Future-proofing ecological knowledge management practices in the workplace: lessons from the pandemic

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Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic compelled businesses to adopt effective ecological knowledge management strategies to navigate the ensuing difficulties brought about by changing work setups and mobility restrictions. This study employs a grounded theory approach to explore the emergence of such strategies and their impact on overcoming institutional obstacles in knowledge management. Twenty-two managers with at least five years of eco-managerial experience were interviewed, resulting in the identification of critical practices. These included virtual collaborative tools, electronic knowledge databases, agile knowledge management techniques, communities of practice, training and skill development programs, hybrid working patterns, strategies for knowledge transition and succession, and programs that promote mental health and work-life balance. By adopting virtual collaboration tools and electronic knowledge databases, access to and dissemination of information are expedited and secured, fostering teamwork and institutional success. Agile ecological knowledge management techniques enable businesses to pivot quickly, fortifying their resilience and adaptability during unpredictable periods. The endorsement of ecological and human well-being and work-life balance initiatives increases employee morale and psychological well-being. Knowledge-sharing strategies, such as the formulation of communities of practice, foster professional development and teamwork. Training and ecological upskilling programs equip employees with essential competencies, whereas the hybrid work setup offers adaptability and compensates for fewer interpersonal interactions. Businesses must prioritize these ecological knowledge management strategies to enhance their organizational resilience.

1 Introduction

The beginning of the pandemic marked a catastrophic event for knowledge management (KM) officers the world over. Suddenly shifting to remote work set-up, then to hybrid mode, and now back to full face-to-face mode posed a great challenge in terms of writing down the policies and keeping pace with how knowledge should be collected, stored, and shared within an organization.

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The possibility of another pandemic of the same scale as Covid-19 or a disruption in the workplace as volatile and unpredictable as the year 2020 (Tao et al., 2022) is not far-fetched. With global warming and climate change on the sides, threats of unknown viruses in the forefront, and the alarming rate technology and society evolve behind our backs, it has become imperative for organizations not only to have contingency plans but also to future-proof processes, including knowledge management practices.

When the pandemic hit the world’s shores in 2020, countless companies, including those with international and global operations, were caught off guard by the mobility restrictions it brought (Martin & Bergmann, 2021). With countries closing their borders and airline operations brought to a halt, everyone had to resort to the unconventional way of meeting and making decisions online. Proof of this emergence is the sudden rise to popularity of platforms like Google Meets and Zoom, which even multiplied its revenues by more than three folds that year.

Evidently, not all issues can be resolved by simply having an online communication platform; There are a lot of matters to consider, and a lot of things that cannot be covered entirely by video collaborations (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). There were the issues of how work can be completed in a remote setup, what will be the policies governing work reporting, and how will access to company documents be facilitated, among many others. This era has seen the unmatched usage growth of project management platforms, learning management systems, cloud storage and database management, e-commerce, and other forms of digitization and digitalization.

With the pandemic now almost behind us, organizations have reflected enough and adopted the best practices that rectify the effects of the pandemic-induced restrictions in the workplace (Ng et al., 2021). These practices may well be in place to protect the organization should another pandemic or disruption happen. The effective practices adopted during Covid times may be retained to future-proof organizations, especially in certain areas [1-10].

This study seeks to investigate these practices, particularly in knowledge management. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

What were the effective knowledge management practices adopted by the organizations during the pandemic when there were some mobility and work restrictions imposed by the government?

How did organizations strategize in terms of shifting from their usual practices to the new ones aimed at coping with the challenges of the pandemic?

What challenges do current KM practices address and how can they future-proof organizations in terms of knowledge management?

2 Background of the Study

Knowledge Management (KM) is important to organizations in improving performance (Farooq, 2023) and in making it more resilient to challenges and threats (Abdalla et al, 2023). It encompasses the collection, creation, storage, sharing, and usage of information within an organization (Zayed, et al., 2022; Saratchandra&Shrestha, 2022).

