

Gestão do Conhecimento no Setor Público: Uma Revisão Sistemática da Literatura

Knowledge Management in the Public Sector: A Systematic Literature Review

Gestión del Conocimiento en el Sector Público: Una Revisión Sistemática de la Literatura

Grupo temático 05 - Gestão de Pessoas e Comportamento Organizacional no Serviço Público

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RESUMO

A Gestão do Conhecimento (GC) é um pilar estratégico crucial para o desempenho superior e a inovação no setor público, apesar da literatura escassa frente ao privado. Este estudo visou evidenciar o estado da arte, identificando tendências, conceitos e lacunas neste campo. Realizou-se uma Revisão Sistemática da Literatura (RSL) qualitativa, exploratória e descritiva, seguindo Tranfield, Denyer e Smart (2003). Buscas nas bases "Web of Science", "SCOPUS" e "CAPES-café" analisaram 23 artigos publicados entre 2021 e 2025. Os resultados mostram que a GC é uma capacidade estratégica essencial, mas sua implementação é globalmente heterogênea e incipiente, enfrentando barreiras como burocracia, inércia e resistência cultural. Há um sério risco de perda de conhecimento tácito pela rotatividade de pessoal. Concluindo, o setor público demonstra imaturidade em GC, exigindo transformação cultural e modelos que integrem as dimensões humana, social e político-administrativa, superando padrões importados do setor privado.

Palavras-chave: Gestão do Conhecimento. Setor Público. Revisão Sistemática. Inovação. Memória Organizacional.

ABSTRACT

Knowledge Management (KM) is a crucial strategic pillar for superior performance and innovation in the public sector, although related literature is relatively scarce compared to the private sector. This study aimed to evidence the state-of-the-art, identifying key trends, concepts, and gaps in this field. A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted, following Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003). Searches in "Web of Science," "SCOPUS," and "CAPES-cafe" analyzed 23 peer-reviewed articles published between 2021 and 2025. Results show KM is an essential strategic capability, but implementation is globally heterogeneous and incipient, facing barriers like bureaucracy, organizational inertia, and cultural resistance. There is a serious risk of tacit knowledge loss due to personnel turnover. Concluding, the public sector shows KM immaturity, demanding cultural transformation and frameworks that holistically integrate human, social, and political-administrative dimensions, surpassing imported private sector models.

Keywords: Knowledge Management. Public Sector. Systematic Review. Innovation. Organizational Memory.

RESUMEN

La Gestión del Conocimiento (GC) es un pilar estratégico crucial para el desempeño e innovación en el sector público, pese a la literatura escasa frente al privado. Este estudio visó evidenciar el estado del arte, identificando tendencias, conceptos y brechas en el campo. Se realizó una Revisión Sistemática de la Literatura (RSL) cualitativa y exploratoria, siguiendo a Tranfield, Denyer y Smart (2003). Búsquedas en "Web of Science", "SCOPUS" y "CAPES-café" analizaron 23 artículos publicados entre 2021 y 2025. Los resultados muestran que la GC es una capacidad estratégica esencial, pero su implementación es globalmente heterogênea e incipiente, enfrentando barreras como burocracia, inercia y resistencia cultural. Hay un serio riesgo de pérdida de conocimiento tácito por la rotación de personal. Concluyendo, el sector público demuestra inmadurez en GC, exigiendo transformación cultural e modelos que integren las dimensiones humana, social y político-administrativa, superando patrones importados del sector privado.

Palabras clave: Gestión del Conocimiento. Sector Público. Revisión Sistemática. Innovación. Memoria Organizacional.

1. Introduction

The process of globalization and technological advances since the 1990s led to the emergence of Knowledge Management (KM) as a strategic pillar for 21st-century organizations. Recognizing knowledge as one of the most relevant resources for organizational success (XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023), KM is a capacity to leverage knowledge to enable superior performance, encourage innovation, and increase customer value (ASHOK, 2021).

In the public sector, KM assumes even greater relevance by driving efficiency and the capacity to respond to social demands (LAIHONEN; KORK; SINERVO, 2023). The complexity of contemporary challenges demands a systematic approach to the creation, storage, dissemination, and application of knowledge (XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023; LAIHONEN; KOKKO, 2023). Despite its crucial relevance, KM in the public sector remains relatively under-investigated compared to the private sector (KASSA; NING, 2023).

Despite its crucial relevance, KM in the public sector its incorporation, challenges, barriers, and opportunities is relatively under-investigated compared to the private sector (KASSA; NING, 2023). The literature on KM in public administrations is scarce and focuses on the macro level, with research trends revealing gaps and demonstrating the need to better research and explore this field of knowledge (KASSA; NING, 2023).

