Critical Success Factors for Knowledge Transfer in Enterprise System Projects: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation

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***Abstract*—Enterprise System Projects (ESPs) are fundamental enablers of digital transformation across organizations, yet they consistently suffer from high failure rates, often attributed to ineffective Knowledge Transfer (KT) practices. Despite the critical role of KT in ensuring project sustainability and long-term organizational learning, limited scholarly attention has been given to identifying and systematically categorizing the success factors that influence KT outcomes in ESPs. The aim of this study is to investigate and conceptualize the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) that influence effective knowledge transfer in ESPs. To address this research gap, a mixed-methods approach is used, combining a literature review with empirical insights from semi-structured interviews with industry practitioners involved in large-scale ESP implementations. The analysis reveals a set of interrelated CSFs that significantly impact KT effectiveness. Some of the key points highlighted are the shared knowledge between cultures, the high expertise of consultants based on technicality and social skills, and the solid and visible management support. These points are integrated into a conceptual framework that enhances conceptual understanding while offering practitioners practical guidance. The study contributes by bridging the gap between the KT concept and ESP implementation, which are connected to the academic discourse, proposing a comprehensive model for successful knowledge transfer during the deployment of ESP. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer organizations a strategic lens to design and implement KT mechanisms that enhance project outcomes and ensure long-term knowledge retention.**

Keywords*—*Enterprise system projects (ESPs); knowledge transfer (KT); critical success factors (CSFs); digital transformation; knowledge-sharing culture; management support; information systems implementation

I. Introduction

ESPs are essential to modern organizations pursuing trending digital transformations. They enable real-time access to data, cross-functional automation processes, and calculated decision-making by integrating basic business functions, such as finance, human resources, supply chain, business intelligence, and management of customer relationships, into centralized platforms according to [1] With organizations increasingly investing in digital capabilities to stay competitive, enterprise system deployment is frequently considered a technological and organizational imperative. Despite the significance of ESPs, the failure rate remains alarmingly high, with reported project failures often occurring in meeting critical baseline objectives in terms of cost, scope, or sustained usability. This supports the assertion made by [2], [3]. Due to these consistent failures, a comprehensive understanding of the underlying challenges beyond technological factors and encompassing socio-organizational dynamics, particularly in knowledge processing, must be explored.

The effective collaborative transfer of knowledge, from external consultants to internal teams and stakeholders, remains one of the most critical yet underappreciated aspects of ESP integration. KT plays a significant role in the long-term success and sustainability of ESPs, especially following implementation, when system shifts between internal teams and consultants are made through maintenance, adaptation, and extension responsibilities. As noted by [4], KT is a complex, multi-layered activity, involving transference of tactical and precise knowledge, cross-boundary collaboration, and shared understanding development across culturally and functionally diverse groups, not only a process of training or documentation, as identified by [5]. Ineffective KT can lead to an inability to utilize the system efficiently, poor user adoption, high maintenance costs, and eventual system underperformance or failure. Yet, despite its recognized importance, KT remains a minor concern in many ESP studies and implementations, often treated as a less critical task rather than a strategic priority, as noted by [6].

Critical Success Factors (CSFs) provide a helpful lens to examine KT effectiveness in ESPs. CSFs refer to the limited number of key areas in which satisfactory performance is essential for the success of a project as mentioned earlier by [7], [8]. In the context of ESPs, numerous CSFs have been proposed, ranging from top management support and user involvement to effective project planning and change management as shown by [9], [10]. However, these aspects are typically considered together, without a focused exploration of how they specifically impact knowledge transfer. Moreover, the interdependencies among CSFs—how they reinforce or constrain each other in practice—are rarely unpacked in empirical studies. For instance, while top management support is often cited as a CSF, its influence on KT may depend on how visibly and consistently

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that support is demonstrated, and whether it translates into concrete actions such as resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, or performance monitoring, as noted by [11]. Similarly, while consultant expertise is critical, its impact on KT is mediated by the receiving organization communication channels, cultural compatibility, and absorptive capacity according to [6].

