

PRELIMINARY REPORT

Analysis of Knowledge Management Driving and Hindering Factors and Perceived Management Performance in the Distribution Sector of Serbia

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the role of knowledge management methods and their perceived contribution to managerial and operational performance in the distribution sector, with particular emphasis on knowledge sharing practices, organizational culture, and technological support. The research applies a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. A survey was conducted among 102 employees from the distribution sector using a structured questionnaire, while qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured interviews with three distribution managers. Findings indicate that organizational culture plays an important role in facilitating knowledge sharing, while knowledge management methods are perceived to contribute most strongly to decision-making quality, productivity, and interdepartmental coordination. Key barriers include lack of time, insufficient managerial support, technical limitations, low employee motivation, and resistance to change. The study contributes to a better understanding of how knowledge management practices are perceived in relation to management performance in distribution. It identifies practical challenges and proposes initiatives for improving knowledge exchange processes, thereby potentially supporting organizational efficiency, innovation, and competitive advantage in dynamic market conditions.

Keywords: *knowledge management, driving and hindering factors, management performance, distribution sector, innovation*

JEL Classification: D83, L81, M10

INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital economy, organizations are increasingly faced with complex challenges arising from both internal and external environments. Externally, companies are exposed to the pressure of rapid technological development, intensified competition in domestic and global markets, and frequent changes that require continuous adaptation. Internally, enterprises operate under constant pressure to develop new or improve existing products and services in order to meet evolving market demands. In such a context, competitive advantage increasingly depends on an organization's ability to enhance its own performance through faster responsiveness to

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change, greater efficiency, higher quality, and stronger customer orientation. To meet dynamic environmental requirements, organizations must continuously renew and develop their competencies, invest in organizational learning processes, and create conditions for the development of new knowledge as a foundation of long-term competitiveness. The value of knowledge is much more important than all other forms of assets that an organization possesses (Baltezarević et al., 2015).

Distribution, as one of the core functions within the supply chain, faces a wide range of challenges, including increasing market complexity, technological changes, and the need for fast and precise deliveries. In this context, knowledge sharing among employees and teams becomes a key component of improving organizational efficiency and innovation and sustaining competitive advantage. The most successful companies and national economies are increasingly knowledge-based and rely on highly educated and trained human resources. A high level of inventiveness and innovation can be achieved only through continuous employee development, which also contributes to organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Kolaković et al., 2009).

Specific challenges in knowledge exchange within the distribution sector primarily relate to difficulties in identifying and applying knowledge that directly affects operational efficiency. Complex organizational structures and geographical dispersion of employees often hinder effective information transfer across teams. Differences in expertise and experience further contribute to knowledge fragmentation, complicating its integration into daily operations. Organizational culture plays a crucial role, as it can either encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing or create barriers such as fear of losing expertise or lack of trust. Technological solutions, including modern knowledge management platforms, can support this process only if aligned with users' actual needs. The strong relationship between knowledge exchange and key performance indicators, such as delivery accuracy and customer satisfaction, indicates the strategic importance of this process for maintaining and improving competitive positioning in distribution. Key challenges include identifying knowledge that directly affects business process efficiency, emphasizing the role of technology in supporting knowledge exchange, analyzing the relationship between knowledge sharing and innovation, and measuring the impact of knowledge exchange on organizational performance, including cost reduction and innovativeness.

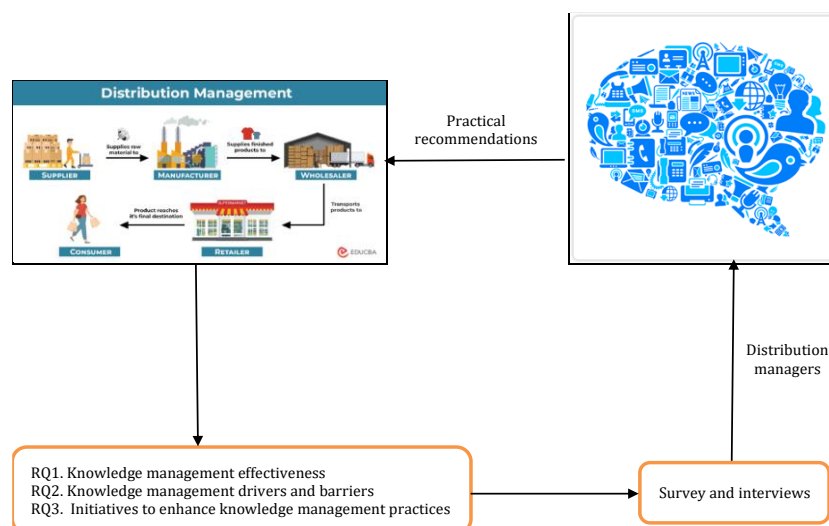


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the research

Source: Authors' survey

Given the importance of knowledge management for management performance in the distribution sector, this paper analyzes knowledge as a strategic resource and examines how its

effective management can improve managerial practice. The paper addresses this gap by identifying existing knowledge-sharing practices and challenges and assessing their relationship with operational and managerial outcomes in the distribution sector. More specifically, as presented in Figure 1, the paper examines respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of current knowledge management approaches (RQ1), key drivers and barriers (RQ2), and recommendations for improving knowledge management practices (RQ3).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge Management

In contemporary knowledge-based economies, knowledge is increasingly recognized as a critical organizational resource that enables adaptability, innovation, and sustained competitiveness. The growth of the global knowledge-based economy, in which traditional factors of production such as capital, land, and labor have been complemented by knowledge as a key resource, has led to the formation of the discipline of knowledge management. Drucker (1959) emphasizes the importance of information as a fundamental resource for the economy, which stimulated the development of the knowledge management concept. Knowledge management (KM) encompasses systematic processes of acquiring, creating, storing, sharing, and applying knowledge to improve organizational performance and decision-making. Transforming information into organizational knowledge not only benefits the organization itself but also supports the individuals within it by providing a "memory base", a medium for storing, sharing, and using knowledge to improve functional efficiency and enhance personal competencies.

