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# **Knowledge Management Capabilities and Hotel Performance in Malaysia: The Role of Learning Orientation in the Conceptual Analysis**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study is concerned with the literature review of the impact of Knowledge Management Capabilities (KMC) and Learning Orientation (LO) to Hotel Performance (HP) in Malaysia. Tourism industry becomes one of fastest growing industry and significantly affected by Covid-19. However, the industry starts to breathe back after the pandemic with different perspectives among tourists. The industry which includes hoteliers must aware and follow the latest market trend as part of their competitive advantages to sustain and compete with their competitors. Thus, hoteliers must be equipped by sufficient and relevant knowledge to the top managements as well as employees. However, some of hoteliers are still refuse to adapt knowledge management in their organizations. Furthermore, there are hoteliers are not able to utilise knowledge as part of their learning orientation to cope with the changes market trend, micro and macro challenges in order to sustain and remain competitiveness. Thus, this research tries to explore on how learning orientation could mediate between knowledge management capabilities and hotel performance based on the empirical researches. From this conceptual analysis, it can lead for further step in developing the framework and the result from the research analysis.

Keywords: Knowledge Management Capabilities, Learning Orientation, Hotel Performance, Tourism

#### INTRODUCTION

Tourism contributes significant contribution to the many countries' gross domestic product (GDP) with 10.4% from total global GDP which is USD9.2 trillion and created 10.6% (334 million) from all jobs worldwide (WTTC, 2021). Meanwhile in Malaysia, tourism industry has contributed 13 million international tourists from January till August 2023 alone (Ganesan, 2023). The increasing number of international tourists is more triple to compare during early pandemic Covid-19 in year 2020 which is 4.33 million only (Malaysian Tourism Ministry, 2021). It shows that tourism industry is the fastest and largest growing sector for many decades and, become key driver for economic growth and social development (Yu et al., 2023). However, Syed Mohamad et al (2023) and Weidenfeld (2006) found that the industry is already entered saturated market and need to join new segmentations strategies such as eco, religious, nature and so forth. Therefore, the hoteliers tend to focus on specific and niche market such as boutique, shariah compliance and business women hotels (Nor et al. 2012). Bharwani and Mathews (2016) stressed that tourism and hospitality industry in the world have changed from product-focused to customer-focused to cater the tourists' demand and trend.

Based on the emergence market, market trend and tourists' demand, knowledge is a vital element to all tourism





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and hospitality industry's companies including hotels and how these companies to react towards their guests and tourists' demand (Syed Mohamad et al., 2023; Muhamad Nor et al., 2019; Nor et al., 2012; Poloski-Vokic, 2008). To cater the changes in business landscape and successfully survive in the business, the companies must provide and deliver sufficient as well as relevant knowledge to all their staff (Mohamad et al., 2022; Poloski-Vokic, 2008). Mohd Zahari et al. (2013) mentioned this century is the era of knowledge and people at work must manage it effectively as part of companies' strategies to sustain and survive in the competitive market. Syed Mohamad et al. (2023), and Guimaraes et al. (2017) urged the companies must identify and develop strategically to achieve sustainable competitive advantages over competitors. Even the countries as macro perspective, must apply and implement effective knowledge management system to sustain the countries' development progressively (Albassam, 2019). In fact, knowledge in economic for a country needed to generated, applied and disseminated among the people as well as giving them learning orientation to ensure country's growth. (Hamzah et al, 2020).

#### **Problem Statement**

The saturation level reached by the tourism and hospitality industry and highlights the necessity for a shift into new markets. Thus, the dynamic nature of the global business landscape, emphasizing the rapid changes brought about by shifting consumer trends and preferences. Mohamad et al. (2022), and Payal et al. (2016) stressed that the service industry is reliant on knowledge management for its modern survival. The absence of adequate knowledge, skills, and capabilities, can impede organizations from achieving and maintaining competitiveness (Khan, 2019). Furthermore, Nor et al. (2019) argued that the industry needs to explore novel avenues to remain competitive and relevant in the evolving business landscape. An avenue suggested for this adaptation is knowledge management, as noted by Syed Mohamad et al. (2023); and Poloski-Vokic (2008). The strategic implementation of knowledge management practices allows the industry to respond effectively to the changing demands and preferences of customers and guests. Furthermore, Weidenfeld (2006) the importance of recognizing these changes, leading to the identification of new market segments. In reaction to these shifts, Syed Mohamad et al. (2023); and Ngah et al. (2016) advocated for a strategic shift in the services industry towards adopting and implementing knowledge management practices. This strategic move is seen as essential for the industry to not only adapt but also thrive in a highly competitive environment. Albassam (2019) extended this perspective by suggesting that nations, especially those aspiring to remain competitive on a global scale by establishing effective knowledge management systems. The rationale is that a robust knowledge management is crucial for sustaining competitiveness, aligning with the practices of developed nations.