Despite the availability of frameworks that address general KT practices or ESP success factors, few studies have systematically integrated these domains to identify the specific CSFs that influence KT in enterprise system contexts. Those that do often lack empirical validation or fail to account for the dynamic nature of KT, which evolves across different project phases and stakeholder groups [12]. Furthermore, much existing research is based on single-case studies or surveys with limited contextual sensitivity. There is a pressing need for research that synthesises existing knowledge and generates new insights based on empirical data from practitioners who have directly experienced the complexities of ESP implementation.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the CSFs that successfully impact KT in ESP environments. Drawing from the insights of a literature review and empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved with large-scale ESP implementations and KT processes, the research identifies and categorizes a set of interrelated success factors, including management support and a knowledge-sharing culture. The findings reveal that these CSFs do not operate alone but are linked, in which the effectiveness of one factor often depends on the presence or quality of others. For example, a strong knowledge-sharing culture may enrich the benefits of consultant expertise, as argued by [13].

A key contribution of this study is developing a conceptual framework that maps the relationships between identified CSFs and KT outcomes in ESPs. In contrast to current models that mainly consider success factors as isolated variables, this framework adopts a systems perspective, highlighting the importance of dynamic collaborations between organisational structures, human behaviour, and technological tools. Unlike models that treat success factors as discrete variables, this framework adopts a systems perspective, emphasizing the dynamic collaborations among organizational structures, human behavior, and technological tools. It seeks to report the KT challenges by systematically identifying and understanding the key CSFs that allow organisations to apply external knowledge meaningfully within their settings. By bridging the gap between KT theory and ESP practice, this study contributes to both academic knowledge and practical application, offering a foundation for more resilient, adaptive, and knowledge-driven enterprise systems in the digital age.

In response to the persistent KT challenges in ESPs and the limited frameworks addressing them, this study poses the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are the critical success factors that influence effective knowledge transfer in enterprise system projects?

RQ2: How can a practical and conceptual framework be developed to assess and enhance the knowledge transfer of ESPs' implementation?

The remaining study is structured as follows: Section II presents a review of studies related to ESPs, particularly focusing on CSFs that significantly influence Knowledge Transfer (KT) outcomes in ESPs. Section III outlines the research methodology adopted in this study, including the rationale for a qualitative approach and the dual-method strategy comprising a literature review and semi-structured interviews. Section IV presents the results of the thematic analysis, drawing on responses from study participants and relating to the findings from the literature review. Section V offers a discussion of the results. The proposed conceptual framework is also introduced in this section. Finally, Section VI concludes the study by summarizing key findings, discussing implications for theory and practice, and offering directions for future research.

II. Literature Review

ESPs have long been studied for their transformative potential within organizations, primarily through their ability to streamline operations, enhance data integration, and support decision-making at strategic and operational levels, as shown in the works of [14], [15], and [16]. ESPs are typically complex, high-cost initiatives involving multiple stakeholders, technologies, and organizational units, which require significant change management and learning efforts to ensure their success. This supports the assertion made by [17].

While much of the early literature emphasized ESP implementation's technical and functional aspects, a growing body of research has highlighted the pivotal role of human and organizational factors in shaping project outcomes. These findings corroborate those of [5] and [9]. Among these, the KT has emerged as a critical but underexplored domain, especially in ESPs, where much of the expertise resides with external consultants rather than internal users. The challenge lies in conveying technical system knowledge and fostering a deep understanding of business processes, system customization, and change implications, where similar conclusions were drawn by [16] and [18]. The literature has identified several barriers to effective KT, including insufficient documentation, lack of contextual adaptation, resistance to change, and limited absorptive capacity, which is supported by [9], [4], [10], [19], and [20]. For example, there is a lack of recognition and support, trust in the quality and accuracy of information, and the convenience and effectiveness of sharing tools. This view is supported by multiple studies, including those of [7], [10], [11], [12], and [13].

Despite these insights, empirical research that systematically investigates the conditions that foster or hinder KT in ESPs remains limited, particularly in identifying and validating CSFs that enable KT efficacy. The concept of CSFs was first articulated by Rockart (1979), who defined them as the few key areas in which satisfactory performance is essential for achieving organizational goals, as argued by [7]. In the context of ESPs, CSFs have been widely examined, with most studies identifying factors such as top management support, clear goals and objectives, user training, change management, and consultant expertise as crucial to implementation success. Strong empirical support for this position is found in the work of [9], [10], [21], and [22]. However, these studies often treat CSFs as generalized enablers of project success rather than

specific originators to effective KT. This generalization limits the explanatory power of CSFs in addressing the nuanced, process-oriented challenges that arise in knowledge-intensive implementations like ESPs.

