Design of a Strategic Knowledge Management Model to Evaluate Sales Growth in SMEs

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing importance of knowledge as an intangible asset or intellectual capital (CI) for companies, has encouraged managers to pay greater attention to knowledge management (KM) strategies (Hansen, Nohria & Tierney, 1999; Earl, 2001), allowing companies to capture, conserve, organize and manage the knowledge and experiences that are generated, for further dissemination and maintenance of sustainable development, through the use of the acquired IC (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Pasternack & Viscio,1998; Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999; Ruggles & Holtshouse, 1999).

Although there is evidence that large companies have invested in initiatives and information systems for KM, which enables them acquiring and improving the use of IC (Sarvary, 1999). However, previous studies have shown that in many SMEs there is an absence of systematic KM (McAdam & Reid, 2001: Wong & Aspinwall, 2005). This fact is supported on some other studies that have identified some factors leading to this absence, such as SME managers assume a central position (Bridge, O'Neill & Cromie, 2003), thus limiting the planning and decision-making processes to a single person (Culkin & Smith, 2000). Therefore, it is shown that some SMEs fail to identify knowledge as an intangible business asset. Which like any other asset, must be valued, processed and be systematically organized, since only people (such as competitors, customers, suppliers, vendors, etc.) are the only agents capable of learning and creating knowledge in an organization, through their individual and collective experience.

Therefore it could be inferred that companies, whether large or small must have continuous learning as a process for the organization to identify its best practices, in order to avoid repeating errors and producing a decrease in entropy (Sharma et al., 2007). Senge (1990) states that organizational learning occurs when people frequently increase their ability to create in order to achieve objectives, designing new patterns for distributing thought and also, where people are continuously learning observing the whole process. In addition to that, Senge affirms that when an organization learns, it can be defined as groups of people that collaborate with each other, to collectively strengthen their capacities and achieve truly important results. According to this, the learning process must start from management, identifying knowledge as a critical element in business strategies. Fernández, Junquera & Del Brio (2009) pointed out that the competitive advantage is not within the individual as a generator and a possessor of knowledge, but in the ability of the company to transfer personal knowledge to different contexts, integrating it into the routines and foundations of the organization, in order to improve its innovative capacity, to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Consequently, the success of business learning is based

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on the transformation of the knowledge related to human and relational capital (tacit knowledge) into knowledge of structural capital (explicit knowledge) (Sharma et al., 2007).

Consequently, being business success directly related to growth, especially to sales growth, this responsibility is in general delegated to the marketing department, which is responsible for developing and implementing strategies necessary to achieve the company's objectives; but: Is it possible to measure the level of growth in sales of an SME through the implementation of a KM strategy? The objective of this paper is to answer this question, through the study of the variables that intervene in the generation of knowledge in the marketing area, specifically in the internal KM between the sellers and the management personnel, proposing a KM model that can be implemented by the management personnel.

This paper is organized as follows: First, a background of the papers related to the research topic is carried out. Next, the methodology that was used is presented describing the hypothesis, research design, data collection instruments, and the description of the design of the model. Then, the results are shown with an analysis of descriptive data, multiple regression and correlations. After that, some future research directions are proposed. Finally, the conclusions of the paper are stated.

BACKGROUND

For the construction of this study, some tools were used to obtain a clearer answer of the evolution of KM and its different perspectives, such as these two electronic resources: *Web of Science* and *Tree of Science* (Robledo, Osorio & Lopez, 2014) as well as this search string, that was used in the Web of Science:

The first search title was: (*knowledge management*) AND subject: (*intellectual capital enterprises*) Refined by: Web of Science categories: (*Management or Business or Operations Research Management Science*) AND Document types: (*Article or Proceedings Paper*) Period of time: *2009-2018*. Indexes*: SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A & HCI, ESCI.*

From this search, we obtained 367 results, which were the basis to us the *Tree of science* (ToS) tool, in order to build the state of the art from the searches carried out in WoS. Since the ToS algorithm is based on graph theory, the papers are represented as nodes and the citations between them as links. In this way, each node represents a knowledge unit located within the network. The most important nodes are identified from their determined positions, according to the links that connect to other nodes. Therefore, the papers located in the root are the most cited on the KM subject, the papers of the trunk are the papers that quote the root and are cited in the leaves. Finally, the leaves are papers that cite both: the root and the trunk. In this way, scientific information can be visualized in the form of a tree (Robledo, Osorio & Lopez, 2014).

Once this structure is finished, the most important papers of each part of the tree are analyzed and selected, choosing only from three to five papers in each area. This visualization allows us to have an overview of the theoretical foundation and current developments on the knowledge management, aiming to fulfill the main objective of the research.

With the results obtained in ToS, it was possible to chronologically select and organize the literature related to the research topic, analyzing the most important concepts of knowledge management.

The papers located on the root of the ToS can help identifying a type of research that allows conceptualizing the two types of knowledge. First, Tacit knowledge, which refers to valuable and highly subjective ideas and intuitions that are difficult to grasp and share because people have them in their minds. Secondly, Explicit knowledge which can be expressed through formal language by using words and numbers, and can be easily transmitted and shared through data, scientific formulas, codified proce-