A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY WITH KNOWLEDGE WORKERS CONCERNING KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT - APPLYING MASLOW'S SEVEN-STAGE HIERARCHY OF NEEDS MODEL

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Abstract

Knowledge workers are the most valuable asset in the IT sector, this understanding the realism of knowledge enhancement in intellect is critical. The phenomenological study aim to explore how knowledge workers in the IT sector experience and navigate their needs in pursuit of knowledge enhancement as outlined by Maslow's Hierarchy Needs. The qualitative study was conducted using interview method with 69 participants from IT sector. NVivo 14 software (CAQDAS) was adopted to understand the phenomena of pursuit of knowledge in software engineers at IT sector. The study conducted on knowledge workers in the IT sector revealed significant insights into how employees' needs and motivational needs are associated with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. A key finding was that, regardless of their career stage, employees consistently seek opportunities for knowledge enhancement. The analysis is provided through word cloud, correlation analysis, Jaccard's similarity index, R squared values explaining the determination of coefficient based on phenomenological methodology understanding their experiences and narratives. The pursuit of knowledge with 69 software engineers is intricately linked to various levels of Maslow's motivational theory.

Keywords: Phenomenological Study, Knowledge Workers, Knowledge Management, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Knowledge Enhancement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the knowledge era, knowledge workers manage their career with knowledge management. As they pursuit for knowledge is never ending, employees' believe at every stage knowledge must be accelerated. The study aimed to heave light on the phenomena adopting the Maslow's seven-stage hierarchy of needs model to investigate in which stage or needs employees seek for knowledge enhancement for their personal growth. It identified a significant relationship between employees' knowledge and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, highlighting a novel approach, as no prior phenomenological studies have explored in this connection and this originality contributes to the study's significance and effectiveness. The study highlights that knowledge workers in the IT sector experience needs across all levels of Maslow's hierarchy, with specific emphasis on higher-order needs such as cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and self-transcendence. Organizations that address these needs holistically are more likely to foster a motivated, satisfied, and high-performing workforce. By applying Maslow's seven-stage model, IT companies can better understand and support their employees' needs, leading to improved organizational outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge has no value unless it is applied to solve the problems, subsequently generates benefits to the organisation[5]. The essence of the study states that in the

knowledge era, knowledge management is prominence in strengthening employees knowledge, which helps organsiations to build a healthy knowledge management. The procedure of capturing, storing, sharing, and application are the aspects of knowledge management[1]. The KM aspects admit acquisition of knowledge through creation process followed by knowledge sharing with dissemination which is put in use for utilization. A critical aspect of knowledge management is knowledge acquisition, which involves using existing knowledge to capture new insights[5]. Knowledge creation has been defined from various perspectives[6,7]. We refer to the definition by Nonaka et al., which emphasizes the importance of a knowledge vision, as it influences every layer of the knowledge-creating process[6]. Leaders need to promote commitment among organizational members to stimulate the sharing and creation of knowledge based on this vision. Knowledge sharing is primal to KM, and its flourishing execution heavily relies on this process[16]. This is followed by knowledge application, which addresses the knowing-doing gap. Knowledge sharing, is the human action of devising individual knowledge to others in the organization," along with knowledge acquisition, are the most often studied KM aspects in empirical research, especially in relation to innovation[8]. This is noteworthy as theoretical KM papers highlight the function of knowledge creation and application, along with sharing and storage, in driving innovation[7].

3. RESEARCH APPROACH

The interpretive paradigm emphasizes understanding the meanings individuals attach to their actions and experiences, rejecting the notion of a single objective truth. Researchers within this paradigm focus on understanding the perspectives through in-depth interactions with the software engineers from IT sector. The study contributes to a nuanced understanding of motivation theory and highlights the need for novel approaches seeking knowledge to address contemporary organizational challenges and knowledge management.

