The Added Value of Knowledge Management in the Operation of Public Organizations

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Abstract –

This paper attempts to outline the role of knowledge management in the public sector and the way it contributes to its operation, creating added value. Modern public organizations face significant challenges in the knowledge economy and must constantly adapt to the economic, social, and cultural changes of the environment. In this context, they must adopt new standards, that put the management of their intangible assets at the core of their strategies. Recognizing the vital role of knowledge resources in guiding public organizations can lead to better performance. The peculiar nature of these organizations, however, seems to create obstacles to knowledge management efforts, as these organizations tend to be highly bureaucratic and trapped in rigid hierarchies, and require knowledge management strategies that are able to deal with this situation. The conclusions of this paperare based on the results of secondary research conducted through an extensive review of international and Greek literature and articles, as well as research in digital sources of information, and highlight the added value of knowledge management in the public sector.

Keywords - Knowledge, Knowledge Management, Added Value, Public Organizations

I. Introduction

In the course of time, knowledge is maintained and passed on from generation to generation and contributes to the understanding and interpretation of the past, the perception of the present and the prospects of the future. Especially nowadays, knowledge seems to be an important resource and essential element for every organizational activity and must be managed in order for organizations to be able to cope in the highly competitive global markets. Knowledge management helps to increase the efficiency and productivity of an organization, improve the quality of the products and services provided, reduce the costs and time for making effective decisions, and contributes to a better citizen/customer service. As they seem to recognize the critical role of knowledge management for their success, all organizations - both private and public - adopt and develop knowledge-based or knowledge-focused processes and activities, aimed at creating value and gaining a competitive advantage. This value does not pertain to financial or market value but is added value. The knowledge produced in an organization, when shared and disseminated within it and utilized to encourage its innovation and creativity, leads to improved and more complete processes, which result in citizens/customers, and society in general, being able to distinguish the organization's uniqueness and internal value. Such processes and activities are activated with the support of Information and Communication Technology, the arrival and rapid growth of which has created significant opportunities for the conception, management, exchange, integration, and dissemination of knowledge. In this context, public organizations are redesigning their functions and are supporting initiatives such as e-government, knowledge portals, etc., in order to manage their knowledge and serve and collaborate with citizens/clients more efficiently [1] [2].

II. Knowledge

In today's changing and competitive era, knowledge is recognized as an increasingly sustainable organizational feature, while there is an exponential increase in research around this issue [3]. Research in this area recognizes knowledge as an invisible or physical asset, the acquisition of which presupposes a complex intellectual process

of perception, learning, communication, correlation and reasoning [4], as a product of individual and collective learning that is integrated into products/services and systems [5], as a primary strategic resource [6], as a tool for continuous improvement and innovation [7] and as an important organizational advantage [8]. Furthermore, knowledge is linked to organizational progress and is treated as a key factor for the prosperity and success of the organization [9]. In today's knowledge economy, knowledge is treated as a principal organizational characteristic, which must be properly managed and communicated so as to maintain the competitiveness of the organization and enhance its efficiency [1][10].

Knowledge is defined as an action, or the potential of an action, which, based on evidence or pre-existing knowledge and/or information, creates, or has the potential to create, value [11]. Knowledge in the organizational environment takes various forms. The "tree of knowledge" of every organization incorporates two types of knowledge: explicit knowledge, symbolized by the branches of the tree, and implicit or tacit knowledge, which corresponds to the roots of the tree [5]. Explicit knowledge is knowledge that is easy to understand and codify, to be expressed in texts, numbers, or symbols and to be imprinted in practices, products, and processes. It is tangible and thus easy to transfer, store and communicate [12].

Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is developed through individual skills, unconscious personal experience, intuition, and judgment. It is based on the education and personal values of the employee and is accumulated progressively over time. Its transmission occurs through observation, imitation, receiving feedback, reflection and adaptation of behavior, which it guides, and the processes, that is, the socialization of the individual [5].