When the pandemic forced people to work from home or away from the office, issues on knowledge management practices evolved. In the usual workplace environment, peers bump with each other and have informal discussions about projects or problems encountered in some company activities. These opportunities for spontaneous interactions were gone with the emergence of scheduled, more formalized, and often calendared meetings via a video collaboration platform (Mark et al., 2022; Schulte-Römer&Gesing, 2022). The venue has also become less personal as people prefer to have their webcams off, hindering the exchange of tacit knowledge, which usually happens in informal talks that were significantly reduced as well.
With people seeing less of each other and having fewer opportunities to come across each other in the hallways, the opportunities for serendipitous learning are also lost (Rosehart et al., 2022). Ideas borne out of simple chats between colleagues coming from different departments who happened to be strolling in the hallways or enjoying snacks in the pantry were less likely to happen in Zoom. These informal interactions that were very natural pre-pandemic have ceased to exist for a time, curtailting the flow of unstructured knowledge sharing within the organization. With everything having gone online, even a simple inquiry would have to be sent through email, which is not real-time and calls for a more formal way of communication.

To compensate for the limited exchange of knowledge with peers in the workplace, employees have gone online to look for the information they need. The internet was in turmoil with more people going online for work and for accessing information from the worldwide web. Market research that used to be a field work became an online task raising the question of whether it’s close to accurate as the usual task. There was a concern as to how much of the information from online can be substituted for the information the company needs. The relevance and reliability of information drawn from the web to the organization were in question (Apte et al., 2023). After all, the information online is so voluminous and varied.

This step also posed some concerns for organizations. They have found that their infrastructures are insufficient to support the demands of the times in terms of technology (Abalkhail& Alslamah, 2022). There were no readily available communication tools at the time. Organizations used to hold meetings face-to-face and had non-premium subscriptions for short overseas or long-distance video calls. When the pandemic happened and almost everything had to be done online, the free or basic subscriptions won’t make the cut. They also must consider that not all people in the organization are familiar with the same technology. There are just some who have inadequate digital skills.

The rapid change in technology, in the workplace, and in the way, things are done also posed a challenge (Apte et al., 2023) for knowledge management practitioners. There was a sudden rise in the volume of knowledge acquired and making sense of the piles of information has started posing a challenge to organizations. It was difficult to keep knowledge repositories up-to-date and ready for sharing and collaboration.

Thus, the next challenge was on how to store these data and overflowing new knowledge. With home being the workplace, employees could not keep physical files with them. The knowledge repositories in the workplace had to be digitized and later shared with employees. Along with this comes several challenges including how to safeguard company documents now that employees are using their own internet (Zieba and Bongiovanni, 2022). This made many organizations ponder how to mitigate the risk of exposing their vulnerabilities, especially to hackers and phishers online. They had then to provide employees with their own cloud storage and some security measures like antivirus subscriptions to protect company data. Hence, an increased cost of storage.

Consequently, it is not only knowledge storage that poses problems to organizations during the pandemic. Knowledge creation, retention, and transfer also threatened the unfamiliar work set-up. The creation of tacit knowledge, which happens only when employees practice the profession and experience the workplace was waning. There were no seniors for juniors to learn from because of the remote set-up. Even when companies started opening, the more senior officers of organizations were working from home as advised by the national government. This somehow created a sense of loss in terms of expertise and intellectual capital especially since the more senior members of the organizations are the ones not very adept with the new technologies available for collaborations (Gqoboka et al., 2022; Stofkova et al., 2022; Diz-Otero, 2023). Hence, even the knowledge transfer within
the collaboration tools organizations subscribed to were helpless in optimizing knowledge sharing and transfer during the pandemic [11-35].

To top the list off, there’s also the concern about employee well-being (Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2023). Research has shown that the work-from-home setup has blurred the boundaries of work time and family time. People may have saved time on transport and gearing up for work, but they have unconsciously worked outside of official time because the computer is also just in the comfort of the home. There was a work-life balance after the boundaries of the two unintentionally became unclear with the new work setup (Zakhem et al, 2022). This phenomenon-tired employees out, made them more unmotivated to work, and reduced their mental capacities and cognitive load.