Recent research has begun to narrow this gap by focusing on KT-specific CSFs as observed in the work of [23]. For example, a model was proposed in which consultant credibility, client motivation, communication quality, and relationship strength were key enablers of successful knowledge transfer. Their findings suggest that KT is a socially embedded process influenced by trust, mutual understanding, and collaborative engagement. Scholars consistently identify top management support as a pivotal CSF in KT and ESP research. It is critical not only for resource mobilization and strategic alignment but also for legitimizing knowledge-sharing behaviors across the organization, which is supported by [20] and [24]. Contrary to the view of authors in [7], who found that management support plays a critical role in the success of KT, in addition to the success of the ESP. Another research [14] revealed that a lack of top management knowledge of product capabilities is one of the ESP success barriers. In contrast, [15] highlighted that top management extensively influences the KT. Furthermore, from research findings in [8] and [9], it emerged that top management support is vital for the success of the ICT project. This view is supported by multiple studies, including those of [10], [16], and [17]. When top management visibly endorses KT initiatives, it creates an enabling environment where employees are more likely to engage in learning activities, participate in workshops, and experiment with system functionalities. Conversely, a lack of executive involvement often leads to fragmented efforts, low user motivation, and resistance to knowledge assimilation.

Another vital factor is consultant expertise, according to [9], which goes beyond technical competence to include interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to contextualize knowledge for diverse user groups in line with the findings of [25] and [26]. Consultants serve as system experts and knowledge brokers who bridge the gap between generic system capabilities and specific organizational needs. Similar conclusions were drawn by [27]. However, the efficacy of consultant-driven KT is contingent upon a knowledge-sharing culture within the client organization, as previously reported by [28] and [29]. Without a culture that values collaboration, openness, and continuous learning, even the most structured KT efforts may fail to take root.

Communication quality has also been identified as a determinant of KT success. Effective communication entails clarity, consistency, feedback loops, and mutual understanding between knowledge senders and receivers, according to [30]. In ESP projects, communication breakdowns are common due to jargon, role ambiguity, and misaligned expectations. Studies have shown that structured communication channels—such as regular status meetings, shared documentation platforms, and escalation protocols—enhance KT effectiveness by reducing uncertainty and reinforcing shared meanings. Similar conclusions were drawn by [16]. While researchers in [18] and [19] found that strong communication facilitates easy KT and better ESP adoption, authors in [20] argued that poor or ineffective communication can lead to silos and resistance to change resulted on ESP project over runs. In [21], the authors examine the communication quality from a contextualization perspective to ensure the ESP team receive the correct information concerning their level of expertise or business context, while scholars. In [22] and [23], the authors highlight the impact of trust, which is consistent with [24]. In addition to openness, there is a need to enhance the quality of communication.

In summary, while the literature on ESPs, KT, and CSFs has matured significantly over the past decades, critical gaps remain in integration, contextualization, and empirical validation. Table I presents the KT-specific CSFs identified in recent literature as essential for facilitating successful KT in ESPs. These factors span leadership, human capital, communication, motivation, culture, relationships, and learning capability, highlighting the multidimensional nature of KT effectiveness.

While existing research offers valuable insights into individual success factors, there is a lack of a holistic understanding of how these elements interact to influence KT outcomes in enterprise system environments, as identified by [25]. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by developing an empirically grounded framework that identifies, categorizes, and analyzes CSFs affecting KT effectiveness in ESPs, thereby contributing to theoretical advancement and practical application in this evolving field.

TABLE I. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS (CSFS)

CSF Domain	KT-Specific Critical Success Factor	Definition	Supporting Studies
Leadership & Support	Top Management Support	Strategic endorsement and resource allocation for KT legitimize knowledge-sharing behaviors.	[20], [24]
Human Capital	Consultant Expertise	Encompasses not only technical knowledge but also interpersonal skills and contextual understanding.	[25], [26], [28], [29]
Communication	Communication Quality	Quality of interactions: clarity, consistency, feedback, and shared understanding.	[16], [30]
Motivational Factors	Client Motivation	Internal drive and willingness of the organization to participate in and absorb transferred knowledge.	[21]
Cultural Context	Knowledge-Sharing Culture	Organizational norms that promote openness, collaboration, and learning.	[28], [29].
Relational Dynamics	Relationship Strength	Trust and rapport between consultants and client stakeholders foster mutual KT.	[21], [25]
Process Management	Structured Communication Channels	Formalized mechanisms such as meetings, platforms, and escalation paths for KT.	[16]