Another issue is the timeliness of companies incorporating knowledge management practices and acquiring intellectual resources to stay ahead in their respective industries (Alavi et al., 2005). Gold et al. (2001) highlighted the challenges associated with establishing and maintaining knowledge management initiatives over time. This recognition adds a layer of complexity to the narrative, underscoring that while knowledge management is crucial for competitiveness, its successful implementation is not without its hurdles.

It could be more challenging in implementing knowledge management across the time is among smaller companies, especially Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), which may have limited resources but need to navigate changes in the market. Randhawa et al. (2020) suggested that SMEs often respond to market changes by using their existing knowledge, resources, and capabilities.

In preparing knowledgeable and skilled managerial personnel is a crucial factor in achieving excellent performance and business success, particularly within the hotel and tourism sector (Stephenson et al., 2010). At the meantime the companies must recognize that all employees are part of their essential assets. Therefore, Poloski-Vokic (2008) underlined the importance of investing in skilled individuals to enhance the overall performance of the tourism and hospitality establishments. Furthermore, Tavitiyaman et al. (2012) delved further into the significance of skilled employees, asserting that their expertise contributes to the improved management of hotels. Normally known that the skilled workforce is a key factor in elevating the standards and efficiency of hotel operations, reinforcing the idea that employees are integral to the success of businesses in the industry. Thus, learning orientation need to be nurtured in the working environment to boost performance (Hamzah et al., 2020). Sheresheva (2016) expands on this perspective by highlighting the necessity for a balance between skilled employees and the developmental initiatives undertaken by developing countries in the tourism and hospitality

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sector. This balance is crucial for developing countries to compete effectively with developed nations that boast excellent and superior services designed to attract potential and repeat guests to stay at their hotels.

Despite the potential benefits of knowledge management in the tourism industry, its adoption faces resistance, particularly due to the industry's unstable environment (Cooper, 2006). The uncertainty and dynamic nature of the tourism sector make industry players hesitant to fully embrace knowledge management practices, which could otherwise contribute significantly to their adaptability and success. In response to these challenges, Tavitiyaman et al. (2012) emphasized the necessity for hoteliers to invest in providing their employees with knowledge. This investment is crucial not only for enhancing the skills of the workforce but also for making learning environment process is available to improve overall performance. By equipping employees with the right knowledge and conducive learning environment can be pivotal in overcoming the resistance to knowledge management, addressing deficiencies in compliance, and ultimately improving the efficiency and effectiveness of hotel operations.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Knowledge Management Capabilities**

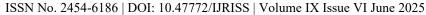
Knowledge is normally well known as a significant asset for organizations, contributing to superior business performance and maintaining a competitive advantage (Muhamad et al., 2022; Grover & Davenport, 2001; Barney,1991). Bolisani and Bratianu (2018) defined knowledge as an abstract concept that finds tangible expression in the real world, further emphasizing its role as a form of wealth for organizations. Anjaria (2020) contributed to the discussion by defining knowledge management as a comprehensive set of methods, tools, and techniques employed by companies to manage their processes. This definition broadens the understanding of knowledge management, encapsulating a systematic approach to handling organizational knowledge.

Steward and Waddel (2008) provided in historical context by noting that knowledge management has been in development for over four decades and was initially implemented in organizations during its early stages. This timeline underscores the evolutionary nature of knowledge management and its roots in both academic and practical disciplines, gaining prominence since the late 20th century. Al-Hawari (2004) came with a distinctive perspective by defining knowledge management as an object that can be codified, understood, disseminated, and applied to achieve companies' goals. This characterization provides a practical lens through which knowledge is viewed as a tangible and actionable entity within organizational processes.

Syed Muhamad et al., (2023), and Chiu and Chen (2016) defined the concept of knowledge management capabilities as a continuous and intentional mechanism for creating knowledge within an organization. This definition emphasizes the dynamic and deliberate nature of knowledge management practices by highlighting its ongoing role in organizational development. Previously, Alavi and Leidner (2001) contributed to the understanding by defining knowledge management capabilities as the ability to create, transfer, integrate, and apply knowledge within an organizational context. This definition summarizes it as the multifaceted nature of knowledge management, spanning various dimensions such as creation, transfer, integration, and application.