The objective of this study is to perform a systematic literature review to highlight the state-of-the-art of scientific production concerning KM in the public sector, identifying the main trends, concepts, gaps, and directions for future research. Furthermore, as observed by Kassa and Ning (2023), the literature on KM in the public sector is still considered scarce compared to the private sector, justifying the relevance of this research (RAZZAQ et al., 2019; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023).

This article was structured into sections, as follows: the 1st section presents the “Introduction”; next, section 2 records the “Theoretical Framework”; the 3rd section details the “Methodology” used by the research, followed, in sections 4 and 5, by the “Results” and respective Discussions; in addition to the “Conclusions,” “Limitations,” and “Suggestions for Future Studies” in section 6.

2. Literature Review

KM has become a *conditio sine qua non* for the survival of any entity in the contemporary society (ELASHRY et al., 2024), focusing not only on information storage but on management that reflects in the quality and results of the services provided (AL SAYEGH et al., 2023; LAIHONEN et al., 2023). It translates into the capacity to leverage knowledge (both internal and external) to achieve superior performance, stimulate innovation, and add value to services and products (AL YAMI; AJMAL, 2019; ALVARENGA et al., 2020; FISCHER; DÖRING, 2022; GAMA, 2024; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023).

2.1. Fundamental Concepts of Knowledge Management

KM is a field that presents itself in a multifaceted way and has roots in diverse areas, including information systems, organizational theory, strategic management, and human resource management, making it an inherently multidisciplinary discipline (AL YAMI; AJMAL, 2019; LAIHONEN et al., 2024). Its scope ranges from the creation and organization of knowledge to its sharing and strategic application, aiming to improve performance, promote innovation, and facilitate problem-solving, both in the private and public sectors (LARTEY et al., 2021; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023). In fact, KM translates into the capacity to leverage knowledge, both internal and external, to achieve superior performance, drive innovation, and add value to products and services (AL YAMI; AJMAL, 2019; AZEVEDO et al., 2020). Literature review studies, for example, are crucial for mapping and evaluating the existing intellectual territory, aiming to enhance the knowledge base (TRANFIELD et al., 2003).

Peter Drucker (2001) already postulated that, in contemporary society, knowledge has become the fundamental resource for people and the economy, relegating elements like land, labor, and capital to a secondary role (DRUCKER, 2001). Thus, the proactive management of knowledge resources is a *conditio sine qua non* for the survival and guaranteed quality of services in any organization (ELASHRY et al., 2024; KASSA; NING, 2023). It is also highlighted that organizations that seek KM as part of their strategy are more likely to innovate and improve collaboration among employees (AZEVEDO et al., 2020).

KM, therefore, emerges as an inherently multidisciplinary field, with deep roots in diverse areas such as information systems, organizational theory, and human resource management (AGRIFOGLIO et al., 2021;

LAIHONEN et al., 2023). Despite the absence of a singular definition, the conceptual convergence points reveal KM as the strategic capacity to leverage knowledge – both internally generated and externally acquired – to drive innovation, optimize performance, and add value to products and services (AZEVEDO et al., 2020; PHALADI, 2024; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023).

Public administration is fundamentally defined as the set of state entities dedicated to providing public services and meeting the needs of citizens and the collective, as observed by Kassa and Ning (2023).

For Fyshchuk and Evsyukova (2021) and Kassa and Ning (2023), KM is essential for the development of a nation, as it enables the public sector to leverage knowledge – both internally generated and externally acquired – to achieve superior performance, drive innovation, and add value to services and products. This potential is widely recognized by various authors in the field (ALVARENGA et al., 2020; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023).

As emphasized by Adobor et al. (2019) and Xanthopoulou et al. (2023), KM benefits the public sector by improving decision-making, citizen participation, and service efficiency. While Kassa and Ning (2023) and Lartey et al. (2021) state that success depends on leadership commitment and robust IT systems, authors such as Phaladi (2024) and Bem et al. (2013) warn that cultural resistance and behavioral barriers remain significant challenges to its effective implementation.

Unlike models primarily focused on private organizations, KM in public administration must mandatorily integrate the Citizen-user and Society dimensions, an aspect that Kassa and Ning (2023) and Laihonen et al. (2023) consider fundamental. This approach focuses on transforming knowledge into action in daily operations, as highlighted by Laihonen and Kokko (2023). KM can thus enhance social capacity and contribute to the effective participation of citizens and civil society in the decision-making of public organizations, a possibility pointed out by Muzzio and Gama (2024).