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretivist research methodology to investigate the CSFs that influence KT effectiveness in ESPs. KT within large-scale system implementations is inherently complex, context-sensitive, and socio-technical. Therefore, a qualitative approach was valued as the most suitable approach to explore the perceptions, behaviors, and organizational conditions shaping successful KT practices, similar to the approach that was rooted in [26], [27], and [28]. Through a mixed-method approach, the study involved a literature review and semi-structured interviews as core empirical instruments. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of the explored topics. The literature review provided a base for identifying initial theoretical constructs and established a conceptual foundation for understanding KT-specific CSFs in ESP contexts. Sources were selected from various databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, and Google Scholar, containing journals in information systems, knowledge management, and enterprise systems. The review focused on identifying patterns, gaps, and limits in existing frameworks related to KT and ESP success, with special attention paid to studies incorporating organizational learning based on insights from [29], [30], in addition to change management, as argued by [17], and consultant-client dynamics as previously reported by [31].

The findings from the literature review informed the selection of five thematic categories: management support, consultant expertise, absorptive capacity, communication quality, and knowledge-sharing culture. Building on this foundation, the second phase involved conducting semi-structured interviews to explore how these themes manifest in real-world ESP implementations. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility and capacity to elicit rich, contextually grounded insights while allowing for consistency across interviews in line with the findings of [32], [33]. The interviews enabled participants to reflect on their experiences and elaborate on how knowledge was shared, absorbed, and operationalized during the ESP lifecycle.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants directly involved in ESP implementations and KT processes. Eligible participants included the IT Director, Planning and Quality Director, Solution Architect, Technical Specialist, IT Management Consultant, IS Project Manager, and Techno/Functional Specialist. All participants had been directly involved in ESP implementation within the past ten years, ensuring contemporary relevance. To promote diversity of experience, participants were drawn from various sectors, including manufacturing, healthcare, higher education, and government services. Fig. 1 illustrates the distribution of the business sectors. The interview sample was selected based on the criteria shown in Table II.

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting between forty minutes on average. Interviews were held using Google Meet or MS Teams. Before the interviews, participants were provided with an overview of the research objectives and signed informed consent forms. Interviews were guided by a protocol informed by the literature review themes but remained open-ended to accommodate emergent issues. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the lead institution's research ethics board, and strict confidentiality protocols were followed to protect participant identities.

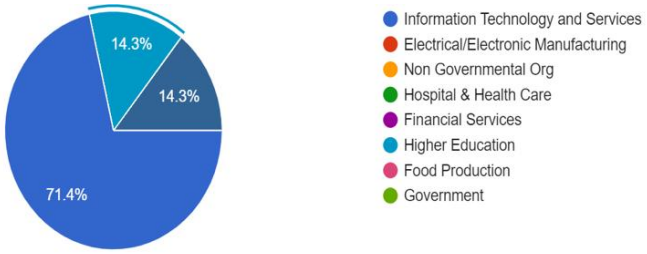


Fig. 1. Participants' distribution within the business sectors.

TABLE II. CRITERIA OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION

Expertise	At least 10 years of experience in ESP implementation and knowledge management.
Relevance	Direct involvement in ESP projects with varying outcomes (successful, challenged, or failed).
Diversity	Representation from different roles within ESP projects (e.g., project managers, system architects, and KT facilitators).

The qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews with ESP professionals was evaluated using thematic analysis. To identify recurrent themes, patterns, and insights on the specialized field of ESP, the researchers carefully reviewed and classified the written material obtained from the interviews. Through the thematic analysis, researchers were able to develop a better understanding of the ESP experts' viewpoints, experiences, and knowledge, which helped to offer valuable insights and conclusions for the study. Combining a literature review and interview-based understanding helped support this study's methodological triangulation, allowing the research to bridge theory and practice. While the literature provided a structured view of the academic views and gaps concerning KT in ESPs, the interviews offered in-depth insights into how practitioners operate, interact, and perceive these factors in a real-life context.

