Received: 21.09.2025 | Revised: 18.01.2026 | Accepted: 29.01.2026

Defining Knowledge in the Age of Society 5.0

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Abstract: The aim of this perspective contribution is to introduce the concept of responsible knowledge management (rKM) and its usefulness for implementing ethically accepted AI solutions in organizations. Illustrative examples are presented to demonstrate the latter. The article concludes with a series of research questions that serve as an outlook and inspiration for further reflection on rKM and ethically acceptable AI solutions in companies.

Keywords: Responsible AI, human-centred AI, responsible knowledge management, ethical behaviour, responsible entrepreneurship, inclusivity

Definition von Wissen im Zeitalter der Gesellschaft 5.0

Zusammenfassung: Ziel dieses Perspektivbeitrags ist es, das Konzept des verantwortungsvollen Wissensmanagements und dessen Nutzen für die Implementierung ethisch akzeptierter KI-Lösungen in Organisationen vorzustellen. Letzteres wird anhand anschaulicher Beispiele verdeutlicht. Der Artikel schließt mit einer Reihe von Forschungsfragen, die als Ausblick und Inspiration für weitere Überlegungen zum verantwortungsvollen Wissensmanagement und ethisch vertretbaren KI-Lösungen in Unternehmen dienen sollen.

Stichwörter: Verantwortungsvolle KI, menschenzentrierte KI, verantwortungsvolles Wissensmanagement, ethisches Verhalten, verantwortungsvolles Unternehmertum, Inklusion

Responsible and human-centred AI in organizations and knowledge

The development and implementation of regulations, declarations and standards to ensure the responsible design and introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), as well as the ethically acceptable integration of AI into existing business processes, pose considerable challenges for companies (Mökander et al., 2022; Schneider et al., 2023). This applies to all sort of companies, young and mature companies, small and large enterprises. The associated activities and behaviours not only require the mobilisation of existing knowledge but also suggest the development of new knowledge while consciously forgetting or unlearning old knowledge (de Holan & Phillips, 2004) in order to be ready for informed decisions and subsequent next steps. This knowledge development or updating of existing knowledge should take place across companies, and consequently every single member of the company must be included and convinced.

This, in turn, underscores once more the importance of having a dedicated and systematic approach to knowledge management (KM) in companies (Zack, 2002). Davenport's classic definition describes KM as "the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge" (Davenport, 1994). However, from the author's point of view, the underlying notions of "traditional" KM thinking has its limitations when it comes to

responsible and human-centred AI in organizations because it is still primarily aimed at private companies and the creation and maintenance of competitive advantages (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Ferreira et al., 2020), and above all, it is primarily seen as something positive, as an asset (Caddy, 2000; Durst & Zieba, 2019). This way of thinking appears to be too narrow to anchor the goal of ethically acceptable integration of AI into companies' business processes and models. If knowledge is viewed solely as something valuable, there is a risk of overlooking the many situations in which this knowledge is more like a liability. Rigorous and sound debates about responsible AI in corporate business ethics, however, require a more nuanced use and perception of knowledge, especially its origin, to strengthen organizations' confidence in the identified and selected solutions.

Therefore, the author of this perspective paper argues that the development and consequences of AI in and for organizations make it necessary to view knowledge from a broader perspective; a perspective that goes beyond that of the individual organization and refrains from viewing knowledge per se as something positive (Durst & Foli, 2024). As a possible solution, the author proposes the concept of responsible knowledge management (rKM).

Responsible knowledge management as a way forward achieving responsible and human-centred AI in organizations?

RKM focuses on responsible KM processes such as the creation, transfer, preservation and application of knowledge for the common good, i.e., for measures that benefit society as a whole or contribute to a better society. RKM has people in the core, i.e., technology is (and remains) subordinate to people. This approach to KM is human-centred, inclusive and collaborative and invites everyone to contribute but also to take responsibility. Consequently, rKM involves different and diverse partners on an equal footing (Durst, 2024). Inclusivity takes an active role in rKM in all activities and throughout the rKM lifecycle (Dalkir, 2025). Additionally, rKM incorporates Dyllick and Muff's (2016) typology of business sustainability, meaning that the starting point of organizations and their actions and behaviour is the external environment. This means that a society-centred approach is emphasized (Durst & Khadir, 2025), which also connects rKM with the concept of Society 5.0, which places people at the centre of innovation (Carayannis & Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022). The importance of knowledge for innovation is well known (Du Plessis, 2007). This can also be applied to innovative solutions for the development and implementation of ethically acceptable AI in businesses.

Knowledge, from a rKM perspective, is seen as something neutral and, depending on the situation, it can be positive, negative or both. If one adopts the language of the insurance industry, this means that knowledge can be seen as a positive and/or negative risk, depending on the situation. To illustrate this from a knowledge at risk perspective (Williams & Durst, 2019), imagine the departure of a long-standing employee. Negative: The employee's departure leads to an attrition of knowledge or even a loss of knowledge. Neutral: The departure has no consequences for the company or the direct colleagues of the departing employee. Positive: The flow of knowledge is improved, as more knowledge is now shared and integrated into the company's knowledge processes.

