing potential vulnerabilities in knowledge flows to prevent disruptions in knowledge accessibility and utilization (Durst, 2019; Durst et al. 2019). By integrating KRM principles into their KM strategies, organizations can proactively mitigate the detrimental effects of knowledge silos and knowledge hiding (Nakash and Bouhnik, 2022).

3. Method

This qualitative study employed a triangulated research approach, integrating multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Importantly, the findings presented

in this paper form part of a broader research initiative examining the role, evolution, and future of the KM discipline (Nakash et al. 2022). The research received approval from the institutional ethics committee and was conducted in accordance with the protocols accepted by the scientific community.

The methodological approach included conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews and facilitating two focus groups, engaging a total of 52 participants. These participants comprised 27 organizational KM consultants and 25 knowledge managers, ensuring a diverse range of expert perspectives on knowledge-sharing challenges and interventions. The interviews and focus groups provided rich qualitative insights into the mechanisms sustaining knowledge silos and the strategies for mitigating them.

To further enhance data richness, cyber-ethnography was employed, involving a systematic content analysis of 20,349 posts and comments collected over four years from two public Facebook communities dedicated to KM. This approach allowed for the capture of organic, real-world discussions among KM professionals, offering valuable insights into prevailing attitudes, barriers, and solutions regarding knowledge silos.

The participants in this study represented various industrial sectors, including technology, media, telecommunications, public administration, government, and finance, ensuring a broad representation of organizational contexts. All research procedures adhered to strict ethical protocols, ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality. The study followed a grounded theory approach (Khan, 2014), employing iterative thematic analysis (Terry et al. 2017) to systematically code and identify emergent patterns across the three qualitative data sources.

4. Findings

The human element was emphasized as critical for enabling effective KM processes and preventing knowledge silos, which pose significant risks to organizational continuity and innovation. Participants highlighted that KM inherently involves behavioral dynamics that shape an organization's knowledge flows. Consequently, dismantling deleterious knowledge silos is imperative to prevent counterproductive individualistic cultures rooted in competition, which can significantly harm organizational learning and cooperation. The study participants propose that implementing five interrelated, actionable strategies across symbiotic Top-Down and Bottom-Up movements can facilitate breaking down barriers to knowledge sharing while concurrently mitigating knowledge risks such as expertise loss and inefficient knowledge retention (see **Figure 1**).

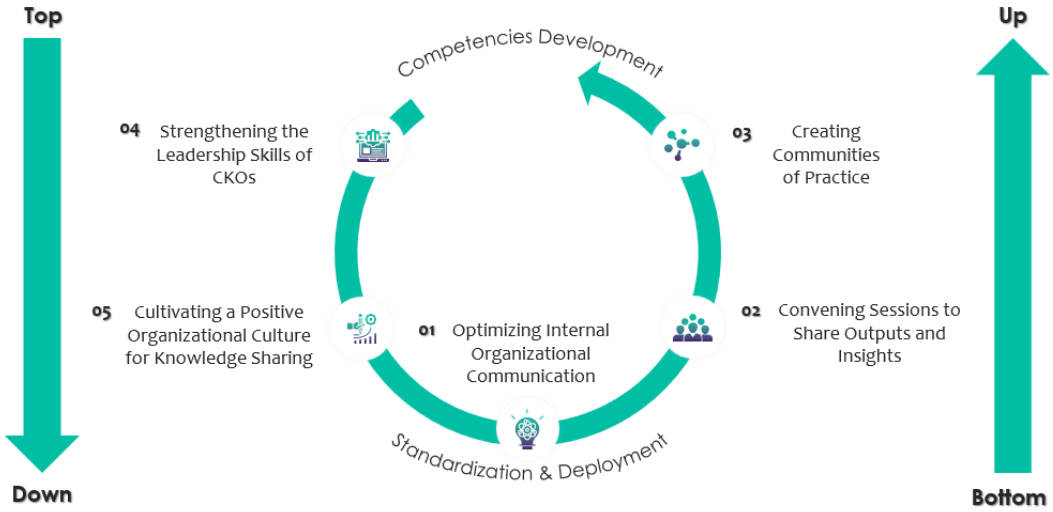

Figure 1: An Integrative Model for Breaking Knowledge Silos in Corporations

4.1 Top-Down Strategies: Centralized Hierarchical Approaches Led by Managers

4.1.1 Developing chief knowledge officers' (CKOs) leadership skills

CKOs play a pivotal role in promoting and implementing an organization's KM strategy and related policies. By enhancing the leadership skills of CKOs, organizations can ensure that these officers are better equipped to engage employees in knowledge retention activities and foster a culture of continuous learning. Improved leadership capacities enable CKOs to effectively address and overcome objections to initial KM initiatives,

which can often be met with resistance. Additionally, skilled CKOs can identify and recruit change agents within the organization who can champion KM practices and support their widespread adoption. By persuading employees towards cooperative behaviors and fostering a collaborative environment, CKOs can significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of KM processes. Furthermore, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) tools can assist CKOs in identifying knowledge gaps, predicting areas for improvement, and providing data-driven insights to support their leadership efforts. Addressing these challenges is critical for managing knowledge risks, ensuring that expertise is not lost due to turnover, and fostering institutional knowledge resilience.