Critics, such as Laihonen et al. (2023), argue that KM research in the public sector, although often adopting business sector models, should give greater attention to the political-administrative nature and social processes of knowledge formation, instead of focusing excessively on data and internal efficiencies. In this way, KM in public administration is not just a tool for internal efficiency, but a strategic and social imperative.

2.2. Challenges and Contextual Factors of KM in the Public Sector

Despite the recognition of its importance, KM implementation in the public sector faces significant challenges. These include the difficulty of knowledge sharing in rigid bureaucratic and hierarchical structures (FISCHER; DÖRING, 2022). Resistance to change by employees and organizational inertia are also important barriers (ASHOK, 2021). Al Yami et al. (2022) discuss how very large organizations can be more bureaucratic and, therefore, reluctant to adopt practices that may disturb the status quo. Furthermore, the loss of tacit knowledge, frequently undocumented due to employee turnover and retirement, represents a continuous risk to quality and efficiency, exacerbated by the absence of effective knowledge retention strategies, as emphasized by Phaladi (2024) and Brătianu et al. (2020).

Institutional complexity, addressed by Laihonen and Kokko (2023), and the need to solve complex social problems ("wicked problems"), according to Dumay (2020), impose specific demands on KM in the public sector. The discontinuity of plans and projects, frequently associated with political and administrative changes, exacerbates the loss of undocumented knowledge, a problem highlighted by Phaladi (2024).

For KM to be successfully implemented in the public sector, a series of interrelated contextual factors are crucial. Support and sponsorship from top management are essential and fundamental for the success of KM, directly influencing knowledge quality and the propensity for change, as argued by Xanthopoulou et al. (2023) and Ashok (2021). Strategic leadership, especially knowledge-oriented leadership, impacts KM capability and organizational innovation, mediating the success of change management (FEREDE et al., 2024).

Organizational culture and flexible structures are vital pillars for KM, determining knowledge-sharing behavior and mitigating barriers such as power mindsets and hierarchical rigidity (ABBASI et al., 2020; PHALADI, 2024). By aligning KM with organizational strategy, leadership fosters a culture of continuous learning and redefines processes to better use collective expertise (ALFENAS et al., 2021; AZEVEDO et al., 2020). Ultimately, this synergy encourages interaction and socialization, which are essential for driving innovation through collaborative partnerships (LARTEY et al., 2021; MUZZIO; GAMA, 2024).

Information Technology (IT) acts as a vital infrastructural pillar, enabling the creation, distribution, and application of knowledge through coding, digitalization, and secure storage (AL YAMI; AJMAL, 2019; RAZZAQ et al., 2019; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023). Digital solutions, such as the LEOS system in Greece, exemplify the importance interoperability in legal administration (FITSILIS & PAPASTYLIANOU, 2024). KM Systems (KMSs) are crucial for ambidextrous organizations, which exploit existing competencies and new opportunities

(ELASHRY et al., 2024). The capacity to deal with cybernetics and information security is also a relevant factor, with Fyshchuk and Evsyukova (2021) highlighting the need for cybersecurity training.

Continuous training and qualification of users and personnel are crucial for the adoption and proper use of KM tools (AL SAYEGH et al., 2023; LARTEY et al., 2021; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023). Promoting multifunctional teams and social activities is indispensable for stimulating the sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge, collective learning, and collaboration in challenge resolution, as demonstrated by Razzaq et al. (2019), Larthey et al. (2021), and Muzzio and Gama (2024). Public-private collaboration and the formation of heterogeneous groups for expertise exchange are essential for more efficient idea generation and responding to social demands, a topic widely explored by Muzzio and Gama (2024).

KM in the public sector is shaped by factors such as accountability to higher governmental spheres (AL YAMI; AJMAL, 2019; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023). The need to manage public knowledge that transcends the organizational scope and aims for the benefit of the collective requires a shared knowledge base, which fosters transparency, trust, and continuous learning, a central premise in the view of Laihonon and Kokko (2023) and Kassa and Ning (2023). KM should be conceived as a social process of knowledge formation, through dialogues that combine diverse views and interests to formulate sustainable policies, as articulated by Laihonon et al. (2023). As already demonstrated, the active involvement of citizens in data management is fundamental to fostering the exchange of expertise and institutional vitality, expanding social capacity and contributing to effective participation in decision-making, as highlighted by Muzzio and Gama (2024) and Laihonon and Kokko (2023).

In summary, the successful implementation of KM in public administration is not just a matter of internal tools or processes, but a strategic and social imperative that requires deep understanding and proactive management of its multiple contextual factors. The synergy between leadership, culture, organizational structure, technology, human resource practices, and a collaborative and participatory work environment is essential to transform knowledge into sustainable public value.