Conducting interviews with 69 IT professionals to understand their experiences and perceptions related to the phenomena studied provided in depth understanding that employees' seek for knowledge hierarchy in Maslow's hierarchy needs just like any other need motivates them to elevate their being.
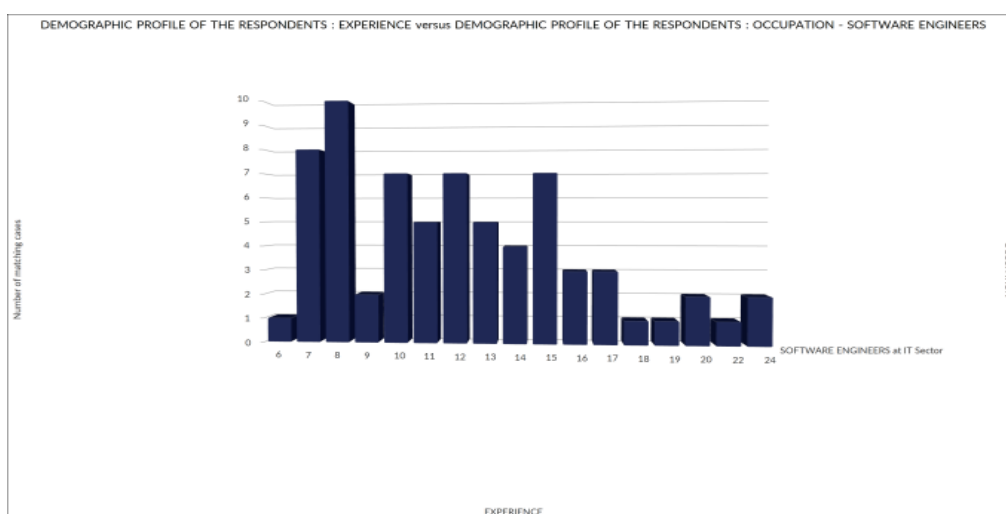

Fig 3: Representing total number of employees with years of experience between 6 to 29.

The data analysis broadly followed the phenomenological method as outlined by Heidegger[6]. This method involves iterative processes and multiple stages of coding: Casual coding was initially adopted by Identifying and categorizing the data into initial codes based on themes emerging from the raw data[3].
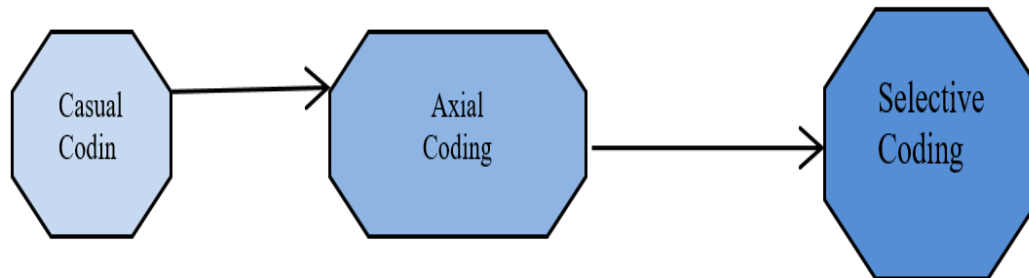

Fig 3.1: Coding Process: Casual code - Labels, Axial codes - relationship:Selective Code - Framework/Model

