

Chapter 5

Knowledge Management and the Competitiveness of Learning Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge management is becoming a source of discriminative value in the competitive positioning of companies and is becoming a lever for the development and emergence of new forms of organization. In fact, knowledge is the result of a cooperative process in collective action. The next step is to promote the creation of this knowledge and its sharing by managing the cooperative work of a community of people: we no longer manage the knowledge itself, but the collective that creates it, where the notion of “cooperative management of knowledge” applies. The author reflects on the organizational factor: Can it influence the practice of knowledge management within the companies willing to improve their innovation processes in order to achieve competitiveness? This reflection falls within the field of management sciences through studying the organizational solutions to ensure a better capitalization, sharing and new knowledge creation, and a better comprehension of the success conditions of the knowledge management approach, which consists of adaptation to the environment.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies have involved changes, as major as they have been irreversible, reflecting the passage from a material economy based on goods and services to an intangible economy based on knowledge. These changes lead companies to adapt and integrate a technology which has involved an evolution in business management and an evolution in the ways they face off against competition especially with the phenomenon of globalization resulting from a globally systemic transition and of a process of economic reorganization, propelled by the search for competitiveness of the firms and the states.

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Today's company may find it very beneficial to be conceived of as being a learning organization, it must be able to analyze its own operation and to improve itself as a company through training, because knowledge has become, even more a company's capital and physical resources, the essential ingredient of value creation (Mack, 1995). Additionally, knowledge is has become a favorable factor for skills acquisition, which must be managed to ensure a better competitiveness (Nonaka, 1994; Ermine, 2003; Harvey, 2011; Barbaroux, 2012). Hence, the author focuses on knowledge management which has a significant impact on company competitiveness. The combination of competitiveness and knowledge management practice leads companies to follow an approach designed to guarantee:

- A durable competitive advantage,
- Increasingly conclusive results,
- Performance successes achievements that are qualitatively and definitively better than successes which definitely exceed those of its competitors,
- Distinctive competences,
- Sufficiently developed innovation processes, and
- A better adaptation to the environment.

Being competitive, nowadays, implies a great capacity to face its competitors, to satisfy its customers in a personalized way, to present know-how with regards to the products and the services offered on the market and to cooperate, with other companies, in intensive knowledge-based activities while (equally) equitably exploiting opportunities presented by new information and communication technologies in order to sustainably guarantee the effectiveness and the efficiency of the company (Wang, Zhongfeng, & Yang, 2011, Schiuma, 2012).

Certainly, this powerful manner of maintaining knowledge is not easy and it differs from one company to another and from one sector to another (Ribald, 2002)—especially, facing the environmental changes which became a constant determining this knowledge-based research on the market. This environment evolution affects the management process, the business relations, and the means of communication (Dube & Pare, 1999; Bergeron, Poulin, & Ellouz, 2000). Then, the question is to know whether the traditional methods of management are always valid and whether the companies have to put forms of mechanistic organization – rather, forms of organic organization – in place to improve their innovation processes? The theoretical framework of this research focuses on the need for the implementation of learning organizations with structure networks which weave fabrics of information exchange, defining the same values and seeking to solve common problems. These organizations must be built like a training system—i.e., they must develop a structure of operation in which two-way communication constitutes the link facilitating development and learning.

Today, the central role of knowledge management within the companies makes it imperative to apprehend the conditions for success. From this, the lack interest in assessing the effects of the environment's moderation of the direct relationship between knowledge management and the competitiveness of the company is an often-ignored problematic.

This research falls under a theoretical prospect and seeks to explore an approach of knowledge management (an approach found within those organizations with a structure network in place) as being a source of competitiveness. The general problematic of this research may be expressed thus:

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