3. Methodology

Systematic review is a rigorous methodology for synthesizing research evidence, differing from narrative reviews due to its replicable, scientific, and transparent nature, aiming to minimize bias through exhaustive searches, providing an audit trail of the reviewer's decisions (TRANFIELD et al., 2003).

In this context, this qualitative research, with an exploratory and descriptive approach, was based on the analysis of publications on knowledge management in the public sector by means of a systematic literature review (TRANFIELD et al., 2003). The methodological rigor, guided by the postulates of Tranfield et al. (2003), allowed for the identification of contemporary knowledge on the researched topic, without biases common to more traditional narrative reviews, but ensuring the researchers' capacity for creativity during the study structuring.

The research was structured in four sequential phases, grounded in the methodological rigor of Tranfield et al. (2003). In the initial identification phase, a search for peer-reviewed articles was conducted in the "Web of Science" (43), "SCOPUS" (25), and "CAPES-cafe" (91) databases, using terms such as "Knowledge Management and Public Sector", "Knowledge Management and Public Administration", and "Knowledge Management and Public Organization", resulting in 159 open-access articles published between 2021 and 2025. In the screening phase, articles with a JCR below 1.00 were excluded, duplicates across databases and languages were removed, and abstracts were read to ensure thematic adherence, narrowing the sample to 23 articles. The third phase, eligibility, involved the full reading and qualitative evaluation of the methodological quality of these 23 publications. Finally, in the structuring phase, data were extracted, analyzed, and synthesized to identify patterns, gaps, and contributions of Knowledge Management (KM) in the public sector, consolidating the final corpus of 23 articles analyzed in this review.

4. Results

This literature review synthesizes the findings of various studies on KM in the public sector. The 23 analyzed articles reveal distinct views and specific contextual approaches, highlighting contemporary research trends that emerge from different concepts, methods, and characteristics, further revealing challenges brought up by the identification of gaps, academic, and managerial implications.

4.1 Main Concepts of KM in the Public Sector

KM in the public sector is a complex and multifaceted field, with diverse conceptualizations and processes. Table 1 highlights the main concepts and characteristics adopted by the different organizations researched:

Table 1: Concepts and characteristics of KM in the public sector

CONCEPT/ KM DEFINITION	MAIN CHARACTERISTICS / DIFFERENCES	AUTHORS / SOURCES
KM as Strategic Capability	A capacity to leverage internal and external knowledge to enable superior performance, encourage innovation, and increase customer value. Viewed as an organizational resource of strategic significance.	ASHOK (2021); LAIHONEN et al. (2023); KASSA & NING (2023).
KM as Processes and Systems	Processes and systems that contribute to the production, acquisition, classification, storage, dissemination, and use/reuse of knowledge. Includes KM oriented towards processes, technology, people, and systems.	AL YAMI et al. (2022); XANTHOPOULOU et al. (2023).
KM as Organizational Knowing	Emphasizes the contribution of human action and processes of interaction and socialization in defining new ways to deal with policy problems and perform administrative tasks. Production and articulation of knowledge.	AGRIFOGLIO et al. (2021).
KM as Knowledge Networks	Human and computational interaction where people exchange information, knowledge, and experience to develop new knowledge and solve new issues. Combination of knowledge, experience, talents, skills, and capacities in models that are constantly changing.	FYSHCHUK & EVSYUKOVA (2021)
KM in the context of New Public Management	Aims to align the public sector with the private sector, incorporating market values and demand cycles via cost-effectiveness, performance, and accountability improvements.	KASSA & NING (2023).
KM as Socio-Technical	Addresses the organization as a complex system with individual subsystems (social and technical) that support functioning in a structured way.	LARTEY et al. (2021).

Source: research data

As demonstrated in Table 1, KM can be understood in various ways in the public sector, with its pillars structured as a Strategic Capability. In this view, as argued by Laihonon et al. (2023), Kassa and Ning (2023), and Phaladi (2024), knowledge is an organizational resource of strategic significance, essential for achieving superior performance, fostering innovation, and adding value to the client, driving efficiency and sustainability (ASHOK, 2021; LAIHONEN et al., 2023). However, this approach is criticized by Laihonon et al. (2023) for focusing excessively on data and technical methods to the detriment of interpretation and the political-administrative context.

Complementarily, KM is viewed as a set of continuous processes and systems, encompassing the production, acquisition, classification, storage, dissemination, and reuse of knowledge (AL YAMI et al., 2022; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023). According to Xanthopoulou et al. (2023) and Ali et al. (2024), these processes are integrating components oriented towards people, technology, and systems.