The coding process in NVivo 14 software was further proceeded with axial coding and selective codes. The whole process of axial into selective coding involved Relating codes to each other, identifying relationships, and organizing. Refining and integrating the categories to form a coherent framework[4]. The data analysis was further processed with theme development condensing the raw data into themes through valid inference and interpretations by the participants. This above data processing assist the research to build the model.
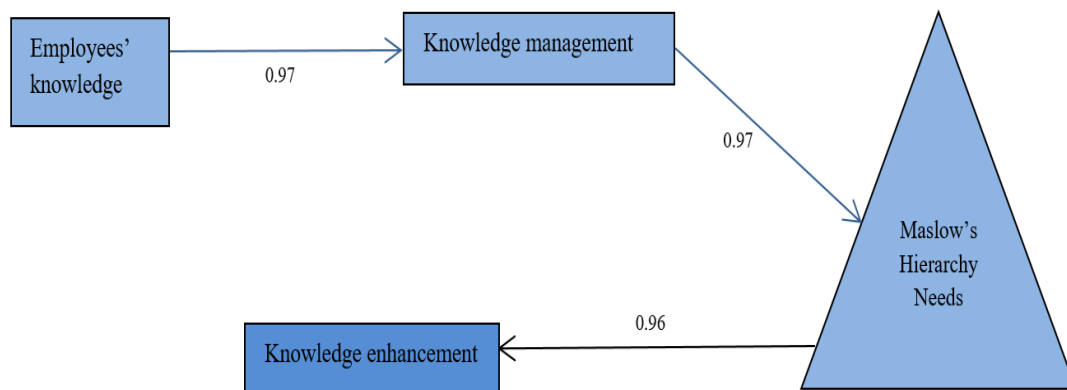

Fig 3.2 Investigate how employees manage their knowledge while striving to seek knowledge in the stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for knowledge enhancement.

The participants were asked in which need do they pursuit for knowledge presenting the seven stage Maslow's hierarchy needs model. The research presented a detail description about every stage in the interviews with 69 participants concerning Maslow's hierarchy expressing from it basic needs to transcendence needs.

The Hierarchy of needs theory starts with physiological needs, which are crucial for survival and represent the most fundamental requirements for an individual's well-being. This theory suggests that these physiological needs form the base of the hierarchy, with individual focusing on meeting them before oncoming onto high level of needs. These basic needs include food for survival with water, sleep, and shelter space to dwell[25,27].

The second need is safety and security needs, which include the need for protection and stability. Safety is necessary as it enables individuals to feel assured in the environment[29].

The love and belongingness needs are found in the third need. This includes needs for warmness, relationship, closeness, acceptance, esteem, association, and a consciousness of belonging. According to Maslow's fulfilling these needs is crucial for individuals to feel attached to others and to experience a cognizance of belonging.

People at this phase often desire relationships and may go to great lengths to gain acceptance within a group. Once these needs are satisfied, individuals move on to pursue esteem needs. Employees expressed they would seek for knowledge in socialisation need as knowledge sharing is one of the aspect of knowledge management which assist them to build network and share their opinions as they would love to learn from knowledge people.

According to Maslow, these needs involve a individual sensitivity of regard and deserving from others, which could be consummated through success, position, authority, or being admired by aside[28]. Participants believe often this leads to sensitiveness of assurance in holding a greater amount of knowledge to further enhance the knowledge holding which results in knowledge management with enhancement of it in employees.

The cognitive needs, aesthetic needs laid a path to final stage of hierarchy of needs in Maslow's theory is self-actualization. The participants believed that they would pursuit and enhance their knowledge in the fifth stage and refine their knowledge with an objective to beautify their knowledge holding which results in knowledge refinement and enhancement in them with aesthetic stage.

The final phase is reached when an individual consummated all introductory needs and focus on personalized growth and satisfaction[28]. The stage of self-actualization is reached when a person has fulfilled all preceding needs and can focus on personal growth and fulfillment. Self-actualized individuals are originative, blessed, and cultivable. They find meaning to life and perceive as a part of things they desire to achieve all their life.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains a cornerstone in the field of psychology and organizational behavior, providing a structured framework to understand human motivation and the quest for fulfillment. The knowledge management in the IT sector can lead to significant benefits such as enhanced innovation, improved decision-making, increased productivity, and a competitive edge. By focusing on knowledge creation, storage, sharing, and application, organizations can build a strong knowledge management framework that drives continuous improvement and success.

Research Questions

To accomplish the aim of the study, research the questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. Do employees seek for knowledge enhancement underlying Maslow's Hierarchy Needs?

2. Does Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs have a relationship with employees' knowledge in the context of knowledge management?

Research Objectives

To address the aforementioned research inquiries, the objectives were formulated to steer the cognitive process of providing answers:

1. To explore the pursuit of knowledge workers' knowledge management with the ladder of needs   framework customized to meet the knowledge enhancement of the 21st century.