Knowledge must be accepted, codified, and stored in a way that makes it accessible to all members of the organization in order for knowledge management to be truly effective. These steps are essential processes of knowledge management. Externalization, in its purest sense, refers to transforming individual experience into accessible information that can be shared and reused. In this way, personal experience becomes part of the organization's "memory base" and contributes to the development of its intellectual capital (Albino et al., 2004).

In this context, information technologies are particularly important. As Holsapple (2005) emphasizes, modern technology has transformed the way individuals and organizations learn and perform knowledge-dependent tasks by amplifying, complementing, and, in some cases, enhancing innate human capacities for processing knowledge. This implies that digital knowledge management can extend personal memory and experience by externalizing knowledge in an accessible format. Rather than representing merely a technological solution, knowledge management is understood as a strategic capability that integrates human, structural, and relational capital to create value and enhance productivity (Žugaj & Schatten, 2008; Markić, 2016).

A layered perspective on knowledge distinguishes between basic, advanced, and innovative knowledge. Basic knowledge enables organizations to operate within industry standards, advanced knowledge supports competitiveness, and innovative knowledge enables market leadership. Effective management of these knowledge layers improves resource utilization and optimizes business processes. Through knowledge acquisition, creation, development, and dissemination, organizations strengthen existing competencies while developing new ones, thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness.

A crucial dimension of knowledge management involves integrating tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge, embedded in employees' skills, intuition, and experience, is particularly difficult to transfer and replicate, making it a key source of competitive advantage. When effectively shared through informal networks, communities of practice, and organizational routines, tacit knowledge enables organizations to respond uniquely to market challenges and strengthen their industry position. Rice & Rice (2005) emphasize the importance of transferring tacit knowledge throughout the organization, as it forms the foundation for generating new

knowledge. Japanese approaches to knowledge management, focused on creating implicit knowledge, contributed to the overall development of knowledge management practices, while American models highlighted the importance of explicit information. Models such as the SECI framework facilitate the transformation of tacit knowledge embedded in employees' experience into explicit organizational knowledge, accelerating learning and innovation processes. Knowledge and knowledge management thus serve as mechanisms through which resources and capabilities are transformed into competencies that sustain long-term competitive advantage in uncertain and dynamic environments (Mahdi et al., 2019).

Knowledge management is also viewed as the process of organizing and leveraging intellectual capital, including human capital, structural resources, and relationships with external stakeholders, to increase productivity and create value through greater knowledge management maturity (Miković et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2024) and quality (Miković et al., 2022). Seiner (2000) argues that knowledge management is a concept that enables organizations to collect, organize, and apply knowledge in ways that directly impact business performance. Organizations that successfully identify strategic knowledge, defined as knowledge that is valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and difficult to substitute, can develop resources that form the basis of sustainable competitive advantage. These characteristics correspond to the resource-based view, which positions knowledge as a strategic asset (Rahimli, 2012; Barney, 1991).

Knowledge Management in the Distribution Sector

One of the most practical and widely recognized frameworks in contemporary supply and distribution management is the Eight Building Blocks Model developed by Probst, Raub, and Romhardt (2000). The model provides a comprehensive and systemic approach to implementing knowledge management by emphasizing that knowledge is a strategic resource whose value depends on how effectively it is managed. The framework consists of interrelated elements: (1) setting knowledge goals, (2) identifying knowledge, (3) acquiring knowledge, (4) developing knowledge, (5) distributing knowledge, (6) applying knowledge, (7) preserving knowledge, and (8) measuring knowledge.

Each component contributes directly to organizational performance, including effective management of supply chains. For example, weak knowledge distribution may slow decision-making and coordination, whereas effective knowledge acquisition enhances innovation and competitiveness (Probst et al., 2000). All of these contribute to productivity and innovation (Nikolić & Živković, 2017; Uriarte, 2008). Moreover, as Rice & Rice (2005) point out, combination involves merging existing explicit information to create new concepts, while internalization allows employees to transform explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge through practical experience, thereby enhancing expertise and productivity. For example, the process of learning to drive illustrates how explicit information, such as instructions, is internalized through practice and repetition (Žugaj & Schatten, 2008).

Empirical studies demonstrate that knowledge management infrastructure in the supply and distribution sector, including collaboration mechanisms, a learning-oriented culture, top-management support, and information technology, is strongly associated with knowledge process capabilities and organizational outcomes. Organizations must know how to effectively leverage internal data and information, whether through business processes or knowledge flows. However, due to the large volume and unstructured nature of available data, proper classification is essential for these resources to be used successfully (Cody et al., 2002; Noori & Salimi, 2005).

According to Lau et al. (2005), knowledge management represents a set of business processes through which the collective experience of employees, as well as information from external sources, is gathered and transferred within the organization. For such a system to be effective, organizations must develop a Knowledge Management System (KMS) that enables efficient control and coordination of information resources necessary for smooth and productive business

operations. Since much of this data is stored in insufficiently structured databases, a Knowledge Management System must classify and organize information according to users' specific needs; therefore, it must be designed to facilitate structured access and usability (Van Deventer, 2013).

