

Chapter 1

The Tacit Knowledge Through the Customer Experience: Conceptualization, Externalization Methods, and Use Application to Tunisian Thalassotherapy Centers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter connects the management and marketing fields by scrutinizing the tacit knowledge management in the case of the customer experience theory. First, the theoretical and conceptual side is presented. To this regard, the tacit knowledge' importance is stressed. Likewise, a discussion of its externalization methods in reference to the customer experience theory as well as its strong relationship with the innovation development, is emphasized. Especially, the experiential innovation is targeted by this research and defended. The research question treated is: How to acquire and use the customer experiential knowledge CEK- for an experiential innovation development? Thus, CEK is conceptualized, in advance, through a deeper correspondence between the tacit knowledge taxonomies and the consumption experience dimensions. Second, the practical side presents a depth qualitative research undertaken with managers of Tunisian thalassotherapy centers to respond to the cited question. Finally, content analysis techniques, discussion of results and the practical contribution are advanced.

INTRODUCTION

How the knowledge could be created? A fundamental question leading to construct the theoretical underpinning of the knowledge management while keeping the knowledge based view as a support. The latter presents the knowledge as a resource that can be acquired, transferred or integrated to achieve a competitive advantage (Jaziri-Bouagina, 2015b). In this case, the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation of Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) supports the idea that organizational knowledge is

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2394-9.ch001

understood as a process that arises principally through informal networks (Einshardt and Santos, 2002) and that the knowledge is created through a continuous interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge at individual and organizational levels (Einshardt and Santos, 2002). It follows that, the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation of Nonaka & Takeushi (1995) gives a more practical side to conceive the knowledge instead of a philosophical one gave by Polanyi (1966) to the tacit knowledge. This conception, considers it on the one hand, as distinct from explicit knowledge. This is an important theoretical contribution which implies to draw the conceptual borders between them and to enable the research continuity for the both. On the other hand, it is essential to determine, acquire, use and convert tacit knowledge into an explicit one in order to transform the firm's knowledge assets into competitive capabilities (Boisot, 1998). In this line, the difficulty to imitate tacit knowledge acknowledges its power to be the source of a competitive advantage (Eisenhardt and Santos, 2002, Seidler et al, 2004).

However, a lack of research on the tacit knowledge marked the business field and especially scarce of them are interested into the marketing field.

In this case, this chapter sheds the light on the tacit knowledge emanated from the lived customer experience while seeking to respond to this principal research question: How to externalize and use the customer experiential knowledge (CEK) for an experiential innovation development?

Hence, this chapter has three objectives, on the theoretical level; it is to conceptualize the lived customer experience on the basis of the tacit knowledge theory. Hence, the marketing and the management fields are connected by defining the customer experiential knowledge (CEK) and its components. On the practical level, this chapter explores on the one side, the externalization methods used by the Tunisian well being tourism (the case of Thalassotherapy centers) and the use of this tacit knowledge for the development of innovation, on the other side. Two main parts will constitute this chapter, as follows: First part concerns the theoretical side that synthesizes the tacit knowledge definitions, its externalization methods in general and those of customer experience in particular. Likewise, the conceptualization of CEK is established and the intimate relationship existing between TKM and innovation will be highlighted; to this regard the experiential innovation is targeted. Second part discusses the methodology side, by presenting first, the field of thalassotherapy in Tunisia, the importance of experiential innovation in this sector. Second, a qualitative research is advanced as well as the techniques of content analysis are outlined. Results of analyses concerning the externalization as well as the use of the CEK for an experiential development innovation are debated.

THEORETICAL PART

The Tacit Knowledge Definitions

Many distinctions have been addressed in the literature regarding the tacit and explicit knowledge. To this regard, Einshardt and Santos (2002), explain that it is very difficult to articulate the tacit knowledge as it is embedded into the individual but some part of it may be codified through messages (focal knowledge).

At the organizational level, Nonaka (1994) defines the tacit knowledge components which are: "cognitive" i.e. the mental models expliciting the individual's images of reality and visions for the future and "technical" i.e the skills related to an especial context. Generally, the tacit knowledge equals the experience obtained from the organizational context (Sigala and Chalkiti, 2007). In this case, the indi-

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