2. To study employees' knowledge is intricately linked to various levels of Maslow's motivational theory.

4. NOVELTY IN RESEARCH

This study is unique as it used a phenomenological approach to explore the intersection of knowledge enhancement and Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the IT sector, a method was not previously applied in this context. Below is the reasoning internal representation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs[28].
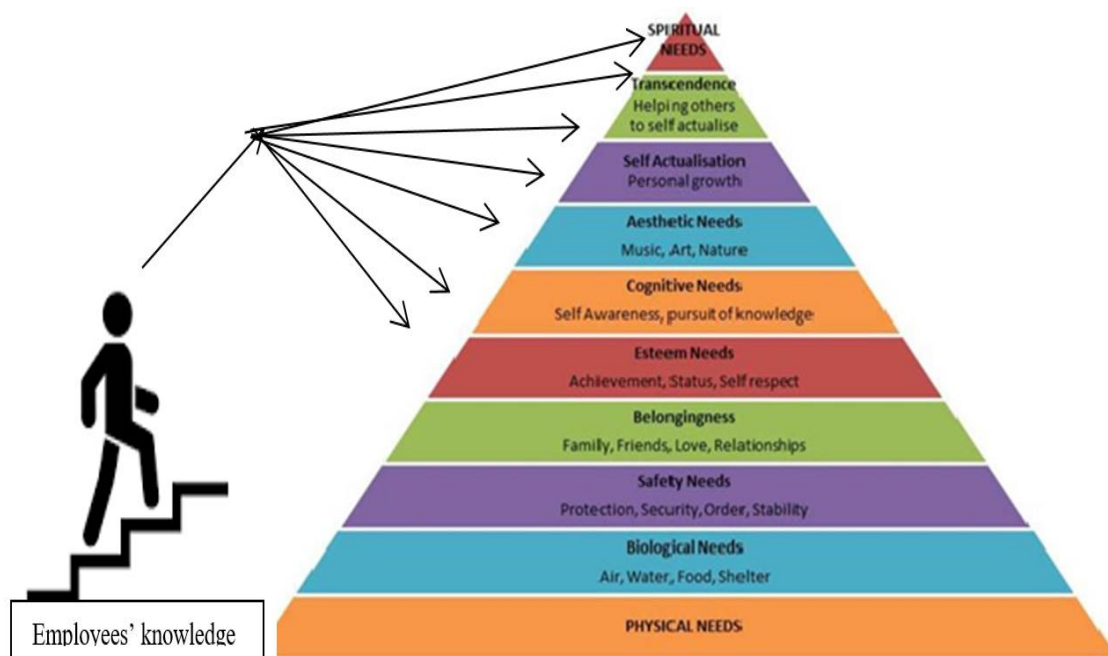

Fig 4: Source: Maslow's hierarchy need (1943 -1954), Hester (2017).

Abraham's hierarchy of wants base as the most influential theories of motivation, purport that human are impelled to satisfy a sequence of five fundamental needs and further two needs which makes the model as seven stage in a hierarchical order[27,28]. The hierarchy is commonly depicted as a pyramid, where the most basic needs form the base and advance to higher-level needs toward the top.

Understanding the needs hierarchy helps organizations and individuals comprehend the stages of human knowledge motivation and development. By addressing and fulfilling these needs, individuals can achieve higher levels of satisfaction and productivity, ultimately reaching self-actualization with greater knowledge acquisition. In organizational settings, recognizing and facilitating the fulfillment of these needs are essential as it does matter employees to elevate themselves.

5. RESULTS

The research was conducted with knowledge workers in the IT sector is purely qualitative study. The study revealed significant insights into how employees' needs and motivations align with Hierarchy of Needs. A key finding was that, regardless of their career stage, employees consistently seek opportunities for knowledge enhancement. This pursuit of knowledge is intricately linked to various levels of Maslow's motivational theory. The study found that knowledge enhancement is a fundamental need for IT employees at every career stage. Whether they are entry-level programmers or senior managers, the drive to acquire new skills and knowledge remains a constant motivating factor. The study presents word cloud analysis with NVivo 14 software in the below fig: 5 expressing the significance of Maslow's Hierarchy needs for managing the knowledge as employees' believe to enhance their knowledge.