These capabilities encompass knowledge acquisition, conversion, application, and protection. Research indicates that acquisition and application of knowledge are particularly influential for creative organizational learning, which mediates the relationship between knowledge processes and management performance. Organizations that establish effective knowledge management infrastructures develop dynamic learning processes that enhance problem-solving ability, innovation, and responsiveness to environmental changes. Managerial support and IT tools have been identified as the most influential factors in successful knowledge management implementation (Lee, Kim & Kim, 2012).

Further evidence shows that knowledge management capabilities positively influence both financial and non-financial organizational performance. Knowledge management capabilities enable organizations to (1) monitor environmental changes and improve strategic decision-making, (2) convert collected information into usable knowledge, (3) apply knowledge to support sharing, innovation, service improvement, and problem-solving, and (4) protect intellectual assets through patents, confidentiality agreements, and information-security mechanisms. Studies on small and medium-sized enterprises demonstrate that all four dimensions contribute to performance outcomes, with knowledge application exerting the strongest impact. This integrative perspective is particularly relevant for the distribution sector, where complex flows of goods, information, and services require rapid adaptation to market demands (Ha, Lo & Wang, 2016).

Knowledge Management and Influence on Performance in the Distribution Sector

Knowledge is increasingly recognized as the central economic resource, surpassing traditional factors such as capital and labor. Organizations that successfully implement knowledge management strategies demonstrate higher levels of adaptability, innovation, and responsiveness. Core knowledge management processes - knowledge creation, storage, dissemination, and application - enhance efficiency by reducing problem-solving time, improving product and service quality, accelerating market entry, and increasing decision accuracy. When knowledge is embedded into organizational routines and supported by appropriate technologies, employees gain timely access to relevant information, increasing overall productivity (Xue, 2017).

Authors such as Sokoh & Okolie (2021) and Farooq (2022) argue that organizations generate large volumes of information and information-related resources through their regular operations. These informational resources can provide valuable insights into the business environment, enabling organizations to respond more effectively and proactively to dynamic market conditions (Sokoh & Okolie, 2021; Farooq, 2022).

Balancing tacit and explicit knowledge remains a critical success factor. While explicit knowledge can be documented and transferred through formal channels, tacit knowledge requires a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous learning. Organizations that effectively integrate both forms achieve stronger innovation capabilities and competitive positioning. Consequently, competitiveness increasingly depends not only on technological superiority or cost efficiency but also on the ability to learn rapidly, innovate continuously, and respond effectively to market changes (Xue, 2017).

Leadership and organizational culture play a central role in facilitating knowledge sharing and application. Effective leaders promote open communication, establish expectations regarding knowledge exchange, recognize contributions, integrate knowledge management into daily activities, encourage continuous learning, provide accessible tools, and lead by example. Value-based leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping an organizational culture that supports sustainable change. By communicating core values, building trust, and promoting continuous

learning, leaders can help ensure that organizational transitions remain aligned with the interests of stakeholders (Purnomo & Ausat, 2024).

In the context of supply chains and distribution, knowledge management becomes a strategic resource enabling coordination among partners and resilience to disruptions. Contemporary supply chain management emphasizes that competition increasingly occurs between supply chains rather than individual firms. Sustainable supply chain performance requires the development of knowledge management methods, IT applications, and managerial measures that support knowledge application across organizational boundaries. These practices enhance innovation capacity, sustainability, and long-term competitiveness (Kassaneh, Bolisani & Cegarra-Navarro, 2021).

Management performance represents a multidimensional concept encompassing both behavioral aspects and measurable outcomes aligned with organizational goals. It includes financial indicators such as profitability, as well as non-financial measures such as efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, innovation, and learning capacity. Frameworks such as the Balanced Scorecard integrate these dimensions across financial, customer, internal process, and learning perspectives (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Kaplan, 2009). Research demonstrates that knowledge management infrastructure and processes positively influence all four perspectives, particularly learning and growth, which is most strongly associated with knowledge-related capabilities (Cho & Korte, 2014). Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) serve as critical instruments for identifying developmental opportunities within organizations. They function as “goal markers” that guide the attainment of strategic objectives. According to Đuričin et al. (2018), KPIs can be broadly categorized as follows:

1. Profitability indicators: These metrics assess a company's capacity to generate earnings. Traditionally, Return on Equity (ROE) and Return on Assets (ROA) have been employed for this purpose. However, evolving management paradigms have given rise to additional measures, such as Economic Value Added (EVA) and Cash Flow Return on Investment (CFROI). In practice, these indicators are rarely evaluated in isolation; analysts typically benchmark them against competitors, peer groups, or industry averages;
2. Efficiency indicators: These are used to evaluate how effectively limited resources, particularly capital and human resources, are utilized. The emphasis is on resource deployment in the context of new projects. Key metrics include Return on Investment (ROI), Payback Period, and Net Present Value (NPV). While these measures effectively capture asset utilization, quantifying human resource efficiency presents greater challenges. Nonetheless, advancements in Human Resource Management and contemporary business theory have introduced methodologies to address this complexity; and
3. Competency indicators: Representing the most strategic dimension of an organization's operational “identity,” competency indicators focus on capabilities critical for long-term value creation. A central competency in contemporary enterprises is the adoption of Value-Based Management, with “created value” increasingly recognized as a primary corporate objective.

The choice of KPIs is largely contingent upon the organization's industry and operational context. Over time, a variety of frameworks have been developed to support managers in monitoring performance and making informed decisions. Among these, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is particularly noteworthy. The Balanced Scorecard provides a structured strategic performance management system, enabling managers to systematically track employee activities and evaluate the resulting outcomes (Kaplan, 2009).

The literature indicates a relationship between knowledge management and management performance. By supporting organizational learning, decision-making quality, innovation capacity, and operational efficiency, knowledge management may contribute to organizational

competitiveness and long-term development. However, the present study examines reported practices and perceptions and does not test causal effects.

