

# Knowledge Management Practices in a Religious Organisation in South Africa

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**Abstract:** Knowledge Management has developed over the years into a mainstream organisational necessity to achieve success and organisational effectiveness. Religious organisations are one of the most producers of knowledge. In many parts of Africa, several Pentecostal churches are established regularly, especially in crowded informal settlements. The knowledge conversion model was utilised to assess the knowledge management practices at a Pentecostal church in an informal settlement in Cape Town, South Africa. The objectives of the study were to examine the awareness and uptake of KM in the religious organisations, determine the level of openness of the members and leaders to knowledge sharing and conversion as well as assess how religious organisations leverage knowledge conversion and KM practices in achieving their goals in spreading the gospel and to enhance their community services. The church leadership and adult members of the church constituted the study population. The findings of this study revealed that the level of awareness and uptake of KM was very low because there was no documented training as well as responsible individuals responsible for the management of knowledge. Tacit knowledge is being shared informally through dialogue communication and religious meetings. However, this knowledge is not formally extracted, documented, or converted into explicit knowledge for organisational productivity, further sharing and future reuse. Although some of the leaders were not keen on knowing explicitly managed and shared in the organisation, religious members thought it is very important for knowledge to be documented and shared. Furthermore, as knowledge sharing is not prioritised within the organisation, the goal of spreading the gospel and to enhance their community services was found to be sluggish. The study developed a conceptual model for implementing knowledge management in Pentecostal religious organisations.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Management, Knowledge conversion, Knowledge sharing, Religious organisations, Pentecostal Church,

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## 1. Introduction and background

Knowledge management (KM) has been studied for many years in various types of organisations, however, literature on KM in religious organisations is scanty, especially in South Africa. The focus of this study is the assessment of KM in religious organisations. More specifically, this study will examine knowledge management and sharing practices within a Pentecostal church. According to Fairchild (2019), currently, Pentecostals are a global cogency and have distinctively eight of the world's largest congregations because they are the fastest-growing religious movement, yet despite this development, very few studies have been conducted on KM in religious organisations (Freeburg 2018). Religion is a very important aspect of African societies and therefore religious organisations need to be managed effectively. Religion matters not only to believers and practitioners of faith but also to an entire nation because in many African societies, religion defines nations, shapes worldview, and influences daily behaviour and life projects among millions of communities (Torry 2014).

Lin (2015) states that organisations are facing extreme pressure due to intense competition, globalisation, and innovation, but when KM is applied it contributes to the success of businesses and is very prominent for the long-term survival of companies. KM also enables the creation and development of a sustainable competitive edge. Hence, the uptake of KM practices has spread among businesses, governments, academic institutions, and Non-Governmental Organisations (Mphahlele (2010). KM is viewed as a systematic tool for managing an organisation's knowledge assets for value creation and the provision of support for decision-making and innovation within organisations. KM is all about managing the knowledge needed for an organisation to succeed by systematically capturing, describing, organising, and sharing knowledge (Girard & Girard 2015).

KM researchers emphasise the vitality of developing new knowledge for organisations to deliver improved products and services and achieve goals. Armaghan and Renaud (2017) did a study at an Iranian research organisation. They found that although KM in the organisation is running properly, there are five factors identified that affect knowledge sharing. These factors include trust, commitment, job satisfaction, learning and

organisational communication. They also found that during the implementation of KM there was a lot of resistance and that no adequate preparation was done in terms of knowledge sharing and KM. Heggli (2011) did a study to investigate to what extent a non-profit organisation such as the World Bank applies tools to manage their knowledge effectively. KM was also studied in the public sector of government in South Africa to facilitate service delivery, especially to facilitate the Batho Pele principles (Mphahlele, 2010).