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The thematic analysis of seven semi-structured interviews revealed a set of five interrelated CSFs that significantly influence KT outcomes in ESPs. Namely, top management support, consultant expertise, communication quality, and knowledge-sharing culture. While these key factors were also identified in the literature review, the interviews provided significant, practice-driven insights that paved the way for a holistic understanding of the CSFs that influence KT outcomes in ESPs. The acquired knowledge helped develop the conceptual framework for knowledge transfer success in ESPs.

A. Top Management Support

One of the most cited enablers of effective KT was top management support. Participants repeatedly emphasized that leadership involvement must go beyond symbolic endorsement to include active resource allocation, milestone enforcement, and public reinforcement of knowledge-sharing behaviors. For example, one IT project manager noted, "It wasn't just the CIO giving a speech at the launch meeting. He reviewed our KT progress, ensured we had dedicated time for shadowing, and

rewarded teams that documented lessons learned". This finding reinforces the argument that visible, engaged leadership sets the tone for KT prioritization and legitimizes it as a core organizational process, as noted by [20], [24].

B. Consultant Expertise

Another pivotal factor was consultant expertise, but the interviews revealed that technical knowledge alone was insufficient. Effective consultants were described as capable of adapting explanations to user skill levels, facilitating trust-based relationships, and embedding learning opportunities within routine activities. A participant from the manufacturing sector described one consultant as "not just a tech whiz, but a people person who knew how to coach our finance team without overwhelming them". This echoes the authors in [25], [26]. The claim is that consultants' social and communicative competence significantly enhances KT effectiveness.

C. Communication Quality

Widely emphasized in the data, effective communication plays a dual role by facilitating other CSFs and mediating their impact on KT success. Transparent, collaborative, and timely communication was essential for clarifying expectations, resolving ambiguities, and aligning stakeholders. Poor communication was linked to misconceptions about responsibilities, misinterpretation of requirements, and duplication of KT efforts. Several participants cited collaborative platforms, feedback loops, and centralized documentation as practical strategies to enhance communication. These findings corroborate prior research indicating that a robust communication infrastructure is essential for successful ESP execution and knowledge dissemination. Similar conclusions were drawn by [34],[16], and [30].

D. Knowledge-Sharing Culture

Finally, a Knowledge-Sharing Culture was described as the foundational layer that either amplified or dampened the effects of other CSFs. Organizations with norms that valued openness, learning from failure, and cross-boundary collaboration were perceived to facilitate smoother KT. Siloed structures and inflexible hierarchies, on the other hand, led to information hoarding and weak adherence to KT activities. As an IT management consultant in the financial services sector observed, "In one company, I felt like I was planting seeds in fertile soil. In another, everything bounced off—there was no curiosity, no engagement". This finding supports the literature asserting that cultural enablers significantly influence organizational learning processes, as observed in the work of [28], [29].

E. Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the empirical findings and prior theoretical foundations, a Conceptual Framework for KT Success in ESPs is proposed in Fig. 2. This framework positions KT effectiveness at the center, surrounded by interdependent CSFs. Arrows between CSFs represent dynamic interactions, while outer layers capture the organizational and temporal context within which these factors operate. The framework contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it provides a validated, practitioner-informed structure that aligns with and extends existing theoretical models of KT and ESP implementation. Second, it emphasizes the interactive and systemic nature of CSFs, moving beyond linear or additive conceptions. Third, it incorporates a temporal perspective, suggesting that effective KT strategies require flexibility and responsiveness to the evolving demands of different implementation phases.

The findings highlight that successful KT in ESPs is not the result of isolated best practices but rather an outcome of strategically aligned, culturally embedded, and dynamically coordinated actions. Organizations aiming to enhance ESP performance must adopt integrated KT strategies, considering structural enablers and behavioral and contextual dimensions.