There was not a single solution to all these problems posed by the disruption that was the pandemic. Organizations use combinations of measures to try and address these issues and prepare the companies for changes in the future. Some of these measures were maintained by the organizations to prepare companies in case another major disruption should happen in the future. This study seeks to find these measures and propose a model that can give insights into how to make organizations more resilient in the face of other work interference in the future.

3 Materials and Methods

This study made use of the grounded theory approach to dig into and develop an understanding of how organizations adapted their practice of knowledge management during the pandemic. This method emphasizes gathering and analyzing data to construct theoretical frameworks based on empirical evidence (Chun Tie et al., 2019). By using this approach, the researchers aim to discover new insights and build a conceptual model that depicts how organizations resolved knowledge management issues during the pandemic.

Twenty-two managers, selected purposefully and coming from different industries, served as informants in this research. Semi-structured interviews aimed at uncovering participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding the measures used to combat the knowledge management challenges experienced during the pandemic, were conducted. The interview questions were carefully designed based on the research objectives and the existing literature on knowledge management in crisis scenarios. They were carried out either face-to-face or through video conferencing platforms, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

It was required for informants of the study to have a minimum of five years of managerial experience and to have been a manager from 2018 to 2022. The average age reported was 41.55 (SD = 9.86) and the median age 37.5. The average managerial experience is 9.91 years (SD = 3.74 years) with a median of 9.5 years. Among the informants were twelve males and ten females. Four were from the food and beverage industry, three from the service industry, three from the manufacturing industry, three from the education industry, three from the retail industry, two from the hotel and restaurant industry, two from the information technology industry, and two from the entertainment and media industry.

The data analysis, following the principles of grounded theory, involved iterative cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis to generate concepts, categories, and themes that emerged from the data. It began with open coding, where the interview transcripts were reviewed line-by-line to identify meaningful units of information related to knowledge management practices. Through constant comparison and theoretical sampling, codes were grouped into categories, and relationships between categories were identified. Theoretical memos were developed to capture emerging patterns, concepts, and relationships.
A conceptual model was developed based on the identified categories and relationships to represent the knowledge management issues addressed by the current practices during the pandemic. This provides a visual representation of the key elements and connections between different aspects of knowledge management practices in response to pandemic-related challenges. The model was refined through ongoing analysis and discussion with the informants, ensuring its alignment with the data and theoretical insights.

Response validation, where participants were provided with summaries of their interviews to verify the accuracy and interpretation of their responses, was done. Additionally, peer debriefing and discussion of emerging themes and patterns to ensure the rigor and credibility of the analysis were performed.

### 4 Results and Discussions

After conducting a grounded theory analysis several themes emerged, uncovering the knowledge management practices used by companies during the pandemic, which they continue to use now to future-proof their organizations. These themes provide insights into how these measures solve the specific issues and complexities experienced during the pandemic because of the factors reviewed in the background of the study.

**Theme #1: Subscription to Virtual Collaboration Platforms**

The shift to work-from-home prodded organizations to subscribe to virtual collaboration platforms. Pre-pandemic, people were using video conferencing platforms like Skype, Zoom, and Google Meet, but they were subscribed to free but limited access.

“We really had no choice. It was not in the annual budget of the company, but we can’t just be inconvenienced by the advertisements in the platform, the limited functionalities and time we can use the virtual collaboration tool, and the traffic in connecting to the program…,” says Informant 13.

Organizations used the virtual collaborative platforms as venues for knowledge exchange. While it was not possible to replace spontaneous interactions and serendipitous exchanges that happen in hallways, companies made the most of virtual collaboration platforms. Here are some of the strategies revealed in the interviews:

“Our company mimicked the face-to-face scenario by having everyone agree to open their webcams. We had a semblance of talking to peers, and that made us open up more…,” says Informant 2.