Durst and Evangelista (2018) found that, despite some initiatives, most third-party logistics providers (3PLs) in Italy and Sweden have not yet fully leveraged the potential of knowledge management. Their study highlights a correlation between the range and complexity of services offered and the sophistication of knowledge management practices, with firms providing broader portfolios (e.g., warehousing, distribution, and value-added services) adopting more advanced tools. Commonly used practices include sharing best practices, knowledge mapping, communities of practice, and post-action reviews. Formal documentation and codification, however, remain underdeveloped, especially in firms relying on informal knowledge exchange and tacit expertise.

This evidence demonstrates the relevance of examining not only theoretical knowledge management frameworks but also their practical adoption in organizations operating within the distribution sector. It underlines the importance of integrating quantitative and qualitative data to capture both perceptions and actual practices, thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of knowledge management effectiveness.

Building on these theoretical insights, the present study adopts a descriptive approach to examine operational knowledge management practices in the distribution sector. The focus is on practical mechanisms such as internal and external training programs, digital knowledge repositories, mentoring systems, and team-based knowledge sharing. Management performance is assessed through dimensions including decision-making quality, customer experience improvement, cross-departmental coordination, productivity, cost efficiency, and innovation, thereby capturing the perceived contribution of knowledge management to organizational effectiveness.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To address the gap described in the conceptual framework, the following research questions were formulated: (RQ1) How do employees and managers assess current knowledge management approaches? (RQ2) What drivers and barriers do they encounter in knowledge sharing and application? (RQ3) Which initiatives do they propose for improving knowledge management practices?

This study employs a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine knowledge management practices, enablers, barriers, and solutions within the distribution sector. The quantitative component consisted of a cross-sectional survey, while the qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews. The interviews were used to provide additional context for the descriptive survey findings. Given the limited number of interviews, they are treated as illustrative rather than as independent validation of the quantitative results. This approach is consistent with literature emphasizing the multidimensional nature of knowledge management and its role in organizational performance (Bresciani et al., 2023) and the integration of knowledge transformation capacity into business systems (Broccardo et al., 2025).

Primary data were collected from April to June 2025 through a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and open-ended items. The focus on KM practices as potential drivers of performance aligns with the framework proposed by Chopra et al. (2021), who highlight the evolving role of knowledge in achieving business sustainability. Closed-ended questions required respondents to indicate the use of specific knowledge management practices ("Used" / "Not used") and to assess their perceived contribution to multiple dimensions of management performance on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was developed using an online survey platform and distributed electronically to employees working in organizations operating within the distribution sector, accompanied by a description of the study's objectives and an invitation to participate. Participation was voluntary, all participants provided informed consent, and

responses were coded to preserve anonymity. The final sample consisted of 102 respondents representing diverse organizational levels and functional areas.

Following completion and analysis of the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three managers from the distribution sector using a predefined interview protocol. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and interview materials were coded to preserve anonymity. No formal coding protocol was applied because of the small number of interviewees and the illustrative purpose of this component. The interview findings were therefore used to supplement, rather than validate, the quantitative findings in relation to the research questions.

Sample Characteristics

The data were collected through a structured online survey conducted from April to June 2025. A convenience sampling approach was used, targeting employees and managers working in organizations operating within the distribution sector in Serbia. A total of 102 valid responses were obtained and included in the analysis. The questionnaire used binary items to assess the adoption of knowledge management practices and a five-point Likert scale to assess their perceived contribution. The survey sample consisted predominantly of female participants (68.6%), with males representing 31.4%.

This gender distribution may reflect a higher proportion of women in the surveyed roles or a greater willingness among female employees to participate. The age profile of the survey respondents reflects the overall professional experience within the sample. The largest group comprised individuals aged 36–45 years (41.2%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (29.4%), indicating that the sample was concentrated primarily in the 26–45 age range. Smaller proportions were noted in the 46–55 (14.7%) and 18–25 (12.7%) age brackets, while respondents aged 56 and above were scarcely represented. The distribution is illustrated in Figure 2.

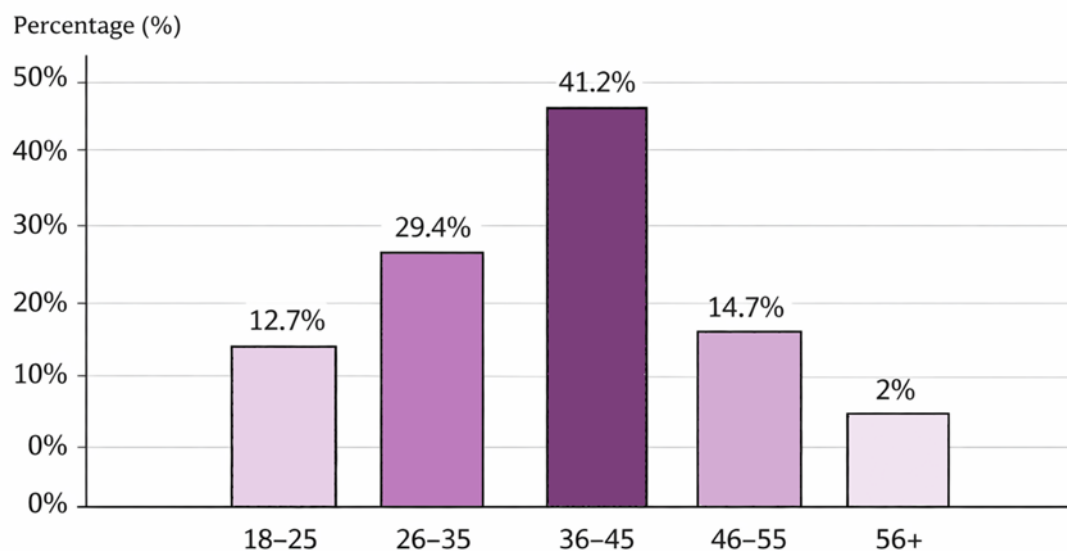


Figure 2. Age distribution by respondents

Source: Authors' survey

To better understand the composition of the survey sample, respondents' organizational positions were analyzed, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample structure by respondents' position