The concept of knowledge management itself cannot be though just an incremental change but a radical transformation that impacts the fundamental aspects of an organization, including assumptions, structures, and value systems. The goal is to reshape and reconstruct these elements to cultivate a knowledge organization. This transformational approach emphasizes the need for continuous support for knowledge management within the organization, recognizing it as essential for enhancing performance (Hindasah & Nuryakin, 2020).

Furthermore, the specific capabilities that organizations need to develop to effectively support knowledge management. It notes that organizations must not only cultivate capabilities but also view them as opportunities for knowledge integration. This aligns with the idea that knowledge management is not just about having the right tools or systems but requires a strategic and intentional approach to integrate knowledge into the fabric of the organization. Therefore, Zhang et al. (2018) categorized knowledge management capabilities into three types: technological, structural, and cultural. This framework acknowledges the multifaceted nature of knowledge





management, and recognizing that it involves not only technology but also organizational structures and cultural

management, and recognizing that it involves not only technology but also organizational structures and cultural aspects. This holistic approach implies that successful knowledge management requires a combination of technological tools, supportive structures, as well as a culture that values and promotes knowledge sharing. However, Gold et al. (2001) and, Lee and Yang (2000) divided knowledge management into two categories: knowledge infrastructure and knowledge process. This division highlights the interplay between the foundational structures and the dynamic processes involved in managing knowledge. Knowledge infrastructure refers to the foundational elements, such as systems and tools, while knowledge processes encompass the ongoing activities and workflows related to knowledge management.

The concept of knowledge infrastructure could be known by multiple perspectives on its definition and components. According to Wu and Chen (2014), knowledge infrastructure is the foundation that companies build to support their core business, encompassing systems and services. This definition underscores the critical role of infrastructure in providing the necessary support for the operational and strategic aspects of a business. Previously, Lee and Yang (2000) viewed it as a combination of structure, technology, and culture. This broader perspective recognizes that infrastructure goes beyond just technological components and includes the organizational structure and cultural aspects, highlighting the interconnectedness of these elements in supporting business functions. Specifically, Gil-Padilla and Espino-Rodriguez (2008) had brought attention to the specific impact of technology infrastructure on hotel performance within the industry by elaborating on how technology infrastructure has evolved into one of the key resources influencing a company's performance, emphasizing its significance in the competitive landscape.

In another perspective, Gold et al. (2001) had contributed a comprehensive view by highlighting the dimensions through which social capital can be maximized within organizational infrastructure. However, the three dimensions: structural, cultural, and technological that been highlighted are similar with Lee and Yang (2000). Gold et al. (2001) suggested that social capital, a critical aspect of organizational effectiveness, can be optimized by aligning the organizational structure, culture, and technology.

As part of KMC's dimensions, Muhamad et al. (2022) and, Mohannak (2011) explored the role of culture as a part of knowledge infrastructure by emphasizing its substantial influence on the success or failure of an organization's knowledge management initiatives. This insight underscores the importance of a supportive cultural environment in fostering effective knowledge management practices. Syed Muhamad et al. (2023) and, Gil-Padilla and Espino-Rodriguez (2008) emphasized that the technological aspect of infrastructure, alongside cultural factors, impacts hotel performance in the industry. Muhamad et al. (2022) and, Gold et al. (2001) extended this perspective by highlighting that social capital within an organization's infrastructure can be maximized through structural, cultural, and technological dimensions. Furthermore, Gold et al.'s (2001) finding of a direct and significant relationship between knowledge infrastructure and organizational effectiveness. This reinforces the idea that a well-developed knowledge infrastructure, encompassing structural, cultural, and technological dimensions, contributes directly to the overall effectiveness of an organization.

Meanwhile, knowledge process appears to leverage organizational infrastructure for improved performance. Syed Muhamad et al. (2023) and, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) described knowledge processes involve the efficient capture, storage, reconciliation, and dissemination of knowledge within an organization. This is identified as crucial for transforming knowledge into a competitive advantage. Meanwhile, Su and Lin (2006) defined knowledge processes as the organization's ability to identify core competencies and the associated knowledge categories, demands, and requirements. This involves the identification of business core competencies and encompasses knowledge generation, dissemination, and application (Lee & Yang, 2000).

Wu and Chen (2014) came out with a detailed breakdown of knowledge processes, dividing them into creation, transfer, integration, and application processes. This comprehensive approach views knowledge processes as an integrated system, nurturing knowledge within the organization. Previously, Gold et al. (2001) contributed by identifying specific components of knowledge process capabilities, including knowledge acquisition, conversion, application, and protection. The paragraph underlines their finding that a direct and significant relationship exists between knowledge processes and organizational effectiveness.