Informant 6 agrees and adds further, “...We had it differently for our company. We observed break times during official hours, but we must stay in front of our computers with our cameras on. We eat “together” during the multiple break times. There [were] a lot of opportunities for informal discussions. We even had breakout rooms for [gossip] time, which is mostly for coaching our peers who are lagging.”

“It was a good thing we subscribed to Zoom. I do not know how I would have coached my partner whom I haven’t seen before about how to go about the course if we were not talking through Zoom. Emails and chats just aren’t enough, not to mention I also have a lot of students who need academic advising. I feel I was able to connect more with them because I [got] to converse with them through a video conference. It’s the best substitute to personally meeting a person, I think…” recalls Informant 1, who is a part-time university lecturer and at the same time a high school teacher.

It was also revealed that the virtual collaborative platforms substituted the companies’ intranet and internal chat services. Learning the new technology was a challenge (Li, 2022), especially for the more senior members of the organization, but the user-friendly interface of many virtual collaborative platforms helped.

Informant 15, a manager in a manufacturing firm has this to say, “Our jobs were saved partly thanks to Zoom and Google Meet. When the government restricted operations in the
workplace, we had to communicate through mobile phones. The problem was with our senior employees as some of them did not have social media accounts, particularly FB messenger. At first, we tried to convince them, but it was difficult. Some have Facebook accounts, but they are managed usually by grandchildren. This is why we decided to subscribe to Zoom. It solved our problems. There was some adjustment period, especially for the old employees. For them, we had to use Google Meet sometimes as it has a simpler interface.”

“Our team must meet regularly as our department is part of Creatives. When the pandemic hit, we tried having a group chat in Messenger, but it wasn’t enough. We resolved that we needed to meet and see each other virtually, so we convinced the company to get a virtual collaborative platform to use. But getting the senior ones involved was a challenge. They found the technology to be troubling. We had two days of training with technology after everything was in place. It did the trick,” says Informant 18.

Thus, virtual collaboration platforms were utilized by organizations to solve some knowledge management concerns. These platforms allowed workers to share ideas, collaborate, and learn together amidst all of them working remotely (Logemann et al., 2022). They provided avenues for collaboration and teamwork with real-time communication through chats, video conferencing, and document sharing. They helped alleviate the concern on limited knowledge exchange and spontaneous interactions. Also, as virtual collaboration platforms have user-friendly interfaces that require minimal technical expertise (Walter-Tscharf, 2022), it was easier for the aged working population to adapt to the technology. With the subscription model, companies do not have to invest in infrastructure, which was not in place or part of the budget during the pandemic [36-49].

**Theme #2: Use of Digital Knowledge Repositories**

With limited access to the workplace during the pandemic, companies had files shared through the cloud, emails, and drives. The transfer and sharing of documents from one employee to the next created confusion and unnecessary duplication of files within the organizations. Companies were then quick to digitize content and subscribe to digital knowledge repositories.

“It was a complete chaos at first. We had a shared online memory (drive) for the whole organization. With many documents being saved numerous times and passed on several times as well, our drive was almost full before we knew it. For example, a faculty member makes a request and emails it to the Head. The head then signs it and attaches the new file for approval and endorsement of the dean. The dean then approves and signs the e-document before submitting it to the vice president for academics, whose office finally files the approval in the 201 files…,” recalls Informant 16, a university faculty member.

Informant 9, coming from a publication company, has this to say, “It’s important in our line of work that the most updated file becomes the active file. We don’t pass files around using emails or chats. Instead, we use a project management tool our company subscribed to. It has a digital repository function. Hence, we’re able to keep the files, maintain only the most recent version, grant permissions as to who can access and update the file, and trace dependencies and sources. It was helpful during the pandemic. When we need something, we know where to look, who to ask for access, and whom to share documents with. Considering that we were working from home, we also saved a lot in terms of the cost of printing and storage. We used to do that pre-pandemic. It was probably a blessing in disguise.”