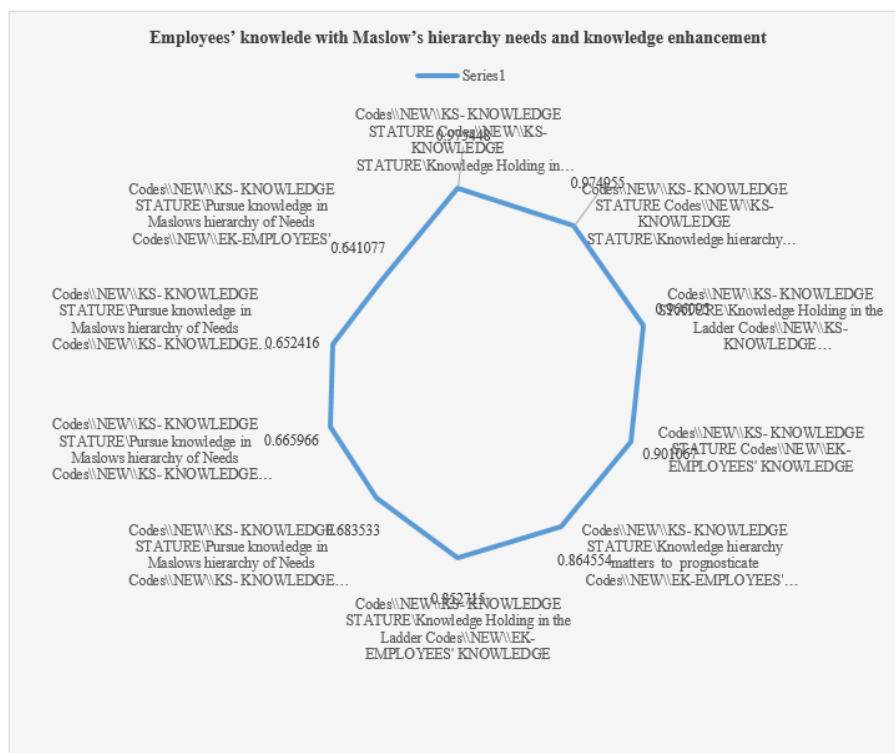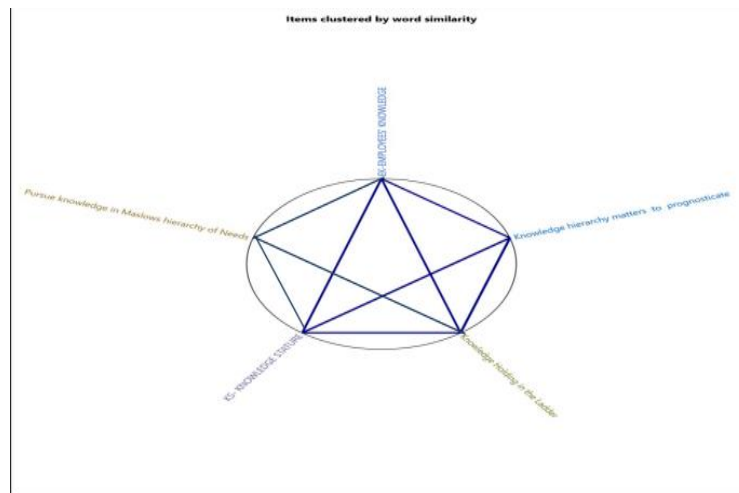**Fig 5: Presenting the diagrammatic view of word cloud analysis with NVivo 14 software expression of Maslow's hierarchy analysis needs with employees' knowledge.**

The participants expressed socialisation and cognitive needs with asethetic needs are highly pursuit for knowledge and this process of refinement while learning from others and managing their knowledge assist them to reach the self-actualisation stage of knowledge as knowledge there is no edge to knowledge.