The greatest amount of knowledge in an organization is tacit knowledge, which is not necessarily documented. This is the knowledge that many public organizations today are beginning to consider, under the threat of losing a significant amount of it, as a result of aging and retirement of their workforce [12][1].

The value of knowledge becomes apparent only if knowledge is accessible, developed and applied [5]. In this context, the desire to organize knowledge was born and knowledge management was developed.

III. Knowledge Management In Public Organizations

Many researchers argue that designing a knowledge management framework should be a primary task of an organization's administration in order to gain a competitive advantage [13]. Knowledge management is, as the word itself implies, the ability to organize knowledge. It is defined as the ability of an organization *"to use a systematic approach to control, structure, manage and disseminate its collective knowledge using modern information and communication technologies. To create, share and use the knowledge it has in order to enhance its continuous education and to achieve its sustainable and balanced development in a turbulent environment'' [14]. In other words, knowledge management is <i>"an organizational process of creating a central source of knowledge that allows the acquisition, assimilation, distribution, integration, sharing, retrieval and reuse of internal and external, explicit and implicit knowledge to promote innovation in the organization"* [15].

As reported by most authors [16], this practice requires the presence of appropriate organizational, human, and technological infrastructure in an organization in order to create, store and distribute timely and valid knowledge and good practices. It essentially concerns the utilization of the knowledge an organization acquires through its experiences and consists in the combination of technology, the human factor, and its organizational structure, in order to promote the already existing knowledge and to produce new knowledge. [17] emphasizes that in order for knowledge management to be effective, the organization must take significant care to protect existing knowledge by adopting a "survival strategy" that focuses on turning tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, as well as provide a source for future competitive advantage, e.g., a "progress strategy" with a focus on creating new knowledge or shaping a new way of exploiting existing knowledge through collaboration.

Effective use of knowledge can be achieved by combining a strong knowledge infrastructure, which includes all the elements that facilitate knowledge management processes (e.g., information systems, structure, culture) and process capabilities, which refer to the capabilities of an organization to use knowledge effectively [18].

Knowledge management refers to the broadening of perceptions about a specific practice or process in the organization, examining the components of acquired knowledge, which the employee is inherently aware of, and which relates to unrecorded knowledge, intuition, and personal experience, that allow or direct to, for the most part, correct choices. It turns out that, in the organizational environment, knowledge management is mainly associated with tacit knowledge and activates a series of processes of creation, use and universal

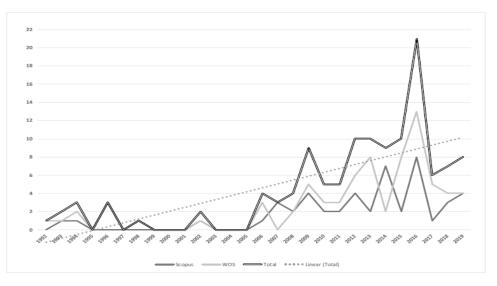
accessibility to the collective knowledge of the organization. This, however, presupposes a special focus on the human factor, which is achieved through the encouragement of employees and their continuous training, the support of participatory processes, the removal of vertical communication structures and the diffusion of knowledge at all working levels. Only in this way can knowledge be shared and used by all members of the organization, in order to improve, facilitate and simplify the workflow [19].

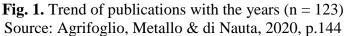
Although relatively recent and not explored and evaluated in many studies, the adoption of knowledge management in public organizations seems to be growing rapidly, as evidenced by recent literature reviews on the subject [20]. According to [20], studies on knowledge management in public organizations have been conducted mostly in developed countries, such as the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom. As part of these initiatives, different knowledge management systems have been established, as well as functions that are in line with this strategy. However, few empirical studies have been conducted on knowledge management in public organizations in developing countries [21].

Instead of examining all aspects of knowledge management holistically, some of these studies have divided it by identifying subsets of issues [20], such as knowledge creation and knowledge exchange [22]. In this context, [23] point out that knowledge creation and knowledge exchange are key components of knowledge management, that contribute to building organizational value. More specifically, the exchange of knowledge in organizations or departments, is one of the most basic functions of any knowledge management program in these organizations.