However, very little literature on KM studies in religious organisations is available. Freeburg (2015) stated that the acceptance of KM concepts is met with resistance due to the cultural environment that churches create. There are studies conducted that speak about the church and the need to change with the demanding developments within society. Oosthuizen and Lategan (2016) stated that the church as a faith-based organisation needs to change and adapt to the global economic, political, and social environment. Additionally, these authors stated that for the church to adapt faster, it needs to change to a more open, and systematic approach to managing it effectively. One of these ways would be to study how KM can be employed within churches as a systematic tool and management approach to create organisational effectiveness. It is a quite common trend that religious organisations have mostly been studied from a spiritual perspective, meaning their beliefs, rituals, and the impact of religion on society; also make up an entire organisation that has various operational functions, alongside strategic goals (Oosthuizen & Lategan, 2016). Therefore, this study is set out to assess the various aspects of a religious organisation: particularly, Christian Faith Revival Ministries, South Africa, which is a Pentecostal church to get a clear understanding of their current operations, systems, and tools that are in place to perform operational functions to reach organisational objectives. Furthermore, this study seeks to evaluate the KM and sharing practices within the Pentecostal church. According to Torry (2014), even though religious organisations are distinct from other organisations in various sectors, it is important to note that the management of external relationships with these organisations is crucial. This is because political, social, and environmental aspects influence religious organisations. Therefore, religious organisations need to have critical knowledge for decision-making.

This study will be conducted at a Pentecostal church based in Cape Town, South Africa. The church, Christian Faith Revival Ministries Church of South Africa. The church is registered in South Africa as a church denomination. The purpose of the church is to "preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to spread the good news that Jesus Christ saves, heals, delivers and sanctifies irrespective of the circumstances you find yourselves in". The prophecy of the church is: the church will be a bible school training centre for its congregation as well community members. Membership requires that you be "born again and baptised in full immersion in water, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who subscribe to its tenets of faith and agrees to be governed by its constitution and rules". The church has an executive council of five members and the general church council consists of eight members which add up to 13 members for the entire council. It has a total of approximately one hundred and twenty church members. The different structures of the church include the Praise and worship team, Sunday school, Youth services, Women ministries, Brothers' fellowship, Community outreach, administration, a fundraising, and events planning committee and lastly, the executive leaders. The church structure and its aims would be ideal to investigate how the church is currently performing in tasks to reach its overall organisational goals.

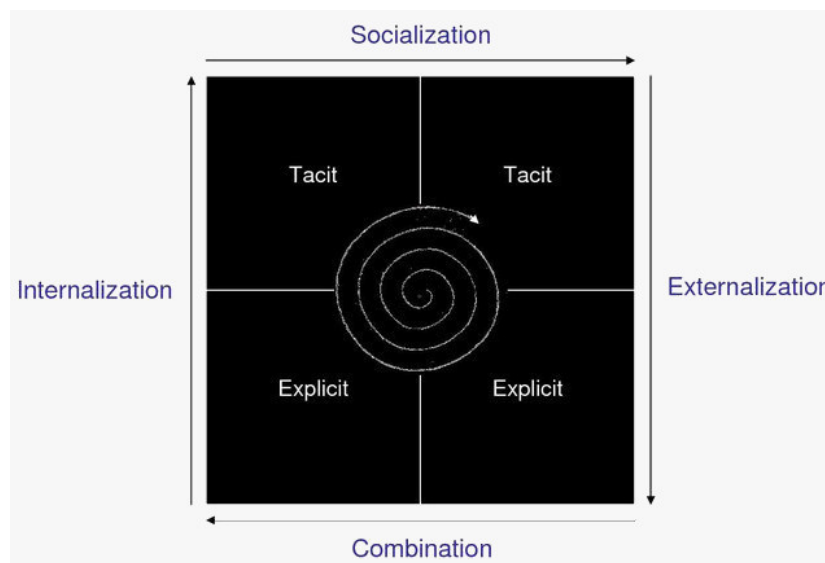
## **2. Problem Statement:**

Tacit knowledge resides in the minds of people regardless of the type of organisation they belong to; this includes members within religious organisations. Therefore, the tacit knowledge that church members possess should be extracted, documented, and converted into explicit knowledge, as this will enable the sharing and creation of new knowledge, facilitating KM, organisational learning, and human capital development practices within religious organisations. Pentecostal Churches globally and locally are spreading, and membership increasing. These churches have been reported to be the fastest-growing religious movement not only in South Africa but all over the world (Fairchild, 2019). Furthermore, religious organisations are intended to be driven for the greater good of society. Therefore, churches are just as important and need to function effectively and successfully to serve the community's needs and make a positive impact on society. The effective and proper management of knowledge in these organisations would therefore help in achieving this purpose. There are skilled, qualified members and experts within church communities possessing valuable knowledge. These skills and tacit knowledge can be extracted and managed to further develop, grow, and maintain the church to reach its goals of spreading the gospel and improving community services. One of the justifications of this study is that it is a response to the need to address the gap in KM practices in religious organisations as it has been observed