“Having a digital knowledge repository was like having an online library. It was convenient. As HR manager, I had access and can grant access to our employee manuals, 201 files, and employee records, among others. During the pandemic, when a manager wants to review the files of an employee for a possible assignment, I grant him a token to
access the files for a day or a period. They cannot download or print the files. It saves us a lot of trouble, especially in terms of data privacy…” laments Informant 20.

Thus, digital knowledge repositories help firms manage knowledge. Repositories organize knowledge assets according to categories, making it easy for employees to look at work-related materials while avoiding information overload and ensuring that personnel receive timely information (Saratchandra & Shrestha, 2022). They ensure relevance and reliability. The company’s governance over the content and management of the repositories ensures that information is secured, accurate, current, and reliable and that knowledge can be shared responsibly within the organization (Fischer & Döring, 2022). This is crucial as the knowledge from repositories is used as input for informed decision-making and also as a reference to practices within the organization. Additionally, organizations can save on cost as digital storage is affordable (Bencsik, 2022), while physical storage is expensive due to space and maintenance. With digital repositories, it is possible for companies to store volumes of data without added expenditures.

**Theme #3: Agile Knowledge Management**

During the pandemic, technology was evolving at a fast phase. Mobility and government policies were also quick to change as we knew more about the virus (Ehn et al., 2022). This meant a lot of changes happening in the organizations within a short period of time.

“The pandemic experience was a disaster for policymakers in organizations. We created policies only to rescind them a week or two later. It was a vicious cycle, but we learned from the experience… It was during the pandemic that we realized that there are measures we can take to ease adapting to changing situations. We even learned to include writing contingency plans within the policies we write,” says a restaurant manager, Informant 11.

Informant 18 reiterates, “We really had to process everything fast during the pandemic. We learned that before the pandemic, we used to take our sweet time in dealing with things. We realized that it might have cost us some customers or revenues. During the pandemic, we were not as quick as the others to have an e-commerce arm. For our company that relies heavily on sales, we were hit hard at the start. Had we been more agile in our processes and quick in making decisions, we would have gotten a bigger market share then, which we could potentially maintain up to now.”

Agile knowledge management approaches address some serious knowledge management concerns. They allow firms to adapt quickly to changing situations, change knowledge-sharing tactics, and stay current with the trends, especially during times of business disruptions like the pandemic (Martinez-Martinez et al., 2023).

Rapid adaptation and knowledge acquisition are essential to organizations if they are to stay competitive. Agile approaches like Scrum & Kanban allow firms to quickly absorb new information and adjust their strategies as they emphasize synthesis and interpretation (Ouriques et al., 2023). These agile methods enable information synthesis, pattern recognition, and significant insights and thus allow companies to make informed decisions after understanding the synthesized knowledge (Roy & Sharma, 2023).

**Theme #4: Promoting Communities of Practice**

Working was difficult during the pandemic as collaboration was also a challenge. People somewhat had their own schedule and focus that coming together to work towards a task was difficult. Many find collaboration during the pandemic as simply dividing the labour among members of the team.

Informant 20 recalls, “It was difficult at first. I was reading a report seemingly written by four different people instead of one done coherently by a team. I am certain they simply assigned parts to individuals. The analysis was shallow, and it was evident they did not discuss it at all. It was simply for compliance. Back when it was in the office, they would have closed-door meetings over pizza to deliberate on matters before they write it down. When the pandemic happened, some people were let go and some new people also joined us.
to replace those whom we lost to the pandemic. The bond was obviously not yet there, and we really acknowledge the problem... When resorts opened, the first thing we did was to arrange a team building.”

“Our department head grouped us according to the courses that we teach. Each course has a team leader, and we really must meet every two weeks. We also have a group chat where we share our materials in class and talk about the best practices. This was very helpful since not all of us are very adept in the use of knowledge management systems. Personally, I find my peers’ stories helpful. They tried different strategies, and those that miserably failed, I did not attempt anymore in my classes. It saved me a lot of trouble.”, says Informant 1.

