

REFeree'S REVIEW

Program:	Master in Information Technologies and Innovation Management
Student:	Nikita Korshikov
Title of thesis:	KEY BARRIERS TO KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN SMALL BUSINESS: IDENTIFYING AND OVERCOMING

Justification of the topic choice. Accuracy in defining the aim and objectives of the thesis. Justification of the topic choice; accuracy in defining the aim and tasks of the thesis; originality of the topic and the extent to which it was covered; alignment of the thesis' topic, aim and objectives.	5	4	3	2
Structure and logic of the text flow. Logic of research; full scope of the thesis; alignment of thesis' structural parts, i.e. theoretical and empirical parts.	5	4	3	2
Quality of analytical approach and quality of offered solution to the research objectives. Adequacy of objectives coverage; ability to formulate and convey the research problem; ability to offer options for its solution; application of the latest trends in relevant research are for the set objectives.	5	4	3	2
Quality of data gathering and description. Quality of selecting research tools and methods; data validity adequacy; adequacy of used data for chosen research tools and methods; completeness and relevance of the list of references.	5	4	3	2
Scientific aspect of the thesis. Independent scientific thinking in solving the set problem/objectives; the extent to which the student contributed to selecting and justifying the research model (conceptual and/or quantitative), developing methodology/approach to set objectives.	5	4	3	2
Practical/applied nature of research. Extent to which the theoretical background is related to the international or Russian managerial practice; development of applied recommendations; justification and interpretation of the empirical/applied results.	5	4	3	2
Quality of thesis layout. Layout fulfils the requirements of the Regulations for master thesis preparation and defense, correct layout of tables, figures, references.	5	4	3	2

Each item above is evaluated on the following scale, as applicable: 5 = the thesis meets all the requirements, 4 = the thesis meets almost all the requirements, 3 = a lot of the requirements are not met in the thesis, 2 = the thesis does not meet the requirements.

Additional comments:

Knowledge sharing is a widely discussed topic, both by researchers and practitioners. However, the research on knowledge sharing in small and medium companies is quite limited, so we do not know much if SMEs face specific problems in this process. Taking into account the relevance of SMEs for economic development, the topic of the current thesis is highly relevant for contemporary business.

The theoretical section of Nikita Korshikov's thesis contains discussion of the key concepts and terms. The text is clearly structured and presented in a logical manner. The methodology section lacks some critical information that could help to understand and interpret author's choices. The scope of the sample (214 individuals in 40 organizations) can be potentially informative for the chosen research question but the way the author analyses the data raises many questions on the validity of the findings.

These observations are detailed below:

Theoretical section:

- 1) The author uses mainly quite old and classic sources in the literature review, omitting the large body of much more recent (and already well-known) studies. For example, in his section on knowledge sharing the author uses 5 sources only, with all except one being published before 2003. And in the following section on barriers to knowledge sharing, the author uses broader range of references, but predominantly he uses the sources published before 2006, and in addition 2 papers from 2010 and

one paper from 2013. This picture does not fit with the scope of the current research on knowledge sharing.

- 2) The key sections of the literature review lack the author's opinion or conclusion – for example, after reviewing different approaches to define knowledge or knowledge management, it's not clear which of these definitions is chosen by the author for this thesis. Another example – in section 1.2.1, titled “components of KM” the author reviews 1 model, but it's not clear how this model is further applied to the main study question. The sections dedicated to knowledge sharing (1.3, 1.4.) are just listing who said what previously and lack any author's analysis or synthesis of the literature. The author concludes the section 1.4 “none of prior models we have examined cannot be considered complete. Husted and Micahilova, Weber and Andreeva models cannot be used independently, so in our research we are going to use it together in order to create a new one”. But he does not explain why previous models are incomplete and why there is a need to develop a new one.
- 3) The research gap is not sufficiently justified. In the section 1.6 (“research gap”) the author argues that there has been little attention paid to micro-level, individual issues in knowledge sharing – that is not fully true, as the recently growing knowledge governance approach by Foss and Michailova has namely focused on the micro level, and these authors have published several important studies in this field over the last 10 years. The author doesn't mention this literature at all. Plus to this, the author argues that no research have been done in Russia on knowledge sharing, that is also not fully true (for example, see the works of Andreeva et al. 2013 and Sergeeva, Andreeva, 2014).
- 4) On p.24 the author presents a new model of “knowledge sharing barriers”, but it's not clear how this model is different from what Leibowitz or Weber proposed, or how this model is superior to other models (as the author claimed in section 1.4.)
- 5) On pp.24-25 the author argues that ontological barriers do not exist per se, as they are always included into the individual level. The author's argument is based on the implicit assumption that onto

Methodology:

- 6) The author explains that his hypotheses are based on his “previous work experience and participant observation” (p.27). This cannot be accepted as an argument where quite a lot of empirical research has been done regarding the statements the author puts forward as hypotheses.
- 7) Plus to this, many of the hypotheses are too generic so they are on the level of common sense – e.g., H4 – motivation has a positive impact on the employee willingness to share. A vast number of studies have explored the role of motivation and they suggest that there are different types of motivation, and different stimuli that influence knowledge sharing differently. Formulated in this way, H4 cannot be meaningfully tested. It also seems that the author doesn't understand the difference between external stimuli and individual attitude (motivation), and it's not clear how the author differentiates between “motivation” and “willingness”. In the similar vein, H1 (saying that “The intensity of knowledge sharing and power of knowledge barriers are correlated with social characteristics of employees (age, gender, education) and years of service”) cannot be meaningfully tested – what are the particular directions of the impact that the author envisions? E.g., it's not clear whether the author expects younger employees to share more, or the older ones (and this position is not justified anyhow).
- 8) Taking into account the vast number of previous empirical studies on knowledge sharing, it's not clear why the author decided to develop his own questionnaire and not borrow any of the existing, validated measures.
- 9) The author does not provide any details of the sample, e.g., demographic characteristics of the employees, how the respondents were distributed across organizations, the characteristics of the organizations involved (sector, size, age, etc, how many of them were classified as “big”or “small”?). Therefore, it's difficult to evaluate the validity and reliability of the conclusions, as well as potential limitations of the study.
- 10) The author says that he surveyed 214 people in 40 organizations. It's not clear on what level of analysis – individual or organizational – the author further operates with the data? In other words,

does the author compare answers from 214 individuals, or aggregated answers from 40 organizations? Do the answers between employees within the same organization differ or not? Do the organizations had an impact on the employees answers?

- 11) Table 4 (Correlation analysis between variables) p.30 lacks the information on the level of statistical significance (p value), therefore, no conclusions on the correlations between the variables can be made.

Structure and formatting:

- 12) There are a lot of small sections with sub-headings (sometimes a half-page). Probably, a different formatting of the text might have made some of its sections easier to read.
- 13) There are a lot of misspellings in the usage of references the text, for example, p. 14 says “Cohan and Livinral (1990)” instead of “Cohen and Levinthal (1990)” and “Teese (2000)” instead of “Teece (2000)”; p.19 says “Micahilova” instead of “Michailova”, while p. 23 calls the same author “Mikailova”, etc. And these all are the core, classical authors in the field.
- 14) Some references are missing from the reference list, for example, the widely cited by the author Weber (no year at all, no reference).

Master thesis of Nikita Korshikov meets the requirements of the Master in Information Technologies and Innovation Management program, and according to the reviewer’s opinion deserves a/an “satisfactory (E)” grade, thus the author can be given the desired degree.

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