that very few studies focus on KM in religious organisations, especially Pentecostal churches within South Africa. As identified from South African literature, few studies have been done on KM focusing on religious organisations. Previous studies on KM have been on corporate, academic and government institutions (Milano et al., 2015; Niu, 2010; Mphahlele, 2010; Kassim et al., 2016; Vasconcelos et al., 2005; Corfield et al., 2013). Therefore, this study focused on a Pentecostal church in South Africa to gain insight into how KM can be applied within the church to contribute to organisational effectiveness through knowledge sharing, organisational learning, and human capital development. The study will not only how KM can be introduced in religious organisations but also provide guidelines for church leaders to use as a starting point for the setup a KM system to create, share and extract tacit knowledge that church members and leaders can use for decision making, to improve service delivery and the overall performance of the organisation.

### 3. Conceptual framework

The Knowledge Conversion Model proposed by Nonaka and Von Krogh (1994) informs the conceptual framework and orientation for this research. According to the proponents, organizational knowledge creation as a higher-order construct comprises four knowledge conversion processes: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization (SECI). According to this model, knowledge creation is considered the source of continuous innovation and continuous innovation is the source of sustained competitive advantage. According to Nonaka and Von Krogh (1994), four modes of knowledge conversion are created when tacit and explicit knowledge intermingle. Socialization which interacts tacit to tacit is everyday proof of converting new tacit knowledge through experiences that have been shared. Externalisation processes tacit knowledge into explicit form to aid knowledge sharing for the creation of new knowledge. The combination is explicit to explicit knowledge interaction and this processes explicit knowledge from within or outside the organisation to bring about a new systematic and more complex knowledge that is shared within the organisation. The Internalization variable interacts from explicit to tacit within the organisation. This is the application of the tacit knowledge that has been consumed explicitly.



**Figure 1:** Knowledge Conversion Model by Nonaka and Von Krogh (1994)

The combination of the variables in the model: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization aims to keep the organisational knowledge updated and aligned to improve effective service delivery (Lindner & Wald 2011). "When organizations innovate, they do not simply process information, from the outside in, to solve existing problems and adapt to a changing environment. They create new knowledge and information, from the inside out, to redefine both problems and solutions and, in the process, to re-create their environment" (Von Krogh, Nonaka, & Rechsteiner 2012). The Knowledge conversion model was utilised as the main aim is the interrelations between organisational knowledge and the individuals inside the organisation: in this case the members of the Pentecostal church. A thorough understanding of KM theories regarding knowledge creation and sharing practices was needed in understanding and evaluating KM at the Christian Faith Revival Ministries Church of South Africa.

#### 4. Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to assess KM practices and organisational learning within religious organisations, in particular, a Pentecostal Church. The objectives of the study specifically are to:

1. To examine the awareness and uptake of KM, and how knowledge is being managed within Christian Faith Revival Ministries of South Africa.
2. Determine Christian Faith Revival Ministries of South Africa's openness to organisational learning and towards contributing to human capital development within the organisation.
3. Assess how Christian Faith Revival Ministries of South Africa could leverage KM practices and organisational learning in achieving its goals of spreading the gospel and enhancing its community services.

#### 5. Research Methodology

The approach for this study's research inquiry was a case study which utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection from a population of 70 (including 20 church leaders) adult church members at the Christian Faith Revival Ministries South Africa. As the church has a total of 120 members with 70 adult members, Total enumeration sampling was used to determine the sample size since children and those below 18 years were not included in the study. Questionnaires were used to collect data from church members while the church leaders were interviewed. Out of the about 70 adult members of the Church, 62 (88.6%) responded by completing the questionnaire but two (2) of the questionnaires were excluded as they were unusable. 10 (50%) of the 20 leaders participated in the interview. Quantitative data was analysed descriptively while the qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. This was used to supplement the quantitative results in the discussion. The study was approved by the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) of the University of the Western Cape.

#### 6. Results and Discussion

To examine the level of awareness and uptake of KM as well as the management of knowledge within Christian Faith Revival Ministries of South Africa, the below quantitative results are related to documented knowledge at the church. This is accompanied by qualitative data in the form of quotations from the research participants. From Figure 1 below, 43 (71.7%) of the respondents agreed that church meetings/services/training is documented, and 6 participants (10%) reported that they are not sure. It is very interesting to note that none of the participants disagreed.