Table 5.1: Represents the Correlation between employees' knowledge with Maslow's Hierarchy Needs with knowledge enhancement

Codes with NVivo 14 Software		Values
Codes\\NEW\\EK- EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE	Codes\\NEW\\EK- KNOWLEDE\Knowledge Holding in the Ladder in Maslow's Hierarchy Needs	0.975448
Codes\\NEW\\ES- EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE	Codes\\NEW\\EK- KNOWLEDGE \Knowledge enhancement	0.974955
Codes\\NEW\\KE- KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENt\Knowledge Holding in the Ladder	Codes\\NEW\\KS- KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT\Knowledge hierarchy matters to prognosticate	0.966095
Codes\\NEW\\KE- KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT	Codes\\NEW\\EK-EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE	0.901067
Codes\\NEW\\KS- KNOWLEDGE Enhancement\Knowledge hierarchy matters to prognosticate	Codes\\NEW\\EK-EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE	0.864554

The study discovered a strong correlation, with a value of 0.97, between employees' pursuit of knowledge and the needs hierarchy which fulfills the purpose of the study. Furthermore employees' knowledge associated with knowledge enhancement with 0.97.The study also tried to explore the phenomena that employees' seek for knowledge in cognitive and socialisation to emphasise and climb the stages with knowledge ladder setting Maslow's hierarchy Needs with high correlation value of 0.966 across all stages in their career, from basic socialisation and cognitive needs to higher-order needs such as self-actualization and self-transcendence.

Fig: 5.1: Presenting the diagrammatic view of correlation analysis with NVivo 14 software expression of Maslow's hierarchy analysis needs with employees' knowledge for knowledge enhancement.

The study also discovered that employees ensure that knowledge is expected to be accelerated at every stage which aspire them to reach the other needs with cognition.

Table 5.2: Represents the Jaccard's similarity index between employees' knowledge with Maslow's Hierarchy Needs with knowledge enhancement

Employees' knowledge	Maslow's Hierarchy Needs	JSI Values
Codes\\EK- EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE \pursuit for knowledge	Codes\\EK- Maslow's hierarchy in pursuit /Knowledge enhancement	0.804241
Codes\\KS- KNOWLEDGE \Knowledge Holding in the Ladder	Codes\\KS- KNOWLEDGE MaNAGEMENT \Knowledge hierarchy	0.787907
Codes\\KS- KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT\Knowledge hierarchy matters to prognosticate	Codes\\KS- KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT	0.763458
Codes\\EK- EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE	Codes\\EK- KNOWLEDGE Holding in the Ladder	0.705798

The study brings forth the core cognitive ability in employees' capacity for thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving with Jaccard's similarity index.
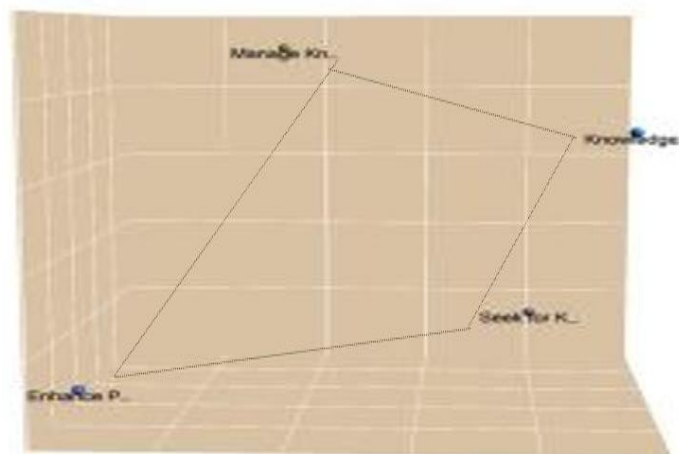

Fig 5.2: Presenting the diagrammatic view of Jaccard's similarity Index analysis with NVivo 14 software expression of Maslow's hierarchy analysis needs with employees' knowledge for knowledge enhancement.

