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Rethinking Research Data Repositories: Lessons from Public Sector Knowledge Management

In increasingly data-intensive and information-driven organisational environments, research data repositories are becoming critical infrastructures for safeguarding institutional knowledge, facilitating evidence-based decision-making, and supporting innovation, particularly in the public sector. Informed by findings from a mixed-methods Knowledge Management (KM) survey conducted within a South African government department, this paper critically examines prevailing practices of knowledge capture, sharing, and reuse. It reflects on implications for the future configuration of research data repositories and related services.

Empirical evidence indicates that while digital platforms and document management systems are in place, institutional knowledge remains fragmented, unevenly shared, and insufficiently embedded in routine organisational processes. Although employees recognise the value of knowledge sharing, siloed operations, under-utilised repositories, inconsistent knowledge sharing practices, and limited user proficiency undermine the effective reuse of research data and institutional knowledge assets. These findings echo broader public-sector challenges relating to KM maturity, governance, and the sustainability of institutional knowledge (Mabhena et al., 2025; Nenungwi & Garaba, 2022).

The paper argues that future-oriented research data repositories must move beyond passive storage towards integrated, service-oriented knowledge infrastructures.

These insights contribute to ongoing discussions on the future role of research data repositories as active knowledge services that support institutional memory, organisational learning, and the effective use of publicly funded data in the evolving knowledge economy.

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