4.1.2 Cultivating a supportive culture of knowledge sharing

Recognizing, appreciating, and rewarding contributions to organizational knowledge systems are pivotal actions for dismantling the barriers that underpin knowledge silos. By actively acknowledging and valuing the efforts of employees who engage in knowledge sharing, organizations can create an environment that encourages openness and collaboration. This recognition can take various forms, such as public acknowledgments, awards, or incentives, which serve to motivate employees to continue sharing their knowledge and expertise. An interpersonal climate that resists the tendency to hide knowledge and instead fosters trust among employees is essential for promoting social cooperation and establishing norms of reciprocity. A failure to cultivate such a culture heightens knowledge risks, as key knowledge may remain locked within isolated units, thereby jeopardizing the organization's ability to respond to emerging challenges.

4.2 Bottom-Up Strategies: Distributed Collaborative Approaches Led by Employees

4.2.1 Facilitating communities of practice (CoPs)

CoPs are voluntary employee groups that share a common interest and are dedicated to the pursuit of learning and the development of knowledge. These groups optimize knowledge flow within organizations by fostering open discourse and creating structured mechanisms for the exchange of insights. CoPs can take the form of online forums, structured mentorship programs, or event-driven initiatives such as hackathons. By actively engaging in such communities, employees prevent knowledge hoarding, surface hidden knowledge gaps, and contribute to collective intelligence. AI tools can further enhance CoPs by recommending relevant content, facilitating networking among members, and summarizing key discussions to improve accessibility and retention.

4.2.2 Convening sessions to share outputs and insights

Structured knowledge-sharing sessions bring together employees from diverse specializations to exchange project insights, lessons learned, and innovative solutions. These sessions expose tacit knowledge, which is often difficult to document yet essential for innovation and organizational learning. By promoting cross-functional collaboration, such meetings enhance knowledge flows, reduce redundancy, and mitigate knowledge fragmentation risks. Over time, this practice not only strengthens collaborative behaviors among employees but also aligns these behaviors with the achievement of broader business goals. The continuous exchange of knowledge and ideas during these sessions can lead to the identification of new opportunities, the development of innovative solutions, and the overall intellectual growth of the organization. AI-powered tools can facilitate these sessions by organizing key takeaways, improving knowledge accessibility, and ensuring that valuable insights are retained within the organization.

4.3 Combining Top-Down and Bottom-Up Strategies

4.3.1 Optimizing internal organizational communication

Strengthening formal and informal communication channels ensures rapid knowledge dissemination. Managers can optimize official communication through intranets and knowledge portals, while employees can drive informal networks such as "knowledge cafés." AI-enhanced platforms can support real-time content curation and automated knowledge synthesis, ultimately strengthening organizational resilience against knowledge risks. By fostering a culture of open communication and continuous feedback, organizations can ensure that knowledge flows seamlessly across all levels. By integrating these formal and informal communication strategies, organizations can create a dynamic and responsive knowledge-sharing ecosystem, thereby contributing to the organization's overall agility and innovation capacity.

5. Conclusion

This investigation has uncovered five interconnected strategic approaches that organizations can deploy to overcome detrimental knowledge silos—comprising two centralized strategies, two decentralized approaches, and one integrated method. The proposed conceptual framework systematically integrates these complementary techniques, demonstrating how they can function synergistically to enhance organizational knowledge flows and dismantle persistent knowledge barriers. This research contributes substantive insights to the currently limited scholarly discourse on addressing knowledge silos, particularly in terms of practical implementation strategies, which remain notably underexplored in the extant literature.

The managerial implications of this study hold considerable significance for CKOs and organizational leadership teams. By comprehensively understanding and strategically implementing these approaches, CKOs can provide evidence-based guidance to executive stakeholders on mitigating knowledge risk through the reduction of knowledge-hoarding behaviors. Moreover, the findings enrich the KRM literature by establishing clear connections between silo mitigation strategies and the broader framework of organizational risk governance. This contribution is particularly valuable as it bridges theoretical constructs with actionable implementation pathways that organizations can deploy to systematically address knowledge vulnerabilities.

The findings are derived from subjective interpretations inherent to qualitative research, and it is possible that not all perspectives have been captured. Future research should continue to explore and validate these strategies, ensuring they remain relevant and effective in an ever-evolving organizational landscape. At the sociotechnical level, subsequent research might investigate which technological interventions most effectively support the establishment of human-cultural relationships that facilitate optimal systematic knowledge transfer while minimizing knowledge-related risks. Furthermore, longitudinal studies examining the implementation impacts of these actionable techniques within organizational settings would prove valuable. By methodically tracking transformations in knowledge flows pre- and post-implementation through robust mixed-methods research designs, scholars can refine their understanding of both the advantages and limitations of these strategies in practice, thereby contributing to more sophisticated approaches to KRM.

AI Declaration: The author confirms that no AI tools were used in the creation of this manuscript. All research, analysis, and writing were conducted manually, adhering to the highest standards of academic integrity.

Ethics Declaration: This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Institutional Ethics Committee. The participants provided informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

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