Category	Number	%
Sales manager	22	22%
Other / Uncategorized	17	17%
Logistics manager	13	13%
Other managers	12	12%
Entrepreneurs	8	8%
Administration	6	6%
Sales (Other positions)	6	6%
Project manager	5	5%
Marketing manager	3	3%
HR manager	3	3%
Finance manager	3	3%
Production manager	2	2%
Logistics (Other positions)	1	1%
Digital manager / IT	1	1%
TOTAL	102	100%

Source: Authors' survey

This classification provides important context regarding the professional roles and levels of responsibility represented in the study, highlighting both the managerial dominance and the operational diversity within the sample. By distinguishing between different functional and hierarchical positions, the analysis enables a more nuanced interpretation of knowledge management practices across organizational levels and departments. Since knowledge management processes often differ between strategic decision-making roles and operational functions, understanding the positional structure of respondents is essential for contextualizing the findings.

In terms of distribution, sales managers comprised the largest group (22%), followed by logistics managers (13%). Project managers, marketing managers, human resources managers, finance managers, and production managers collectively accounted for a smaller proportion of the managerial sample, indicating representation across multiple functional domains, albeit with lower individual shares.

The "Other managers" category (12%) included general or unspecified managerial roles that did not fall within predefined functional categories. The "Other/Uncategorized" group (17%) encompassed non-managerial roles or positions that could not be clearly classified, such as drivers, team leaders, or interns. Entrepreneurs represented 8% of the total sample, contributing an additional strategic and ownership-oriented perspective.

More than 60% of respondents occupied managerial positions. This strong representation of decision-makers provides substantial insight into knowledge management practices from a strategic and leadership perspective, while the inclusion of non-managerial respondents adds perspectives from different organizational levels.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of respondents according to their years of professional experience. This overview provides insight into the experience structure of the sample, allowing for an assessment of the respondents' professional maturity. It also helps determine the extent to which the study's findings reflect perspectives shaped by different stages of career development.

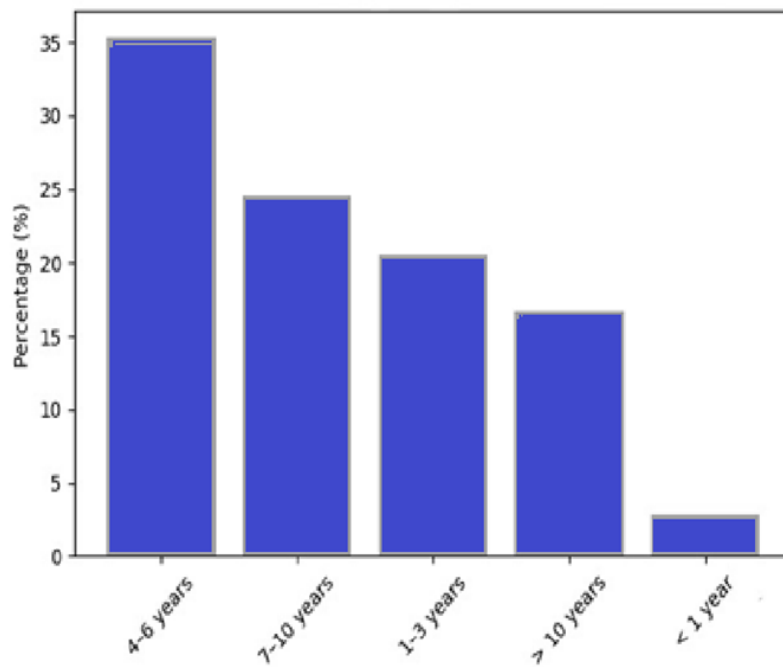


Figure 3. Structure of the employees by years of work experience

Source: Authors' survey

The structure of the employees by years of work experience indicates that the largest proportion of respondents (35.3%) has between 4 and 6 years of professional experience, followed by those with 7–10 years (24.5%) and more than 10 years of experience (16.7%). Together, these three categories account for more than three quarters of the sample, indicating that most respondents had at least four years of professional experience. It is also noteworthy that more than one fifth of the respondents (20.6%) have 1–3 years of experience, thereby providing the study with the perspective of early-career professionals who are still in the process of professional development. By contrast, the proportion of respondents with less than one year of experience is negligible (2.9%). The table below presents the distribution of respondents according to the size of their organizations, illustrating the representation of different organizational scales within the sample.

Table 2. Distribution of the sample by organizational size

Organizational Size (Number of Employees)	Percentage (%)
Fewer than 50 employees	23.5%
50–200 employees	32.4%
200–500 employees	27.5%
More than 500 employees	16.7%
Total	100%

Source: Authors' survey

With respect to organizational size, the results indicate a relatively balanced distribution across the examined categories, ensuring adequate representation of organizations of different scales. The largest proportion of respondents is employed in medium-sized organizations with 50–200 employees (32.4%), followed by those in organizations with 200–500 employees (27.5%). Small enterprises with fewer than 50 employees account for 23.5% of the sample, while large organizations with more than 500 employees represent 16.7%.