Furthermore, KM manifests as Organizational Knowing, a perspective highlighted by Agrifoglio et al. (2021) that emphasizes "organizational knowing" as a factor continuously acquired and reproduced by human action, interaction, and socialization. The description of the "generating dance" between knowledge and organizational knowing brings up the individual and collective interpretation of data for knowledge formation (AGRIFOGLIO et al., 2021; LAIHONEN et al., 2023).

KM is also delineated by its function in Knowledge Networks, where human and computational interaction allows individuals to exchange information and experiences to develop new ideas and solve problems (FYSHCHUK; EVSYUKOVA, 2021). These networks, characterized by a non-hierarchical and self-organized structure, promote the combination of talents, skills, and experiences in dynamic models, as observed by Fyshchuk and Evsyukova (2021) and Muzzio and Gama (2024).

In the context of New Public Management, Kassa and Ning (2023) state that KM seeks to align the public sector with private sector values and practices, aiming for cost-effectiveness and performance. However, this

transposition is viewed with reservations, as the focus on efficiency and technology may disregard the unique political-administrative complexity of the public sector (AGRIFOGLIO et al., 2021; LAIHONEN et al., 2023). Finally, KM is addressed in a socio-technical manner by Larney et al. (2021), treating the organization as a complex system of social and technical subsystems that operate in a structured way. This view recognizes the interconnection between people, technology, and processes, where quality KM systems are crucial for empowering employees, facilitating communication, and exploring new solutions, as exemplified by the work of Elashry et al. (2024) and Fitsilis and Papastyliaou (2024). Thus, technology acts as an essential facilitator for the creation, sharing, and development of knowledge (LARNEY et al., 2021).

4.2 Research Trends

Based on the multifaceted conceptualizations, research on KM in the public sector reveals diverse trends and study focuses that aid in the understanding of this theme.

4.2.1 Impact of KM on organizational memory

The adoption of KM practices is driven by concern over the loss of institutional knowledge due to personnel turnover (ASHOK, 2021; LARNEY et al., 2021; PHALADI, 2024). The loss of tacit knowledge is a serious risk, often due to employee turnover and the aging workforce. Phaladi (2024) points out the lack of strategies to retain critical knowledge and "knowledge stickiness" as a challenge for knowledge transfer, prompting organizations to implement initiatives to remove organizational obstacles in order to prevent the loss of institutional knowledge.

Knowledge capture involves a systematic process of documenting experiences and lessons learned, being crucial for making this knowledge available for future use by the organization. Knowledge storage and retrieval are essential KM processes (AL YAMI et al., 2022; COCCHIARA et al., 2024; PEPPE et al., 2022). Fyshchuk and Evsyukova (2021) highlight document management systems for storage, indexing, and archiving, and the "review of the performed activity" tool to obtain information about the development of situations, advantages, disadvantages, and lessons learned. In this context, the "lessons learned" methodology presents itself as an important process for collecting, consolidating, and documenting experiences, errors, and risks for use in future reforms.

4.2.2 Levels of KM implementation in organizations

KM implementation in the diverse researched organizations reveals varied levels and, in many cases, is still in early stages of development. Although there is a growing recognition of its criticality and increased interest in KM for public entities (BALASUBRAMANIAN et al., 2020), its practical and consistently effective application is frequently hampered by diverse factors, as observed by Agrifoglio et al. (2021).

In countries like Greece, KM in the public sector is considered to be in an initial investigation phase, facing substantial barriers such as bureaucracy, inflexibility, legislative limitations, resource scarcity, and resistance to change (XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023a, 2023b). Similarly, in public sector enterprises in South Africa, KM is classified as underdeveloped and non-institutionalized, with lack of leadership, bureaucracy, excessive "paperwork," and organizational silos being pointed out as major obstacles to the effective management of tacit knowledge (PHALADI, 2024).

Research in an African country (Nigeria) highlighted that KM was not well established and participants were unfamiliar with it in many public sector departments and agencies, indicating that context strongly influenced implementation (PEPPE et al., 2022).

Variation in implementation is also linked to organizational size. In the UAE public sector, KM implementation was highest in large entities, followed by small/medium, and then by very large entities (ALI et al., 2022). Very large organizations, despite their resources, may suffer from "organizational inertia" and bureaucracy, making them less effective than large and medium-sized ones, resulting in an "inverted V" pattern (ALI et al., 2022).