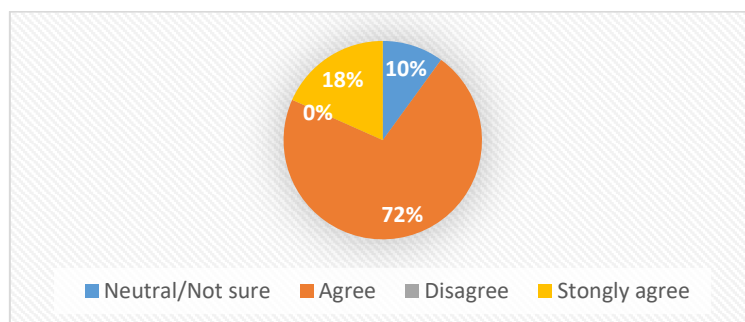


Figure 2: Documentation of church /meetings/services/trainings

However, these responses contradict the interview responses where most of the leaders who were interviewed, reported that currently, there is no documentation of church meetings/services. "It is not that these training are documented but that is very important" [Interview Participant 1]. An evangelism leader noted that "in my department, there is not really trainings taking place... but if there would be... trainings should be documented in both print and electronic format" [Interview Participant 3]. Another participant who is a deacon and in the music section added that "there is no formal training and rehearsals for both the deacons as well as the music division, but if there should be such training and rehearsals... it would have been documented in printed format for people to have access to these training, but someone must be appointed to do this work and to share it with whosoever needs it" [Interview Participant 4]. Respondents also pointed out the need for documentation to take place noting that training "must be documented... we need to appoint someone to do this work and to provide access to these documents" [Interview Participant 9]. This contradiction in responses could be due to

members undertaking personal documentation for their personal records and not necessarily for the organisation.

As trainings and meetings in the church are not documented, the interaction of knowledge as put forth by Nonaka and Von Krogh (1994) in the SECI model is happening at the socialization level but not at the Externalization level of the model. For explicit knowledge to be shared and accessed, tacit knowledge first needs to be captured, organised and stored effectively. Knowledge sharing is thus a vital aspect of KM because it makes knowledge accessible and usable at the social and organisational levels (Paulin and Suneson 2012). When tacit knowledge is not being extracted, documented, and converted to explicit knowledge, it not only hinders the access to knowledge within religious organisations but also, hinders the practices of KM, organisational learning and human capital development in these organisations. According to a study by Mahmoudsalehi, Moradkhannejad and Safari (2012), there are four critical factors for the success of KM – leadership, culture, structure, and information technology infrastructure. In the case of Christian Faith Revival Ministries of South Africa, it seems that the church already engages in sharing tacit knowledge informally through dialogue. However, there is no organisational structure that supports KM practices or activities.

To determine Christian Faith Revival Ministries of South Africa's openness to organisational learning and towards contributing to human capital development within the organisation, respondents were queried on their perception of the importance of knowledge sharing and management. From Figure 3, it is evident from the responses to the questionnaire that the church members have a positive perception of knowledge sharing as 46 (76.7%) of the respondents agreed with this, and 11 (18.3%) indicated that they strongly agree. Only 3 (5.0%) were neutral in their responses with none of the respondents in disagreement.

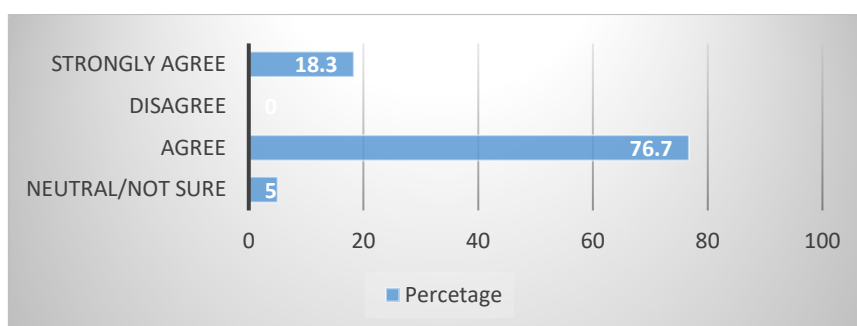


Figure 3: Perceptions of members on the importance of knowledge sharing

Similar to the quantitative results, the majority of the leaders who were interviewed responded that they think it is very important for information, knowledge, and skills to be shared within the church and they gave various reasons for this. "Yes, for me as a leader it is very important to share documents and to share information, knowledge, and skills. This will ensure that we are more successful in our vision" [Interview Participant 1]. The participant also agreed on contributing to human capital development by stating that "I also see the need to provide members with short course trainings and to send them for these trainings to provide them with more knowledge and skills" [Interview Participant 1]. On keeping up with new knowledge and skills, another participant stated that "... everyone must do something like a refresher course, and this is something in my opinion, which can be done in the near future" [Interview Participant 7].