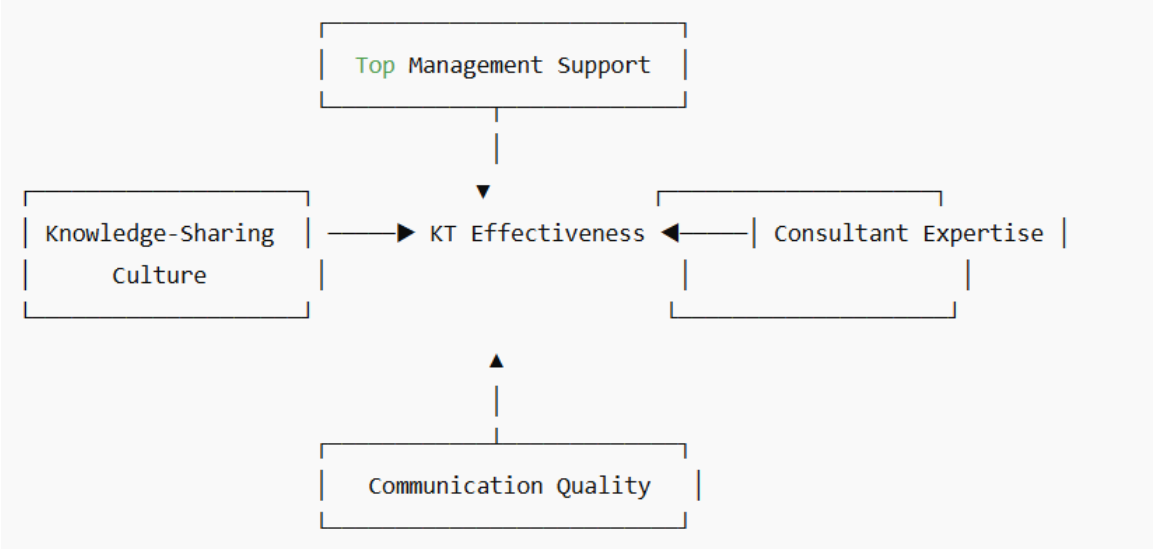


Fig. 2. Conceptual framework for knowledge transfer success in ESPs.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the two research questions. Firstly, the RQ1 focus on how CSFs collectively influence KT in ESPs. While prior studies have acknowledged the importance of KT in such projects based on insights from [21], [22], [26], [30], and [32]. This research offers an empirically grounded conceptual framework integrating CSFs as standalone enablers and dynamically interdependent variables.

The empirical data significantly backs up the role of top management support, consultant expertise, communication quality and knowledge-sharing culture as essential facilitators for efficient KT. However, beyond confirming the significance of these individual CSFs, the interview data revealed their complex link. For instance, strong top management support positively affects communication quality and knowledge-sharing culture by defining allowed time for reflection, reinforcing shared goals, and embedding metrics on KT accountability and performance evaluation. Similarly, consultant expertise was most impactful when matched with trust-based relationships. These interrelationships highlight that CSFs should not be analysed as standalone components and emphasize the importance of holistic frameworks.

Secondly, the RQ2 was confirmed based on the expert feedback, and data also suggested a temporal dimension to CSF salience. During early project phases (e.g., planning and configuration), top management support and communication were most critical. In contrast, absorptive capacity and knowledge-sharing culture became more prominent during system testing and stabilisation. This temporal variability suggests that KT strategies must be adaptive, with CSF prioritization shifting based on project lifecycle stages.

VI. CONCLUSION

KT is a key process in the success of ESPs. While often overlooked in many organizational settings, this study explored KT practices within enterprise system planning (ESP) implementations and examined the key factors influencing their effectiveness. Following a literature review and semi-structured interviews, we identified several CSFs, including support from top management, consultants' expertise, communication quality, and a knowledge-sharing culture. These characteristics were repeatedly validated across research, demonstrating their interconnectedness and importance in affecting KT results.

This study addressed two primary research questions concerning the identification of KT CSFs (RQ1) and the development and validation of the proposed framework (RQ2).

First, it confirmed the fourth CSFs; the results indicated that organisations focusing on these CSFs could better internalise and apply transferred knowledge, especially when strategic leadership and collaborative environments were present.

Secondly, the study developed and validated a practical framework, revealing that KT effectiveness evolves across different stages of ESPs, thereby requiring adaptive and context-sensitive strategies. This directly addresses RQ2, with the proposed framework receiving positive validation from ESP experts. The resulting conceptual framework offers both theoretical guidance and practical applicability by promoting cultural alignment, systemic thinking, and responsive management practices as key enablers for enhancing KT across the project lifecycle.

Despite the valuable insights generated by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size could be extended for more generalisation. In future, the framework can be tested across organizations of different sizes, sectors, and geographical locations to assess its broader applicability. Additionally, the study suggests that longitudinal and mixed-method approaches help capture the evolving nature of KT, particularly during post-implementation activities like system upgrades and user onboarding and offboarding, which need to be discussed. The role of modern technologies such as AI-based tools, chatbots, and learning platforms in supporting KT should also be investigated further.

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