Informant 11 saw the community of practice as a way of optimizing time and upskilling as well. He says, “There was a time in the pandemic when we had to totally close the restaurant, but we couldn’t let go of our baristas for economic and humanitarian reasons. But will they just get paid without doing work? We don’t run a charity after all. Hence, I created small groups with our head barista as team lead. They met regularly sharing about their past experiences and learnings from previous works. They came up with the idea of proposing new drinks by putting together the things they had learned. When we opened again, we had three new drinks on the menu and one of them is our best seller now.”

Forming communities of practice is a powerful strategy for handling knowledge management challenges. These communities bring together people with similar interests, expertise, or work duties to share, collaborate, and learn (Mohammed Alrubian, 2022). They provide a friendly and dynamic environment for employees to share tacit knowledge, and experiences, and learn from each other (Germaine et al., 2022). As distant work and other circumstances limit face-to-face interactions, spontaneous ideas, and informal dialogues may disappear. With these communities, organizations are able to avoid the issue of fewer casual discussions. They help preserve their members' knowledge and experiences (Beattie et al., 2022), and because of them, new employees benefit from the community's knowledge and wisdom in the workplace.

Theme #5: Learning and Upskilling

When the government stopped all work operations except for the medical- and food-related ones, many industries took the opportunity to upskill their employees. This explains the abundance of webinars and online training programs available during the pandemic.

“Our employees had a lighter load than usual as the whole company was transitioning and digitizing our operations. Some people really had nothing to be busy with, especially those whose work was concentrated on physical labour. To keep them busy, and to let other employees know they are performing official functions, we sent them to training programs. We did not have many expectations then as there were just too many webinars and online training programs it’s impossible to know which ones are really of quality. Fortunately, it did us well, and we really saw some improvements in our employees. Many of them became more knowledgeable about the work, too. We had some innovations in the way we do things thanks to their suggestions.”, says Informant 17.

Informant 15 recalls, “We thought of sending them to training programs as a matter of obligation as well. After all, we must ensure the development of our employees. We sent teams to online training programs and virtual workshops. Perhaps because of the dynamics, they used what they knew about the company processes in relation to the things being taught to them. When they were asked to report to the company the things they had learned, we received several proposals to streamline our manufacturing processes and improve productivity. After some consideration, we adapted some of them and we still do up to now.”

“I found my work mentor thanks to a training program the university asked us to attend. The service-learning workshop brought me closer to being a co-faculty member. I became
so comfortable with her that I could even ask her to assist me with some new online processes we follow at the university. You see, I’m not very techie and I am not young anymore. While my friend is younger, he has more achievements than me and his skills are really what we need during this pandemic, so I really see him as a mentor.” says Informant 1.

Companies invested in employee development and training because of the pandemic, equipping their workforces with the skills and knowledge to contribute to knowledge management (Dutta et al., 2023), especially after technology-related vulnerabilities were highlighted due to remote work setup. Employees acquire new experiences, knowledge, and skills through training programs, mentor-mentee relationships, and interdepartmental or inter-team partnerships. By fostering a culture of learning, this enhances the limited flow of tacit knowledge and promotes a culture of knowledge sharing (Gui et al., 2022). Efforts devoted to learning and upskilling facilitate informal conversations and the exchange of information among colleagues. They assist with limited collaborative tools and digital skills issues. Through training, employees enhance their digital and collaborative skills. Through training and mentorship programs, seasoned workers impart explicit and tacit knowledge to less-seasoned workers (Chaudhuri et al., 2022), thus, promoting knowledge retention. Preserving vital skills and intellectual capital also prevents the loss of knowledge due to employee turnover.

Theme #6: Fostering Hybrid Work Models

The full work-from-home setup required by the government for two months and the gradual easing of mobility restrictions that followed prompted companies to experience operating in different modes. There were times when the whole company operated remotely, and there were also times when they reported in hybrid mode.