However, the importance of sharing knowledge about spiritual gifts was also raised, claiming that this will help people learn more about the gifts and be more educated on what this work entails with real-life examples. "...I do think it's important to share this kind of information and knowledge so that people can be educated and understand what God expects from them who have these gifts of healing, prophesying, and casting out demons" [Interview Participant 9]. Rafoq (2019) opined that knowledge sharing is a systematic way of improving an organisation's performance. From the results, nearly 80% of the members who participated in this study, are in favour of knowledge sharing and organisational learning, revealing a positive attitude towards KM and openness towards contributing to human capital development in the Church. According to Liebowitz and Hopkins (2004), knowledge sharing stimulates individual learning and individual learning can be changed to organisational learning. This positive attitude and openness suggest knowledge sharing is an enabler for individual learning, organisational learning, and human capital development as in Pentecostal Churches as identified in the results of the study. The results, however, contrast those reported by Freeburg (2015), claiming that the acceptance of

KM concepts is met with resistance due to the cultural environment that churches create. These differences could be a result of several factors including organisational climate in addition to nature and nurture.

The final research objective was to assess how Christian Faith Revival Ministries of South Africa could leverage KM practices and organisational learning in achieving its goals of spreading the gospel and enhancing its community services. The qualitative data revealed that evangelism is the most prominent means of knowledge-sharing engagement between the church and the community. One of the respondents noted that "I think there should be held campaigns like door-to-door must be put in place for sharing information and knowledge about the gospel. The method we use currently to reach the community is through open-air services" [Interview Participant 10]

On giving to the needs of the community, one of the leaders stated that "We do not get donations, but I also encourage them to make voluntary contributions for the feeding scheme; to go out into informal settlements to provide food and minister the word of God" [Interview Participant 1]. Furthermore, the leader acknowledged that "there is a lot of things such as data capturing, and administrative work which still needs to be put in place to document, preserve information, knowledge and skills...This will ensure that we are more successful in our vision. However, I can certainly see that our church has grown through sharing knowledge, through learning, skills development, and mentoring" [Interview Participant 1]. According to a study by Reddy (2019), there are various communication types to spread the gospel such as print, radio, television, the internet, and social media to reach a wider audience.

For Pentecostal churches to reach their organisational goals, the church needs to determine what the current organisational knowledge is, and then analyse the knowledge gaps. Many organisations have made investments in KM with failed attempts with the most prominent reason being the lack of alignment between the organisational strategy and the KM plan (Pour, Matin, Yazdani, and Zadeh 2019). Organisational learning has been reported to add value to organisations and institutions because it fosters the achievement of goals (Castaneda, Manrique & Cuellar, 2018).

## 7. Conclusion

This study aims to assess KM practices and organisational learning within religious organisations, in particular, a Pentecostal Church. The results from the study reveal there are no structured KM practices at the Pentecostal church, however, the Church is willing to engage in KM practices. The majority of the church members together with the leaders agree that organisational learning is very important for contributing to the knowledge and skills of its congregational members. Knowledge sharing aimed at empowering and uplifting the community, using community learning as a teaching and learning approach can be adopted. However, all of the needs to be highlighted within a KM plan and organisational strategy of the Pentecostal church must be presented.