Many researchers underline the benefits of knowledge management in public sector organizations in terms of accountability and transparency, but also in terms of their more efficient operation [24] [25] [26]. More specifically, [24] stressed that knowledge management in public organizations can bring prosperity to society and increase its sustainability. Knowledge sharing, in particular, can offer benefits in both the technical and organizational areas as well as in the policy area. When it comes to the technical benefits, proper data management, based on avoiding unnecessary effort and/or duplication of effort and fast communication of information, leads to greater productivity and reduced processing costs [27]. In the organizational field, the benefits of knowledge management refer to faster and more complete decisions, streamlining of processes, reduction of failures in the organization's activity and innovation, which reduce the cost of work and improve citizen/customer service. At the same time, knowledge management increases the value of the organization, as knowledge is included in its assets along with traditional assets, e.g., stocks, capital, facilities [25]. Finally, in the political field, the exchange of knowledge provides a more complete analysis of needs, better planning, better evaluation of programs and more integrated public services [27].

In their study, [28] schematically presented the growing interest in the research field of organizational knowledge in public administration, that has been observed since 1992.





Although knowledge management is recognized as an important issue in public sector organizations, its implementation is considered difficult, due to excessive bureaucracy, mismanagement, inefficiency, rigid hierarchy, available technological tools, etc., i.e., special conditions, that traditionally govern these organizations [29] [30]. These characteristics of public bodies seem to restrict the free flow of information and the exchange of knowledge, with the result that *"information produced in an organization may not be available to entities in other parts of the system"*, as a consequence of very clearly separated tasks and reference structures [31]. In the current context, the existing traditional bureaucratic framework of public bodies seems to be expanding, along with the prefix of a technological structure, in which both employees and citizens, as recipients of services, participate voluntarily either to create or to share the public knowledge [31].

[32] recognize knowledge management as an effective approach to improving organizational performance and competitiveness of public organizations, that needs further promotion. In addition, the International Competition Network states in its Report on Knowledge and Information that knowledge management provides a wide range of benefits, such as better "customer experience", greater efficiency, building the capacity of new staff and quality decisions [33]. [7] cites the increase in citizens' expectations and demands for easier access to information as a factor that will highlight knowledge management.

Accurate measurement of the benefits of implementing knowledge management in an organization is of the utmost importance, as it can ensure that the overall objectives of its implementation are met. Many organizations adopt knowledge management processes, but few are able to implement them successfully and reap the benefits [25].

IV. Knowledge Management And Organizational Innovation

Innovation is considered as the main medium through which an organization competes and differentiates itself. Therefore, there is an ongoing and urgent need to develop new knowledge-related skills and competencies in order to develop innovation. In addition, organizational innovation is considered as increasingly important for organizations, as it is an inherent feature of an organization and can become a valuable and resource, difficult for others to emulate.

Innovation in public sector organizations can be defined as the introduction of new elements in the form of new knowledge, new organization and/or new administrative or procedural skills, which should, however, not be an extension of the past [34]. According to this definition, innovation refers not only to the creation of new views, ideas, and frameworks, but also to the exercise of new skills in practice.

[35] used three aspects to define innovation in organizations: service/product innovation, process innovation, and policy innovation. Understanding service/product innovation, process and policy innovation through knowledge management can help public administration become more able to meet challenges and improve the performance of its organizations [36].

Therefore, knowledge management can be used as a "vehicle" for innovation [37] as it helps organizations understand that the effective use of their assets helps them recognize the knowledge they have. Developed countries are using innovation in the public sector as a means of addressing growing fiscal pressures and meeting new societal demands.

Modern organizations pay close attention to how intellectual capital translates into innovation and how knowledge management can contribute to this process. According to [38], knowledge management is vital for organizations, both private and public, in order to develop their intellectual capital and generate innovation. This will help them react and adapt to changes in the external environment, as well as adapt to the issues and challenges that arise as a result of the constant renewal of knowledge.