In European public space agencies, the documentation of previous missions is not always easily accessible. To overcome this, Cocchiara et al. (2024) propose the implementation of a three-dimensional Project Management Office (PMO), focused on Strategy, Resources, and Knowledge. Specific advances include a KM experiment in Greece involving a legal interoperability laboratory and the LEOS system, demonstrating encouraging results in creating a legal knowledge base (FITSILIS; PAPASTYLIANOU, 2024).

KM practices function as crucial mediators between learning organizations and sustainable organizational performance in public IT companies in China (QIN et al., 2024). Similarly, in the Egyptian public telecommunications sector, Knowledge Management Systems (KMSs) fully mediate the effect of motivation on

organizational ambidexterity practices (ELASHRY et al., 2024). In India, the need was identified to improve organizational learning and knowledge sharing to address growing knowledge inequality (LARTEY et al., 2021). The diversity of contexts suggests that KM effectiveness depends on adaptive and contextually informed approaches (ASHOK, 2021; LAIHONEN et al., 2023).

4.2.3 Knowledge Management and Innovation

KM and innovation are increasingly recognized as crucial elements for development and high performance in the public sector (COCCHIARA et al., 2024; FEREDÉ et al., 2024; LAIHONEN; KOKKO, 2023; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023). Research indicates that KM contributes directly to the innovation of public organizations, resulting in better performance (AL SAYEGH et al., 2023; KASSA; NING, 2023).

As highlighted by Agrifoglio et al. (2021) and Lartey et al. (2021), "organizational knowing" is a central mechanism for knowledge production and articulation, fundamental for innovation, especially in "technological innovation adoption models". Effective KM and knowledge sharing are significant contributions to innovation and creative performance, as argued by Muzzio and Gama (2024). Open creativity, based on knowledge sharing, is strengthened by collaborative networks between the public and private sectors (MUZZIO; GAMA, 2024).

The relationship between KM and innovation is driven by organizational learning, knowledge sharing, and innovation itself. KM supports knowledge sharing, best practices, and lessons learned, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation (FEREDÉ et al., 2024). Strategic leadership also drives innovation through its interconnection with change management and KM (COCCHIARA et al., 2024; FEREDÉ et al., 2024).

KM-driven innovation manifests in various areas: e-government adoption for "innovation governance" in the UAE (AL SAYEGH et al., 2023), the development of "smart cities" (AL SAYEGH et al., 2023; KASSA; NING, 2023), and "new data-driven business models and service innovations", according to Laihonon and Kokko (2023). KM is also associated with improving "project management practices effectiveness and innovation" (COCCHIARA et al., 2024) and linked to organizational ambidexterity (ELASHRY et al., 2024), affirming that "innovation is a logical outcome of knowledge production and sharing within the firm".

High-performance organizations (HPOs) and learning organizations are favorable contexts. KM best practices mediate the relationship between HPOs and innovation in the Greek public sector, as evidenced by Xanthopoulou et al. (2023). However, the loss of tacit knowledge presents a significant risk, which can affect the performance, productivity, innovation, and sustainable competitive advantage of public enterprises (PHALADI, 2024).

In summary, studies consistently demonstrate that KM is a crucial driver of innovation in the public sector, leading to improved organizational performance.

4.3 Research Contexts and Methods

The 23 analyzed studies demonstrate a notable diversity of methodologies and contexts, reflecting the complexity and scope of KM study in the public sector globally, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Most used methodologies by KM research in the public sector

Principal Methodologies Used by the Research	Authors/Sources
Systematic literature reviews and bibliometric analyses	(AGRIFOGLIO et al., 2021; KASSA & NING, 2023).
Qualitative exploratory case studies based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis	(ASHOK, 2021; COCCHIARA et al., 2024; ELASHRY et al., 2024; MUZZIO & GAMA, 2024; PEPPE ET AL., 2022; PHALADI, 2024; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023).
Robust quantitative approaches that use structured surveys and statistical tools such as PLS-SEM and ANOVA	(ALI et al., 2024; AL SAYEGH et al., 2023; AL YAMI et al., 2022; ELASHRY et al., 2024; FEREDÉ et al., 2024; LARTEY et al., 2021; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023)
Studies that adopt mixed methods	(ELASHRY et al., 2024; PHALADI, 2024; QIN et al., 2024).
Action research or design research for tool development	(ULMANEN et al, 2024).
Evaluations based on surveys of experts or workshop participants	(FITSILLIS & PAPASTYLIANOU, 2024).