The following examples attempt to demonstrate the advantages of a neutral approach to knowledge when the goal is the ethically acceptable integration of AI into existing busi-

ness processes. For example, there could be a knowledge gap between what the company should know (or should be able to know) to implement AI ethically and what it actually knows. A knowledge gap also represents a clear signal that entirely new knowledge must be developed and/or old knowledge updated. This process requires a critical discussion of existing knowledge, which means that it must first be identified and then reviewed for its relevance to addressing the current challenge, i.e., for developing an ethically acceptable AI solution within the company. The result of this review could be that the existing knowledge is insufficient, and new knowledge must be created. However, achieving this may require a conscious process of unlearning (McGill & Slocum, 1993) as a basis for creating a new framework/mindset necessary for the implementation of AI solutions and their expected impact on the organization.

Another example could be that decisions are made quickly and without careful consideration, as a result of reacting to external pressure—for example, competitors rush ahead, or ecosystem partners, especially dominant players, try to force certain AI solutions on the company. Certain media reports and their chosen connotations when discussing the importance of AI implementations in companies to remain competitive could also lead to hasty decisions. Especially if these decisions are associated with an unreflective belief in technology, in the sense that AI is the panacea for fundamental problems in the company and/or the world. In other words, the company is not using its own knowledge and judgment to make an informed decision. Conversely, a state of denial can be considered equally critical. However, it should also be noted that decisions are also made on the basis of underdeveloped, missing, outdated, unreliable or incorrectly applied knowledge (Durst & Zieba, 2018).

It is conceivable that the implementation of AI solutions in a company will require collaboration with new service providers who provide and maintain the technical solutions (Merhi, 2023). At the same time, it is quite likely that the ethical principles of the business partners differ. However, in order to develop and subsequently implement ethically acceptable AI solutions within a company, the partners must first clarify whether their values, norms, and ideas are compatible before examining the specific solution in more detail. If this is not the case, it is advisable to seek an alternative partner, as the company's ethical values and norms should be non-negotiable. The same approach would also apply to existing information and communications technology (ICT) partners.

The core idea is that those who are prepared to view their own knowledge and the collective knowledge of the company from a neutral perspective should be better able to consider both the positive and negative consequences of a project and discuss them with others. This, in turn, should also benefit their judgement. Consequently, rKM recognises the value and importance of risk management and risk management literacy among people. Knowledge in Society 5.0, and thus rKM, must also be supported by AI literacy, which is fundamental not only for the ethical and responsible use of AI, but also for its development and implementation (Ng et al., 2021).

The discussion of ethically acceptable AI solutions, their selection, and subsequent implementation requires not only a diverse range of relevant and reliable knowledge (old and new), but also that this knowledge is contributed and (constantly) critically examined by different knowledge holders. A company that not only welcomes diversity and inclusion but actually practices it brings everyone to the table, regardless of gender, cultural or professional background, or position within the company. Such a company gives everyone

a voice, but at the same time emphasizes that this voice also comes with responsibility. This also means that leadership is developed (negotiated) in the discussions and thus represents a result and is not something that is pre-existing due to a position of authority.

Let's try "responsible knowledge management" thinking

The aim of this perspective paper was to introduce the concept of rKM to offer an interesting framework of KM for tackling the implications of ethically acceptable AI integrations in organizations. Integrating the underlying principles of rKM into discussions related to responsible and human-centred AI in business ethics is expected to lead to the development and execution of more inclusive and responsible solutions to addressing the challenges at hand. This way of thinking can also contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5 "Gender Equality," Goal 10 "Reduced Inequalities," and finally Goal 17 "Partnerships." The use of AI raises the question of digital inequality, which is why a human-centred, inclusive, and collaborative approach such as rKM is more important than ever.

The author is aware that the rKM concept is challenging and that some people will question its actual feasibility. However, if ethical behaviour and actions for and within organizations are truly considered important, and are not just lip service, one can (and must) expect to be confronted with some "unpleasant" challenges as an individual. To move from thinking to action, the following questions can serve as food for thought:

What are the factors that enable responsible KM thinking that responds to the current activities and initiatives of organizations to act and work ethically and responsibly?

What forms of organization and/or ownership structures would be needed to promote/enable rKM thinking?

How to make sure that organizations take sufficient time to think things through thoroughly before making hasty decisions, despite the rapid development of new AI models and solutions?

Since involving different people and their views and ideas requires tolerance of ambiguity, the question arises as to how one can develop such a skill, considering that dealing with ambiguity is frightening for many people. How should the school and education system change in this regard?

With all the planned initiatives regarding the introduction of ethically acceptable AI measures, organizations must also be prepared for their failure. What can be done to ensure that efforts are not abandoned in the face of the stakes?

Responsible knowledge management requires a willingness to take responsibility on the part of all those involved. How can the field of leadership research, particularly the subfield of self-leadership, contribute to the realisation of this principle?

The concept of good and bad actions and behaviour varies from person to person. How can an organization ensure that its members agree on a solution? And once this compromise has been reached, how can it be ensured that it is incorporated into the selection and introduction of ethically acceptable AI solutions into existing business processes?

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