This distribution provides descriptive coverage of organizations with different structural and operational capacities. However, because the sample was selected by convenience and no inferential subgroup analysis was conducted, the results cannot establish statistically significant differences in knowledge management practices across organizational sizes.

RESULTS

The results for each knowledge management method are presented below, providing a detailed overview of their level of adoption and perceived impact across key organizational performance dimensions:

1. Internal training and workshops were the most widely employed knowledge management method, reported by 94.1% of respondents. Their perceived contribution was most pronounced for decision-making, with 43.1% of respondents assigning a rating of 4 out of 5. Positive perceived contributions were also noted in customer experience and interdepartmental coordination. Productivity improvements were perceived by 40.2% of respondents, whereas the perceived contribution to cost reduction and innovation was moderate.
2. Digital knowledge repositories were utilized by 69.6% of respondents.
3. Mentorship programs were reported by 79.4% of respondents, with moderate to high perceived contributions to decision-making, coordination, productivity, and innovation. Non-use was cited by 20.6%.
4. Knowledge sharing in team meetings was nearly universal (93.1%), with respondents indicating moderate to high positive impacts across all performance dimensions, particularly in coordination and innovation.
5. Documented procedures and instructions were reported as used by 74.2% of respondents with a valid response to this item. The mixed perceptions regarding their impact show variability in application and underscore the need for standardized practices.
6. External training and consulting services were employed by 80.4% of respondents, with positive perceived contributions reported across all measured dimensions, although adoption was not universal.
7. Knowledge management software tools were utilized by 58.8% of respondents. The perceived impact varied, and non-use was reported by 40.2%; the remaining 1.0% reflects a missing or unclassified response. These findings suggest that digital knowledge management tools were not uniformly adopted among the surveyed respondents.

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of the most effective knowledge management methods. The "Other" category contains the largest number of responses (57) but could not be further classified from the available data. Among the specified methods, internal training and workshops were cited most frequently, followed by knowledge sharing, mentorship programs, and external consulting. Software tools and formal documentation were less frequently cited.

Table 3. Most effective knowledge management method

Most effective knowledge management method	Number of responses
Internal training/workshops	15
Knowledge sharing	9
Mentoring programs	7
Consultants/workshops/educational sessions	7
Software	4
Documentation	3
Other	57

Source: Authors' survey

Figure 4 presents the distribution of perceived barriers, emphasizing the key organizational and managerial challenges that hinder the implementation of knowledge management practices.

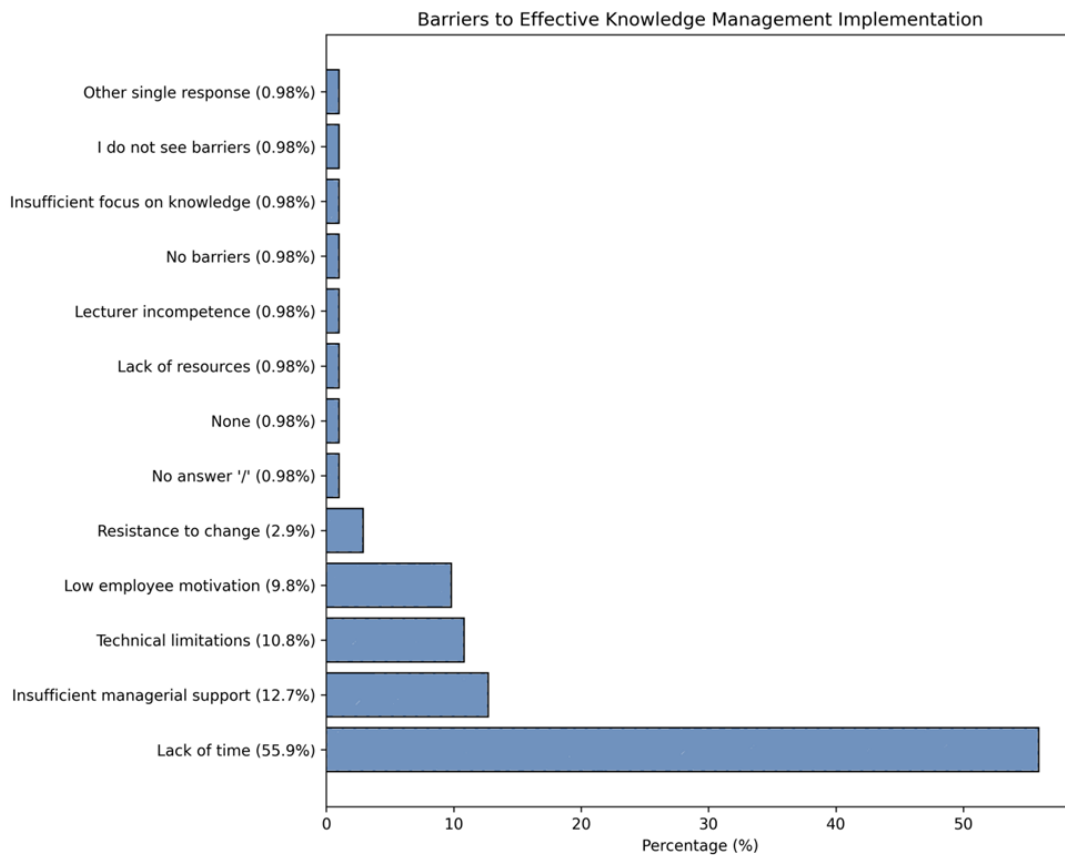


Figure 4. Barriers to knowledge management implementation
Source: Authors' survey

Identifying these obstacles provides insight into both operational limitations and the structural and cultural factors that affect the sustainability of knowledge management initiatives. The main barriers were lack of time (55.9%), insufficient managerial support (12.7%), technical limitations (10.8%), low employee motivation (9.8%), and resistance to change (2.9%). The remaining 7.9% comprised other low-frequency responses.