Jaccard's similarity index measures the similarity between employees seeking for knowledge in relation to Maslow's needs theory with similarity of 0.84, indicating its essential and significance between the variables. It includes skills like memory, attention, language, and executive functions, which enable individuals to comprehend intellect, managing knowledge with similarity index of 0.78. The study focused on Maslow's hierarchy, cognitive needs pertain to the desire for knowledge, comprehension, and mental engagement with similarity expressed between employees' knowledge and knowledge enhancement. These needs are crucial for personal development and self-actualization, motivating employees to pursue learning and intellectual.

The study further explored result with determination of coefficient to fins a goodness o fit in the model proposed with R squared value. The results generated with NVivo 14 assist the study to examine the better fit expressing the relationship between the dependent and independent variable.
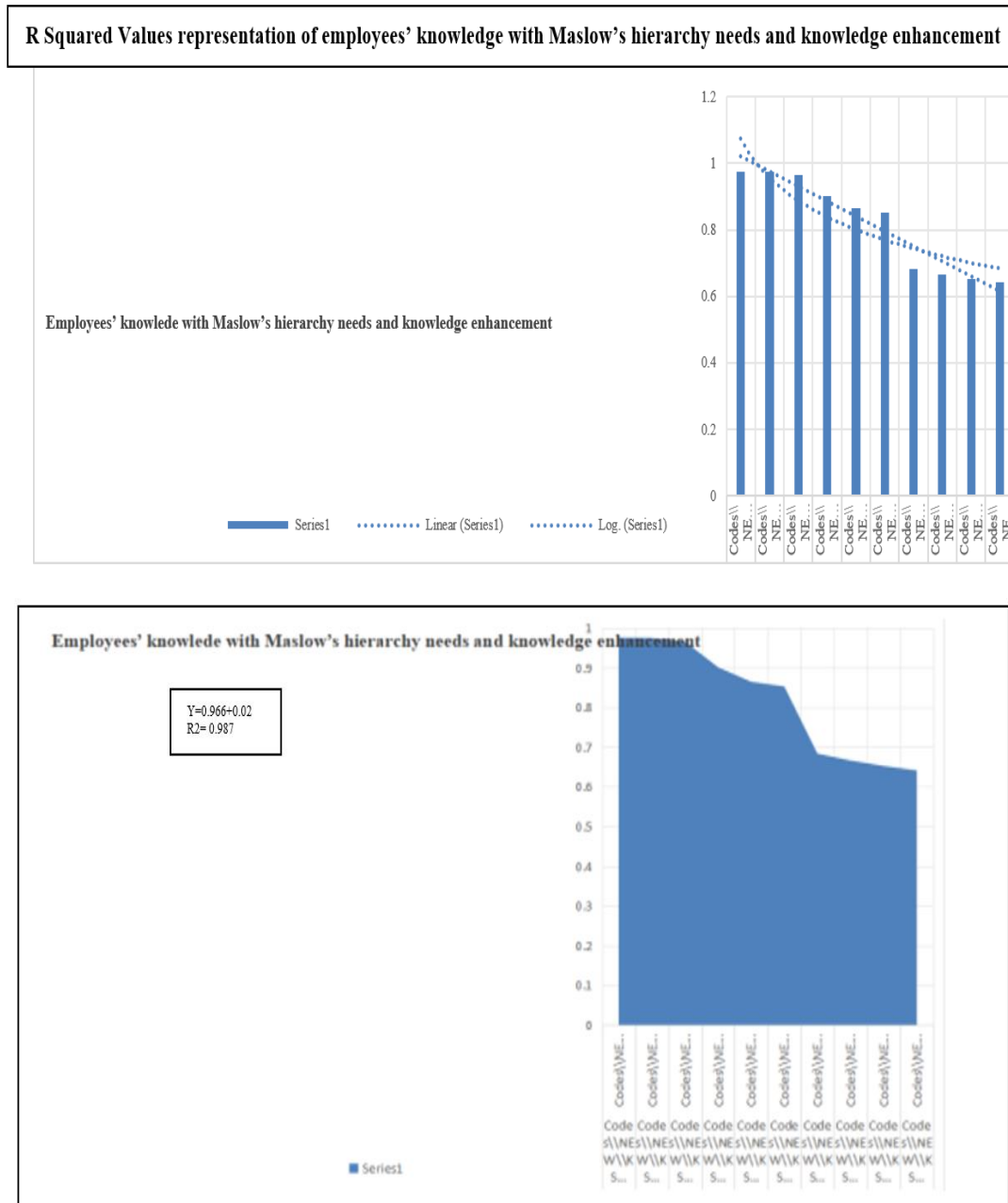