“It was confusing at first. Some of our documents are in print, and some are online. Technically, those from March 2020 are e-files, while all those before are in hard copies. Sometimes, it was difficult because we had to study files before and after March 2020, so some of them were on the computer’s vehicle and some of them were on paper. Also, when we were already in hybrid mode, there was confusion as to whether we should print the documents or not.”, recalls Informant 14.

Incidentally, it led to several realizations. Informant 12 reflects, “Policies now should be adjusted so that they are flexible to all three work modes - full face-to-face, work-from-home, and hybrid. It means that the repository must be accessible in whatever mode one is in; Hence, we thought the online repository was here to stay. Right now, we are in the hybrid setup, and we really appreciate how people are able to interact more, collaborate, and enrich each other’s work experiences.”

A hybrid work setup incidentally solves some knowledge management difficulties. Combining remote work and face-to-face cooperation solves important issues and promotes information exchange (Trivedi & Patel, 2022). Even with subscriptions to virtual collaboration platforms and communities of practice, there remains a gap in the flow of tacit knowledge, which is optimized only in face-to-face interactions. Not to mention jobs that require the physical presence of employees. Even with remote setup, allowing employees to meet in offices provides an avenue for people to share views, knowledge, and experiences that are hard to describe remotely through video conferences and online chats. This also allows employees not very comfortable with remote or virtual work to have a breather, as well as those who prefer physical work reporting to have some “break” too (Knight et al., 2022). Hybrid work arrangements foster innovation and information sharing through open communication and cooperation as they overcome spontaneous interaction hurdles (AbiSaad & Agogué, 2023). Employees have chance meetings at work that may lead to unexpected discoveries, idea sharing, and information diffusion. They allow the best of what remote work setup and physical work arrangement have to offer.
Theme #7: Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning

The pandemic resulted in a lot of changes in the organizations. Often, it’s not only the work mode but also the work functions. The pandemic found people being retrenched from work and employees who stayed but juggled the functions of two personnel. After all, many industries were at negative financial standings, especially during the first few months of the pandemic. This made organizations realize the value of knowledge transfer and succession planning.

Informant 20 laments, “We lost key personnel, a manager, to Covid-19. It was difficult when he was suddenly gone because he had not trained anyone to replace him yet. After all, he was still young and very healthy before the pandemic. We did not know what to do, and we were tracing back to how he did his job. The processes were not documented; We did not see the need to do that before as he was very efficient in what he did. That was our eye-opener. Now, we document almost everything, and we ensure that there’s an understudy for each key role in the organization.”

“I had to let go of half of my employees; probably the most difficult decision I had to make from being part of top management. There was just nothing I could do. To make matters worse, those who stayed had to perform the functions of the ones who left. There were fewer orders so there was also less work. People had to work the same number of hours, but the process is now longer. If one person handles two steps for all orders, now he must handle four or five. They were complaining. They had completely no clue what to do at first. I realized that should Covid return, I must ensure as head of human resources, that people will know what to do with functions to befall them. Hence, we started documenting in detail the things that we do. We had discussions, and we looked for the best practices to write down in our operations manual. We have video documentation, too.”, says Informant 22.

Knowledge transfer and succession planning help employees pass on knowledge, reducing knowledge loss risks and promoting organizational continuity (Kunath, 2022). This prevents expertise and intellectual capital loss by identifying key knowledge holders and adopting systematic knowledge transfer methods. This transfers vital knowledge to the next generation of employees, reducing turnover and retirement (Humrickhouse& Rowe, 2022). This covers tacit knowledge and informal networks. Documenting and conveying tacit information, which is often deeply ingrained in experience and skill, is often challenging. Mentorship, employment rotation, and joint projects can help firms transfer tacit knowledge and build informal networks (Nderema, 2022). This helps share knowledge and skills, improving knowledge management.