Source: research data

The methodologies employed vary widely, including systematic literature reviews and bibliometric analyses that examine general trends (AGRIFOGLIO et al., 2021; KASSA; NING, 2023), qualitative exploratory

case studies based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis to deepen specific phenomena (ASHOK, 2021; COCCHIARA et al., 2024; ELASHRY et al., 2024; MUZZIO; GAMA, 2024; PEPPLÉ et al., 2022; PHALADI, 2024; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023), and robust quantitative approaches that utilize structured surveys and advanced statistical tools such as PLS-SEM and ANOVA to validate models and test hypotheses (ALI et al., 2024; AL SAYEGH et al., 2023; AL YAMI et al., 2022; ELASHRY et al., 2024; FEREDÉ et al., 2024; LARTEY et al., 2021; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023). Furthermore, there are studies that adopt mixed methods (ELASHRY et al., 2024; PHALADI, 2024; QIN et al., 2024), action research or design research for tool development (ULMANEN et al., 2024), and evaluations based on surveys of experts or workshop participants (FITSILIS; PAPASTYLIANOU, 2024).

5. Discussion

This systematic review revealed an evolving field, characterized by diverse conceptual approaches, varied implementation levels, and significant contextual challenges. The 23 analyzed studies converge in recognizing KM as a strategic imperative, but diverge in emphasis. KM is consistently defined as an essential strategic capability to leverage knowledge for superior performance, innovation, and customer value, often rooted in Peter Drucker's perspective of knowledge as the fundamental economic resource (PHALADI, 2024).

However, there is a clear conceptual tension. Some studies emphasize KM as structured processes and systems (AL YAMI et al., 2022; XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2023), while others, such as Agrifoglio et al. (2021), propose the "organizational knowing" perspective, focusing on human action, interaction, and socialization in knowledge production. "Organizational knowing" suggests a more dynamic and tacit understanding, contrasting with the more explicit and formalized process view.

Another divergence lies in the adaptation of models. The "New Public Management" seeks to align the public sector with private sector values, aiming for efficiencies. Critics, such as Agrifoglio et al. (2021) and Laihonen et al. (2023), argue this approach may disregard the unique political-administrative complexity, focusing excessively on data. The socio-technical approach, as articulated by Larthey et al. (2021), offers a more holistic view, balancing people, technology, and processes. For effective KM, organizations should develop hybrid conceptual frameworks that critically adapt models to the public context, integrating human, social, and technological dimensions to generate sustainable public value.

The analyzed research converges on identifying institutional knowledge loss as a serious and generalized risk, driven by personnel turnover and the aging workforce. Tacit knowledge is highlighted as particularly vulnerable (PHALADI, 2024; BRĂȚIANU et al., 2020). There is general recognition of the need for systematic documentation (AL YAMI et al., 2022; COCCHIARA et al., 2024; PEPPLÉ et al., 2022), utilizing tools like the "lessons learned" methodology (FYSHCHUK; EVSYUKOVA, 2021). However, implementation is not universal, exacerbating tacit knowledge loss. Contemporary research reflects a gap between the theory (retention necessity) and practice (effective implementation), with persistent challenges related to culture and inconsistency. Organizations urgently need to invest in sharing cultures and robust KM tools to ensure critical knowledge is accessible.

As argued by Larthey et al. (2021) and Al Yami and Ajmal (2022), KM is a critical driver of operational efficiency and sustainable development, resulting in reduced expenses, increased productivity, improved customer service, and greater value. KM is also a mechanism for organizational innovation, as noted by Fyshchuk and Evsyukova (2021) and Qin et al. (2024). However, the impact is non-uniform and can be influenced by organizational size, a factor discussed by Al Yami et al. (2022), suggesting that complexity and rigidity in large structures can be significant obstacles. KM benefits also extend to citizen satisfaction, public value creation, and smart city development, according to Kassa and Ning (2023). KM strategies must be adaptive and context-sensitive, prioritizing public value creation for society.

Agrifoglio et al. (2021) and Xanthopoulou et al. (2023) observe that KM implementation is globally heterogeneous and often incipient, facing widely cited barriers such as bureaucracy, inflexibility, and resistance to change. Success exists in specific contexts, as demonstrated by Cocchiara et al. (2024), Elashry et al. (2024), Fitsilis and Papastyliaou (2024), and Qin et al. (2024), reinforcing that implementation is unequal and contextually influenced. KM strategies must be highly contextualized, beginning with leadership awareness and overcoming cultural and structural barriers.

The relationship between KM and innovation is a consistent pillar. As evidenced by Elashry et al. (2024) and Xanthopoulou et al. (2023), KM acts not only as a direct facilitator but also as a mediating mechanism and a guardian of innovation capacity. Furthermore, Muzzio and Gama (2024) highlight "open creativity" as a precursor

to innovation, potentially driven by external engagements. KM fosters organizational ambidexterity and open creativity, including through public-private partnerships. To foster innovation, organizations must invest in sharing culture, knowledge-oriented strategic leadership, and effective strategies to mitigate tacit knowledge loss.