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#### **Learning Orientation**

The concept of learning orientation within organizations could be explained from various perspectives. According to Sinkula et al. (1997), learning orientation can be conceptualized as a commitment to learning, shared vision, and open-mindedness within an organization. Sinkula et al. (1997) defined further about learning orientation as a cultural aspect that fosters a continuous search for new knowledge and consistently seeks improvement. Meanwhile, Hindasah and Nuryakin (2020) contributed to the discussion by describing learning in an organization as a comprehensive process. This process involves creating, integrating, learning business processes, and transferring knowledge and skills. Such activities are integral components of the organizational culture, contributing to overall organizational performance.

Furthermore, Anjaria (2020) introduced a nuanced perspective on learning organizations, presenting two distinct meanings. Firstly, it showed a learning organization as 'organized learning,' which emphasizes education, learning, and pedagogy within the organizational context. Secondly, it referred to learning organizations as entities where a developmental process unfolds, emphasizing that learning is a dynamic and ongoing aspect within the organizational environment. Thus, the multi-faceted nature of a learning organization could be seen as an incorporating element of commitment, shared vision, open-mindedness, and a cultural commitment to continuous improvement.

The critical role of learning orientation for organizational survival and success, particularly in competitive industries such as hospitality and tourism by thriving and enduring in the face of competition (Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Day, 1994). Ali et al. (2020) supported this notion by identifying learning orientation as a vital factor contributing to better business performance within the hospitality and tourism industry. Su and Lin (2016) added from a customer-centric perspective, suggesting that organizations can provide the best quality products and services by understanding their customers better. This positive outcome is achievable when both organizations and their employees are capable and committed to continuous learning. Tajeddini (2009) aligned with this perspective, emphasizing that learning orientation is crucial for new service development and enhances hotel performance.

In turbulent environments, Hoi and Ngui (2014) argued that learning orientation becomes a necessity for modern organizations to innovate, explore new opportunities, and sustain competitiveness. The dynamic nature of industries, especially in the face of uncertainty, demands an organizational culture that fosters continuous learning and adaptability.

Moreover, Mohd Zahari et al. (2013) posited that whether internally or externally, organizations must facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources to enhance their effectiveness. Furthermore, learning orientation is not just an internal affair but extends to collaborative efforts that involve sharing insights and resources both within and outside the organization. Thus, learning orientation as a crucial factor for organizational success and competitiveness, especially in dynamic and competitive industries like hospitality and tourism. The positive impact extends to customer satisfaction, new service development, and overall organizational effectiveness, emphasizing the multifaceted benefits that a commitment to learning can bring to organizations.

#### Learning orientation as Mediator

In the organizational context, there are a mediating role of organizational capabilities, specifically learning orientation and market orientation in various relationships and variables. Slater and Narver (1995) discovered that learning orientation acts as a mediator in the relationship between the combination of market orientation and entrepreneurship, influencing organizational performance. This finding suggested that organizations that cultivate both market orientation and entrepreneurship, when combined with a learning orientation, tend to exhibit improved performance. Furthermore, Hindasah and Nuryakin (2020), Ngah et al. (2016), and Hooi and Ngui (2014) identified that learning capabilities positively mediate the relationship between organizational capabilities such as human resources management and knowledge management capabilities within an organization and its performance. This implies that the effectiveness of human resources management and knowledge management in contributing to organizational performance is further enhanced when coupled with a

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robust learning orientation.

Begum et al. (2020) extended the understanding by agreeing that organizational learning can mediate and enhance business performance, particularly among Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in China. This indicates that the relationship between learning orientation and business performance is not only applicable to larger organizations but also holds significance for SMEs. Meanwhile, Meher & Mishra (2022) found that individual learning orientation within an organization is crucial. Meher & Mishra (2022) noted that individual learning orientation significantly mediates between knowledge sharing and performance, particularly in the service industry such as IT companies. It suggested that the learning orientation of individuals within an organization, especially influenced by peers, plays a pivotal role in facilitating effective knowledge sharing practices.

#### **Hotel Performance**

The concept of performance, encompassing both individual and organizational dimensions, with a particular focus on organizational performance. Le and Nguyen (2020) defined performance as the degree of understanding at the individual or organizational level. Meanwhile, organizational performance, according to Salim and Rajut (2021), Narver et al. (2004), Slater and Narver (1995) and, Narver and Slater (1990) referred it to the business goal outcomes set by an organization. Hoi and Ngui (2014) and, Gill-Padilla and Espino-Rodriguez (2008) contributed by emphasizing that organizational performance is derived from various organizational resources, including human resources and technology infrastructure, along with organizational capabilities. Additionally, Gotteland et al. (2020) concurred that strategic orientations such as market orientation and technology orientation significantly influence a company's performance.