Understanding organizational culture is critical for assessing the environment in which knowledge management takes place. Employees' perceptions of their workplace culture can either facilitate or hinder knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation. The following analysis examines how participants view their organizational culture in relation to knowledge exchange, highlighting the extent to which the environment supports, remains neutral, or restricts knowledge-sharing practices. As shown in Figure 5, the majority of participants perceive their organizational culture as open and supportive (60.8%), underscoring the importance of cultivating an environment that encourages effective knowledge exchange. One third of respondents (33.3%) perceive the culture as neutral, indicating that knowledge sharing may occur but is not actively promoted, while only a small minority (5.9%) describe the environment as closed and inactive, signaling potential organizational obstacles such as limited communication, hierarchical constraints, or restricted access to information.

Promoting a culture that values transparency, communication, and inclusivity can help overcome barriers and enhance knowledge management within organizations. Building on these insights, it is important to consider how improved knowledge management is perceived to

contribute to managerial performance. As illustrated in Figure 6, 79.4% of respondents believed that improvements in knowledge management practices could positively contribute to decision-making, coordination, and overall management effectiveness. A smaller portion (16.7%) remained uncertain, while less than 4% perceived no benefit.

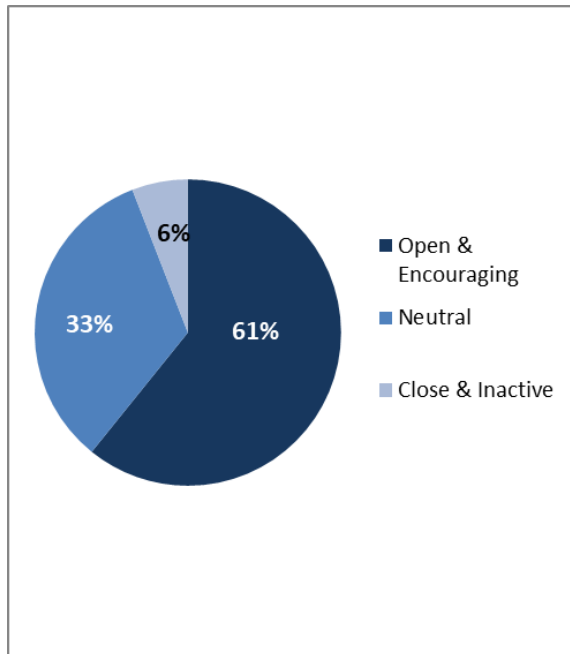


Figure 5. Organizational culture for knowledge sharing

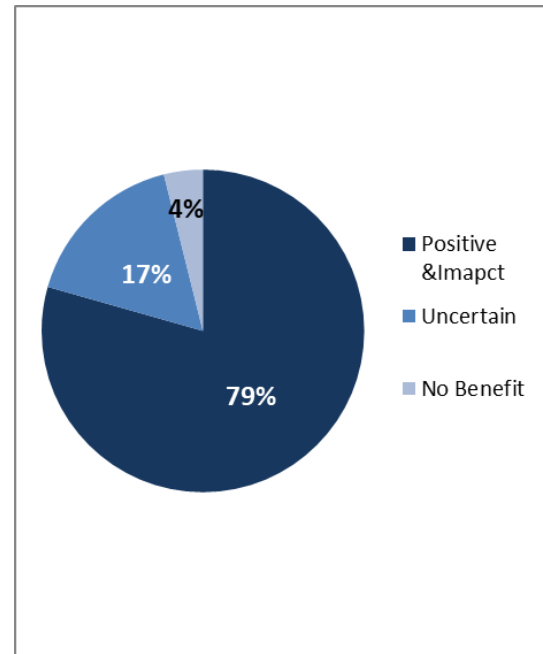


Figure 6. Perceived impact of improved management on management performance

Source: Authors' survey

Overall, addressing the identified barriers, fostering a supportive organizational culture, and implementing structured knowledge management initiatives may contribute to improved managerial performance, more effective knowledge sharing, and better organizational outcomes. Integrating both people-based practices and digital solutions offers the potential for a formalized and strategic approach to knowledge management within organizations. Concrete suggestions emerging from the survey included structured mentorship programs, enhanced digital knowledge management infrastructure and collaborative tools, capacity building for managers and employees in modern knowledge-transfer practices, on-the-job learning, performance-based reward systems, and the integration of knowledge management into organizational culture and strategic priorities.

To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three managers from different organizations within the distribution sector. As presented briefly in Table 4, the qualitative findings were broadly consistent with several survey patterns, particularly the importance of organizational culture and time constraints as barriers to knowledge sharing. The interviews also provided contextual examples of informal knowledge transfer, limited use of digital platforms, unclear responsibilities, and low employee engagement. Participants emphasized the need for structured mentorship programs, digitalization of internal knowledge, managerial education on knowledge management benefits, allocated time for learning activities, and links between knowledge management practices and reward systems. Because only three managers were interviewed, these findings should be interpreted as illustrative insights rather than sector-wide evidence.

Table 4. Survey vs. interviews level of matching

Research Questions	Survey findings	Interviews findings	Level of S-I matching
RQ1: Effectiveness of current knowledge management approaches	Results show that knowledge management methods are present across different performance dimensions.	Interview responses indicate that these methods are recognized and applied in practice.	Confirmed
RQ2: Knowledge sharing and application drivers and barriers	Survey results indicate the presence of challenges related to knowledge sharing and application.	Interviews provide additional clarification and examples of these challenges.	Extended
RQ3: Initiatives to enhance knowledge management practices	Survey responses suggest the need for improving knowledge management practices.	Interviews highlight potential directions for improvement and practical suggestions,	Confirmed

Source: Authors

Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the three groups of variables presented in Table 5. The reported coefficients exceed 0.8, indicating high internal consistency among the included items. Cronbach's alpha is retained as a reliability indicator; it does not, by itself, validate the questionnaire, the constructs, or all study results.