Learning orientation and organizational innovation are two factors that are critical to the success of organizations in modern environments, where competition is constantly increasing. Therefore, these characteristics can help organizations create differentiating factors that will allow them to be ahead of others in the context of competition [39]. These two characteristics can also have a positive effect on the performance of the organism [40].

Moreover, organizational innovation is part of the organization's culture and reflects its intention to take advantage of new opportunities, thus creating the capacity for innovation and the introduction of future, effective innovations. In the public sector, innovation is associated with improved efficiency, which means lower service costs, transparency, quality services and satisfaction of users, i.e., recipients of these services [39].

The ability to innovate has an impact on both long-term and short-term results, and therefore on the competitive advantage of an organization. In such a system, its resources and skills create the possibilities needed to develop innovations and achieve a competitive advantage. That is why it is extremely important to be aware of the mechanisms related to building and developing the innovative capacity of an organization in the context of knowledge management processes [41].

V. The Added Value Of Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is an asset of every public organization and a strategic tool that helps it formulate new policies, which concern better administrative practices, faster collection data and evidence, more complete information, making faster and more effective decisions and the provision of improved services to citizens/clients. Consequently, time decreases and its efficiency and productivity increase. In addition, by managing its knowledge, the public body streamlines its processes by reducing failures at work, innovates and, finally, transforms itself from a bureaucratic mechanism with limited development expectations and inadequate results or citizen/client orientation into a learning organization and creates value [42].

Despite the difficulty of its implementation, knowledge management in public organizations is an administrative approach "*extremely useful*" and "*with remarkable development prospects*", as Rossidis and Aspridis point out [43]. This is because it can contribute to the development of their extroversion through the interaction with the external environment, to the improvement of their quality through the advancement of the services they provide, to the increase of the level of satisfaction of the citizens and their employees, by the avoidance of mistakes, etc. and to the general upgrading of their functions, contributing to the promotion of the public interest.

The creation or the correct elaboration and configuration of a product, a function or a service based on appropriate mechanisms is the one that will give the product, the function, or the service a key feature, that of the added value. Added value is essentially the result of the personalization processes and the adaptation of the products and services provided to the needs of the final customers-recipients, at the time and in the way they wish [44].

As a concept, added value is used more often in finance and business than in public services. For example, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the added value of a country's economic activities and businesses over a given period of time. In the business field, when an organization/company carries out a product processing activity, then additional functions and value are added to it, that if sold, its price will be higher than the one it had before the processing. The collection of the total added value of all final products constitutes the GDP of the specific country. In this case, the measurement of added value is very easy, as there is the monetary value of the products, which are sold and profit is one of the most reliable indicators for measuring the performance of the organization. This approach, however, rarely applies to public sector organizations [45].

[46] identifies three levels at which added value can be created in public sector organizations:

- The improvement and support of existing organizational processes and, at the same time, the reduction of their costs ("how they could be made better").
- The production and promotion of new products/services ("what more could be done").
- The strengthening of their strategic position, in order to achieve the development of unique knowledge, the application of this knowledge in new, innovative products/services, the enhancement of their competitive position, the maintenance of the organization's continuity, the improvement of flexibility, the formation of an attractive working environment and the formation of an organization independent of the individual knowledge of each employee.

Realizing the added value that knowledge management processes can offer, modern public administrations try to adopt them and apply them in public sector administration. The strategies that are designed place knowledge at the heart of the vision strategy and attempt to draw on the added value that the management of the organization's intellectual capital can bring, significantly increasing its effectiveness [45]. Public sector

organizations can create value and provide value-added services according to the competitive advantage they will gain based on their intellectual capital, since through it:

- the flow of information is facilitated and both ideas and documents, as well as expertise, are reused, resulting in faster decision making and avoidance of any unnecessary effort or repetition of the same mistake
- existing expertise, methods, practices and tools, standards, procedures, and rules are utilized, while examples of problem solving can be recycled
- the position of the organization towards the customers is differentiated, who will benefit from the correct use of the knowledge and the delivery of the products/services.

Besides, the degree to which knowledge creates a competitive advantage for a public organization, indicates the success of the application of the knowledge management program that is implemented [45].