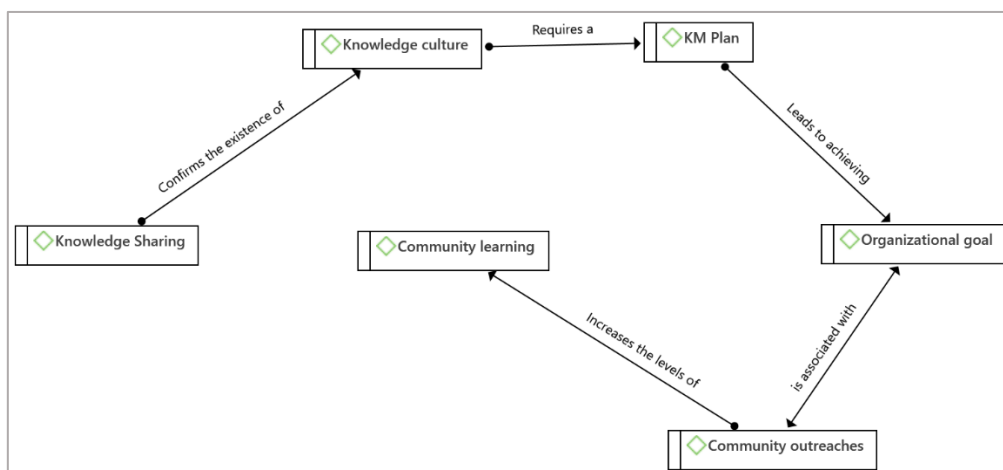


Figure 4: Knowledge sharing at Pentecostal Churches

The Pentecostal church is very much involved in tacit knowledge-sharing practices, but not at the stage of systematically using this as a tool to create organisational effectiveness. This was revealed from the study to be the lack of four constructs that make up the SECI KM processes which are to create explicit knowledge, organise

knowledge, store knowledge and apply knowledge. A KM plan can be based on either a codification or human-centric approach to share, extract, organise and store knowledge for later use. The KM plan is linked to or built on the organisational strategy. Gourova, Antonova, and Todorova (2009) explain that a knowledge audit forms a firm foundation for the goals of a knowledge strategy (or KM plan) and simultaneously, identifies the awareness and KM attitudes in organisations. In utilising KM practices to achieve the organisational goal, the knowledge already in existence within the Pentecostal church should be processed through an established KM infrastructure because this will increase the levels of organisational learning related to how the church's organisational goals can be achieved.

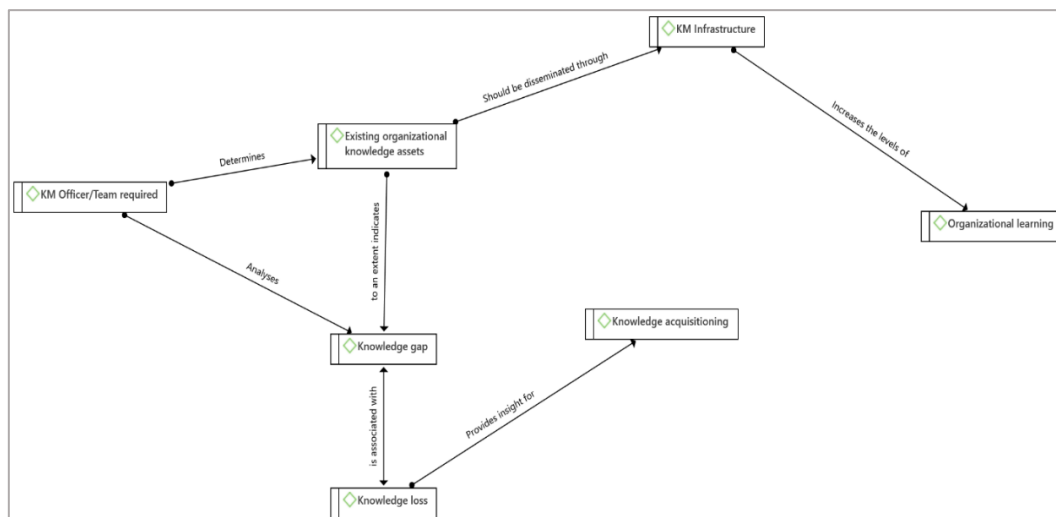


Figure 5: Using KM for goal achievement in Pentecostal Churches

To gain a deeper insight into how organisational learning and organisational goals are linked together as illustrated in Figure 5, the organisational strategy should be the centre of organisational learning to enhance organisational goals and achievement. The organisational strategy of the Pentecostal church is tied to all the important aspects of KM practices which facilitate organisational learning.

## 8. Limitations of the study

The results and conclusion of the study should be considered in light of the following limitations. The limitations of the study are that due to it being a case study, the findings cannot be generalised to all religious organisations and Pentecostal churches. Also, the study on KM practices in Pentecostal churches might not address all the issues that religious organisations face in reaching their organisational goals and effectiveness.

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