Theme #8: Support for Employee Well-Being and Work-Life Balance

The pandemic thinned the line that separates family from work life. People talk about work and send emails even at the wee hours of the night. Some people became nocturnal because of the work setup, but some found it disadvantageous. There were calls for promoting well-being, particularly mental health, and work-life balance during the pandemic.

“Our university had issues with mental health concerns. Employees sought the help of administrators as they felt stressed receiving emails and sometimes even private messages past 9:00 PM. They said they find it stressful, and somehow, they feel compelled to reply because they already saw the message. The university must address it through a memo addressed to the academic community prodding everyone to observe work hours even in fully online mode. After a while when order was established, employees were back to being vibrant and energetic.”, says Informant 1.

Informant 13 had a more negative experience. He shares, “There was a time in the pandemic when our employees did not want to meet virtually any more. They were openly telling us that they were too tired even if they were not physically reporting to work. No one
wanted to mentor or to be mentored. We gave in. We relaxed the workload a bit, and we had online team-building activities. We commissioned a third-party company for that, and the company even spent on Grab vouchers to have a semblance of the usual team building when there’s also good food. I can say our workers were motivated after that. We learned that work-life balance should really be there regardless of whether it's remote work or face-to-face.”

Well-being and work-life balance programs address psychologically related knowledge management difficulties. Employee cognitive decline is a serious knowledge management concern. This mental strain is reduced via mental health, stress reduction, and work-life balance efforts. These efforts help people focus, think, and share, improving information exchange and teamwork. Well-being and work-life balance programs also motivate workers. A healthy, supportive workplace boosts morale, work satisfaction, and knowledge management engagement. Respectful and supported employees share more knowledge, thoughts, and ideas, boosting teamwork and knowledge sharing.

Work-life balance and well-being improve communication and psychological safety (Adair et al., 2022). Companies promote free communication, idea sharing, and constructive feedback by making employees feel safe. Knowledge management involves psychological safety to allow employees to freely voice their thoughts, ask pertinent questions, and have meaningful conversations, which boosts knowledge sharing, innovation, and organizational learning (Kerrissey et al., 2022). Well-being and work-life balance programs help employees set limitations. Flexible work arrangements, time management, and work-life integration enable employees to balance work and life. This gives personnel time and energy to do knowledge management responsibilities, reducing tiredness and increasing productivity.

5 Conclusions

Knowledge management practices that emerged as effective and invaluable solutions to address the challenges faced by organizations during the pandemic may prove to be helpful in future-proofing companies. Fostering virtual collaboration platforms, digital knowledge repositories, agile knowledge management, communities of practice, learning and upskilling initiatives, hybrid work models, knowledge transfer and succession planning, and well-being and work-life balance support initiatives can empower the workforce, enhance decision-making, foster innovation, and create an environment conducive to continuous learning and improvement. These could be instrumental in promoting knowledge sharing, collaboration, and organizational success within organizations. Figure 1 models how knowledge management practices solve issues experienced during the pandemic.
The research findings have implications for organizations seeking to improve their knowledge management practices and future-proof their companies. By implementing these strategies, organizations can establish a culture that values learning, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. These practices not only address the challenges brought about by the pandemic but also align with the ever-evolving digital landscape. Embracing these practices brings benefits to organizations. It enhances their decision-making capabilities by leveraging...
the knowledge and expertise of their employees. Cultivating a culture of learning and knowledge sharing keeps organizations informed about industry trends, market dynamics, and emerging technologies, enabling them to make data-driven and strategic decisions.

Continuous learning and the exchange of knowledge lay a groundwork for adaptability enabling companies to navigate unpredictable circumstances and flourish in a fast-evolving corporate environment. By tapping into existing repositories of knowledge and learning from past experiences, organizations become more agile, and they can quickly adapt to challenges and disruptions in the workplace.

Also, effective knowledge management practices stimulate innovation within organizations. By fostering an environment that values sharing knowledge and collaborating organizations empower their employees to contribute ideas and perspectives. This fosters an atmosphere that drives the development of solutions, products, and services.

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