Table 5. Reliability of variables

Variable	Cronbach's alpha
Methods	0.87
Challenges	0.94
Improvement	0.94

Source: Authors' calculations

DISCUSSION

The research findings emphasize the need to balance formal and informal knowledge management mechanisms, leverage technology, and ensure managerial support for sustainable knowledge-sharing practices. They also point to the importance of cultural barriers, employee motivation, and management involvement. These findings are broadly aligned with the literature emphasizing internal learning mechanisms as carriers of organizational memory and continuity (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Knowledge management practices were perceived to contribute to productivity, decision-making, and coordination, while their perceived contribution to cost reduction and innovation was less pronounced. Lack of time, managerial support, and technical limitations were among the primary reported obstacles (Anser et al., 2021). Overall, effective knowledge management in the distribution sector appears to require more than technological solutions; it also requires cultural change, leadership commitment, and integration into daily practice.

In greater detail, and with regard to RQ1 and RQ2, the results indicate that employees participate in knowledge exchange through training, mentoring, and team interactions. The interviews suggest that some of these activities remain informal and insufficiently embedded in

formal organizational systems. This may indicate an imbalance between the widespread use of knowledge-sharing practices and their formalization within the participating organizations. However, this interpretation should be treated cautiously because it is based partly on three illustrative interviews.

The results further indicate that managerial involvement warrants attention. Insufficient managerial support was reported as a barrier by 12.7% of respondents. Another relevant dimension is the limited adoption of digital knowledge management tools, which were used by 58.8% of respondents. The available data do not establish whether this reflects technological constraints, strategic prioritization, or integration into daily workflows. The interview observations provide possible context but cannot support sector-wide conclusions.

The study indicates that the perceived contribution of knowledge management is concentrated primarily in short-term operational outcomes, while its contribution to long-term strategic dimensions appears less visible. Organizations may find the broader benefits associated with innovation and cost optimization more difficult to recognize or measure, although this explanation was not directly tested. From a sector-specific perspective, time pressure and rapid decision-making may favor flexible and informal knowledge-sharing mechanisms, but further research is needed to test this interpretation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to RQ3 and based on the empirical findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of knowledge management practices in the distribution sector:

1. Formalize mentorship structures by developing systematic, organization-wide programs that support knowledge transfer across different career stages. This is particularly important given the strong reliance on experience-based knowledge identified in the study.
2. Enhance the integration of digital knowledge management tools by aligning technological solutions with operational workflows. Rather than focusing solely on tool adoption, organizations should ensure usability, employee training, and relevance to daily tasks to increase acceptance and effectiveness.
3. Strengthen managerial involvement in knowledge management initiatives through active support mechanisms, including resource allocation, monitoring of knowledge-sharing activities, and alignment with strategic objectives.
4. Institutionalize knowledge-sharing practices by embedding them into formal processes and routines, thereby reducing reliance on informal and ad hoc interactions and improving consistency across organizational units.
5. Allocate dedicated time for knowledge-related activities within work schedules, particularly in time-sensitive operational environments, to mitigate one of the most significant barriers identified in the study.
6. Link knowledge management to performance evaluation and incentive systems, ensuring that knowledge sharing and contributions are recognized as measurable and valuable organizational behaviors.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study contributes to the literature by providing exploratory evidence on current knowledge management practices in the distribution sector, identifying key barriers, and linking employee perceptions with practical recommendations. Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the relatively small sample size ($N = 102$) and the use of convenience sampling limit the generalizability of the results. Second, reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias and common-method bias. Third, the number of organizations represented and possible clustering of respondents within organizations were not assessed. Fourth, the cross-sectional and descriptive design does not permit causal inference or the assessment of effects on objective performance outcomes. Finally, the three interviews provide only limited illustrative context.

Future research should address these limitations by employing larger and more heterogeneous samples and longitudinal designs. Inferential statistical methods could provide a more robust analysis of associations between clearly defined knowledge management and organizational performance variables. Comparative studies across industries and organizational sizes could further clarify contextual differences in implementation. Finally, combining perceptual measures with objective performance indicators would enhance the validity and practical relevance of future research.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine existing knowledge management approaches in the distribution sector, with a particular focus on knowledge-sharing challenges, the role of management, and opportunities for process improvement. The findings indicate that knowledge management activities are widely present in the sample. The results show that knowledge-sharing practices are primarily based on internal training, team interactions, and individual experience, while digital repositories and formal systems are less consistently utilized. Respondents perceived positive contributions to decision-making, coordination, and productivity, while perceived contributions to innovation and cost reduction were more limited. A key contribution of this exploratory study lies in highlighting a possible gap between the operational presence of knowledge management practices and their strategic and systematic implementation.

The findings suggest that the perceived effectiveness of knowledge management depends not only on the existence of practices but also on their level of formalization, managerial support, and alignment with organizational objectives. From a practical perspective, organizations could move beyond ad hoc knowledge-sharing approaches by embedding knowledge management into formal processes, managerial practices, and organizational culture.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its sample size, convenience sampling, sectoral focus, and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and objective performance indicators to examine the long-term relationship between knowledge management practices and performance. The present results should therefore be understood as exploratory evidence of reported practices and perceptions rather than proof of causal effects.

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