Furthermore, the implementation of knowledge management programs supports the creation of memory in the organization, which contributes to the creation of added value in the organization. Most public bodies lack memory when it comes to the practices, methods, procedures, and rules used. The creation of memory achieves the recording of processes that require the use of information that exists within the organization and the recognition of all knowledge bodies (human resources, information systems, documents, etc.) used in these processes, as well as the development of a system (organizational - informative). At the same time, many malfunctions are faced with their consequences, such as the lack of knowledge of an employee to handle issues of his/her responsibility or the complete dependence of the system's operation on specific, experienced, and well-trained executives, as the knowledge is "transferred" to the memory of the organization [47].

VI. Conclusions

In recent years, a new perception has been formed in the modern organizational environment regarding the information-knowledge relationship. According to it, it is not enough for an organization to have the information in order to address the issues that arise concerning its efficiency, effectiveness, and adaptability. On the contrary, it is imperative it has a substantial knowledge of its organizational environment, the existence, value, and usefulness of all the information it possesses and processes, as well as the way in which it should be sought and located. It is therefore not enough for an organization to have or have access to information. It must have the knowledge of the information at his disposal, the way in which it can use it and distinguish the useful from the useless ones, as well as the way in which it can monitor the dynamics of their usefulness.

Managing knowledge in an organization helps its development, as it allows it to become more effective over time. Many researchers have looked at the effects of applying knowledge management processes to an organization's performance and report that there is a significantly positive relationship between its success and performance. When knowledge management processes are effectively implemented, emphasizes [48], then unique opportunities, that lead to improved performance, mainly through innovation, are created. As a result, organizations that excel in knowledge management are more likely to succeed [49][50]. Therefore, knowledge management constitutes a strategy that applies knowledge and experience into the production of worth and the increase of the efficiency of the organization.

Organizational knowledge is a strategic advantage for all types of organizations, as it supports faster decisionmaking and documented policy-making. Modern public sector organizations have realized the added value of knowledge management and its importance in formulating their policy and providing quality services to their clients/citizens. For the proper application and success of knowledge management, the strategies for its implementation must be planned carefully and in advance by the organization. In addition, in order to meet the current challenges and take advantage of new opportunities, public organizations need to be active and take initiatives by adopting new knowledge management practices and philosophies which they will have to adapt accordingly to their needs. Proper and effective knowledge management can only be achieved by an organization that is learning, constantly evolving, and transforming. One who can immediately identify, assimilate, and apply lessons learned from the interaction with its environment. In such a context, capturing, sharing, and using organizational knowledge for best results can have meaning and value [12].

Public sector organizations can create value and provide value-added services based on the competitive advantage they gain according to their intellectual capital. The intellectual capital of an organization, which is

the collection of individual knowledge, skills, abilities, ideas, and experiences of its employees, is an asset and is recognized as organizational intangible value. Several activities, such as the creation, exchange, retention, and integration of knowledge - tacit and explicit - aim to create organizational knowledge as part of the knowledge management process. Every member of the organization can create, store, distribute and interpret knowledge as a process of knowledge management [51].

The e-government, through which the public administration develops its services, presupposes an organizational redesign of the public sector bodies, in order for them to become interoperable, that is, to be able to work together and to form a unified information-communication system. This way, the flow of information is facilitated, and consistency and accuracy are promoted. At the same time, the conditions for the development of a knowledge management network in the entire public administration system, on the basis of uniform standards, are created, and the provision of more integrated services to citizens/clients and/or other organizations, through specific web portals, is supported.

The culture in public sector organizations remains in line with traditional bureaucratic models and processes, that leave little room for individual initiative or innovation, which is considered to be the most crucial factor for a country's economic growth and competitiveness. Nevertheless, it is observed that public organizations, although not properly implementing knowledge management, present significant prospects for development by utilizing the significant knowledge capital they possess, thus contributing to the organizational changes, necessary for the proper functioning of public administration and the promotion of the public interest (British Standards Institution, 2006, as ref. in [52].

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