Lestari et al. (2020) extended the understanding by highlighting that the performance of an organization should be built on multiple pillars, including business strategies, knowledge-sharing capabilities, entrepreneurship abilities, innovation, and market orientation. This multifaceted approach underscores the interconnectedness of various elements in influencing organizational performance.

The empirical researches mostly focus on dual perspectives of companies' performance: financial performance and non-financial performance. Kim (2008) and Gil-Padilla & Espino-Rodriguez (2008) emphasized these two dimensions as crucial aspects in assessing organizational success. However, Ramayah et al. (2011) presented a broader view, suggesting that researches on performance often consider three factors: financial performance, organizational effectiveness, and business performance.

From the tourism and hospitality perspective, hotel performance is a common focus in many researches. Studies on hotel performance delved into various aspects such as management (Kim, 2008), the environment (Cortez et al., 2007), and marketing (Jang et al., 2006). These dimensions collectively contribute to the overall assessment of a hotel's performance. However, Karatepe and Uludag (2008) suggested that performance in the tourism and hospitality industry is influenced by a combination of individual and organizational factors, aligning with the broader understanding of organizational performance.

Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016) took a comprehensive approach by measuring both financial and non-financial perspectives in evaluating the growth performance of the hotel industry, particularly during crises in Europe. This dual assessment acknowledges the importance of considering both financial metrics and other non-financial aspects in gauging the overall performance and resilience of the hotel industry during challenging times. Previously, Tavitiyaman et al. (2012) specifically focused on competitive strategies and their behavioral implications on both non-financial and financial aspects of hotel performance. The inclusion of both financial and non-financial perspectives in evaluating hotel industry growth during crises reflects a holistic approach to performance assessment.

However, there is a gap in the existing researches. Specifically, the need for more exploration in studies focusing on non-financial performance in the context of hotel performance. This aligns with the perspective presented by Sainaghi et al. (2013) found that many studies on hotel performance predominantly relied on quantitative

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measurements, emphasizing efficiency and profitability. Sainaghi et al. (2013) suggested a shift toward more qualitative measures to gain a deeper understanding and redefine hotel strategies in future research

# The Conceptual Framework

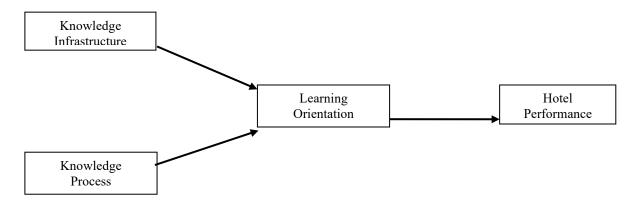


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

# **CONCLUSION**

In the context of organizational research, numerous empirical studies have been conducted by exploring the variables of knowledge management, learning orientation, and performance from diverse perspectives due to their crucial roles in shaping organizational success. Therefore, this conceptual paper is an essential component of a doctoral research project centered on knowledge management, learning orientation, and performance in Malaysia's hotel industry. The study aims to focus on the relationship between these three variables specifically among three-star hotels and above across the nation. To ensure the study's relevance and accuracy, the top management of these hotels will be selected randomly as participants to represent their respective organizations. The respondents could be among hotels' managers, managing directors, general managers as well as chief executive officers.

The expecting results of this study might contribute the implications for hoteliers and organizations across various sectors. By examining the relationships between knowledge management capabilities, learning orientation, and performance, the study aims to propose valuable insights to assist organizations in implementing strategies to improve their knowledge management and learning practices. By doing so, these organizations can enhance the overall performance and become more competitive in the industry.

#### **Contributions**

The framework used in this research has been widely applied by many scholars in previous studies to test its relevance and applicability across different context in the organization. However, this conceptual study seeks to make a unique and significant contribution in the context of the hospitality industry. This study aspires to shed light the existing body of knowledge management practices, learning orientation, and ultimately, the performance of hotels in Malaysia.

The dimensions of the variables under scrutiny, namely knowledge management, learning orientation, and hotel performance, hold the potential to provide a wider perspective in understanding of these variables. Specifically, this research aims to explain the elements of knowledge management, including knowledge infrastructure as well as knowledge process, that significantly influence both learning orientation and hotel performance. By exploring these dimensions, this study tries to offer valuable insights and practical implications for industry players as well as academicians.

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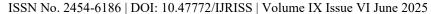


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