The analysis of research methods shows a notable diversity, reflecting the complexity of KM globally. There is a clear preference for mixed methods, as seen in the studies of Elashry et al. (2024), Phaladi (2024), and Qin et al. (2024). This diversity, while robust, evidences KM's contextually sensitive nature and presents significant challenges for generalization. Future studies should focus on cross-cultural and cross-sector comparative analyses to identify patterns.

Theoretically, research contributes reflections on "organizational knowing", as explored by Agrifoglio et al. (2021), and the importance of KM for decision-making and social intellectual capital, as argued by Kassa and Ning (2023). Contributions extend to the resource-based view and knowledge stickiness theories, according to Phaladi (2024). Practically, implications guide public managers to adopt more social approaches to learning, a point emphasized by Lartey et al. (2021) and Pepple et al. (2022), incorporate KM best practices for innovation, as suggested by Xanthopoulou et al. (2023), and actively remove organizational barriers like bureaucracy and silo mentality, as highlighted by Phaladi (2024). The state-of-the-art emphasizes the imperative need for engaged strategic leadership, cultural transformation, and the active dismantling of bureaucratic barriers.

The public sector is highlighted as still being in a stage of KM immaturity, facing a vicious cycle of under-research, organizational inertia, bureaucratic cultures, and uncritical appropriation of models. Multifaceted, long-term approaches are needed, including contextual research, developing adapted frameworks, cultural transformation, specific digital tool training, and reorienting KM to holistically integrate human, social, and political-administrative dimensions.

6. Conclusions

The systematic literature review on KM in the public sector outlined a field in constant evolution, characterized by diverse conceptual approaches that oscillate between KM as essential strategic capability and instrumental models imported from the private sector, and the "organizational knowing" perspective that highlights human and social action.

The results point to a generalized risk of institutional knowledge loss, especially tacit knowledge, due to turnover and the aging workforce, revealing a mismatch between theory and practice. KM is a critical driver of operational efficiency, sustainable development, and innovation, reflecting in cost reduction, increased productivity, improved citizen service, and public value creation. However, its impact is complex and non-linear, significantly influenced by organizational size and bureaucratic inertia.

KM implementation remains heterogeneous and incipient, facing barriers such as bureaucracy, inflexibility, legislative limitations, and resistance to change. The research reveals a growing preference for mixed methods and great contextual diversity.

In summary, the public sector is in a stage of KM immaturity, requiring a conscious and integrated effort that transcends the mere importation of models, prioritizing cultural transformation, framework adaptation, and the holistic integration of human, social, and political-administrative dimensions to fully achieve sustainable public value.

The analyzed studies further reveal a persistent set of gaps and challenges, including: under-research and superficiality of approaches, as evidenced by Agrifoglio et al. (2021), Ashok (2021), Kassa and Ning (2023), and Muzzio and Gama (2024); organizational inertia and bureaucratic culture, identified by Ashok (2021), Muzzio and Gama (2024), Pepple et al. (2022), and Phaladi (2024); excessive dependence on technology, as discussed by Ali et al. (2024), Ashok (2021), and Laihonon et al. (2023); absence of a unified framework, noted by Ferede et al. (2024); implementation problems, highlighted by Cocchiara et al. (2024) and Pepple et al. (2022); limited validity and generalization of results, addressed by Al Sayegh et al. (2023), Kassa and Ning (2023), Muzzio and Gama (2024), and Phaladi (2024); and the absence of interoperability and open data analysis, as described by Fitsilis and Papastylianou (2024).

Regarding possibilities for future research, it is suggested to conduct more empirical and case studies, replicating research in different countries and public sectors to increase generalization and develop contextually adapted KM models. Future research could also investigate cultural barriers in depth (including institutional corruption, ethics, and the transition from bureaucratic to collaborative cultures). Additionally, future studies could explore the application of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in KM, the development of unified frameworks that integrate KM, strategic leadership, and change management, and a reorientation of KM to more



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holistically integrate the human, social, and political-administrative dimensions. Cross-cultural and cross-sector comparative studies, and more research on training public administrators in legal informatics tools, are also needed.

This review has limitations, notably the restriction of analyses to articles extracted from 3 consultation databases, leaving open possibilities for sample expansion from other databases. Furthermore, restricting the search to specific terms only in the article titles means that the research possibly fails to include studies adhering to KM in the public sector that were published without the chosen terms and locations.



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