Fig 5.3: Presenting the diagrammatic view with R squared values - NVivo 14 software expression of Maslow's hierarchy analysis needs with employees' knowledge for knowledge enhancement.

The determination of coefficient (R^2) was high determining the coefficient with 0.987, indicating a strong predictive relationship between the fulfillment of Maslow's needs and the emphasis on knowledge enhancement. This suggests that meeting employees' needs at different levels can effectively predict their motivation to seek further knowledge.

6. FINDINGS

The key findings of the study were based on the participants experience of pursuit for knowledge at workplace. Based on the result with Karl's Pearson coefficient correlation analysis and R Squared coefficient under NVivo 14 software the findings are revealed to heave light on the notion of knowledge workers pursuit for managing knowledge are exhibited:

Significant relationship with Maslow's Hierarchy: The study found a significant relationship between employees' pursuit of knowledge and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Employees consistently seek knowledge enhancement across all levels of the hierarchy.

Knowledge Enhancement at every stage: At each stage of Maslow's hierarchy, employees demonstrated a strong desire for knowledge elevation. Physiological needs: Basic training and skill acquisition to secure job stability. Safety Needs: Learning new skills to enhance job security and career prospect. Love and Belonging: Collaborative learning to build strong team dynamics and social connections. Esteem Needs: Achieving certifications and recognitions to boost self-esteem and professional standing. Cognitive Needs: Pursuing advanced knowledge and continuous learning to satisfy intellectual curiosity. Aesthetics Needs: Engaging in creative problem-solving and innovative projects. Self-Actualisation: Seeking personal growth through challenging and meaningful projects. Self Transcedence: articipating in projects with a greater societal impact, contributing to a sense of higher purpose.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study highlight the integral role of knowledge enhancement at all levels of Maslow's hierarchy, providing a comprehensive understanding of how various needs influence employees' motivation to learn and grow. The findings of the study revealed that the knowledge management with the facet of Maslow's need model is fairly high in employees at IT Sector. The employees seek for knowledge at workplace to enhance their cognitive abilities, as the participants were found to be endowed with greater opportunities provided by the organisation to build positive work culture. The purpose of the study was to build an understanding that IT sectors must ameliorate employees knowledge, as it is highly correlated with Hierarchy needs just like any other need.

The implications of these findings for the phenomena studied are that the organisations must nurture their employees' knowledge and knowledge management with the facets of Maslow's Hierarchy needs for motivation to sustain in knowledge era.

The study assist the other researchers to utilise the current study to understand and investigate the phenomena better and provide the organisation better insights which contributes to the field of knowledge management by demonstrating the significant relationship between employees' pursuit of knowledge and their position within Maslow's hierarchy of needs. By recognizing the continuous desire for knowledge enhancement across all stages, organizations can better support their employees' growth and satisfaction. This phenomenological study provides a novel and effective framework for understanding and fostering employee development in the IT sector.

Authors Contribution Statement:

The work is conducted under the guidance of Dr. Pratima Verma by the research Scholar Aatika Bi at Alliance University

Data avaliability:

Data will be provided upon request

Has this article screened for similarity:

Yes

This Article is a part of PhD and has not been published anywhere else.

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