Chapter V

Sharing Knowledge in Strategic Alliances to Build Collaborative Advantage

Fátima Guadamillas Gómez,
University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain

Mario Javier Donate Manzanares,
University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain

Jesús David Sánchez de Pablo González del Campo,
University of Castille-La Mancha, Spain

Abstract

This chapter studies the transmission and sharing of knowledge in strategic alliances. First of all, the authors explain the existence of alliances from different theoretical perspectives. They argue that resource and knowledge-based views of the firm offer an adequate approach for the understanding of social and strategic aspects involved in the achieving of a collaborative advantage. Secondly, they examine information technology (IT) tools that are critical for enabling and supporting information and knowledge-sharing processes among partners. Also, they emphasize other important

problems that make the effective development of collaborative activities and knowledge sharing in strategic alliances difficult: distrust between partners and cultural barriers in relation to collaboration; the excessive technological and knowledge diversity or similarity among partners that makes learning more difficult; and the governance structure of the alliance. Finally, some practical solutions are proposed: the correct use of IT tools, some organizational measures, human resource practices, and the limitation of the scope of the agreement.

Introduction

In recent years, uncertainty, volatility, and risk are some factors that better define the current competitive environment. Firms in most industries carry out restructuring processes in order to face this situation and alliances become a key tool for competitiveness of firms in the knowledge society.

Alliances can be a source for firms to acquire and improve their knowledge-based capabilities in the current knowledge-intensive environment (Oxley & Sampson, 2004). They can also be a mechanism for firms to build a competitive advantage and to gain or maintain leads over their rivals because of their proven access to economies of scope, scale, complementary capabilities, and knowledge.

In this work, we study the transmission and sharing of knowledge in alliances from the knowledge-based view of the firm and the role of information technologies in this process. The paper is divided into four parts. First of all, we explain the importance for firms of sharing knowledge in alliances to build collaborative advantage and to obtain higher returns on their R&D investment. Secondly, we look at the importance of IT in this process. Third, we try to study the factors that complicate the effective transmission and sharing of knowledge. Finally, some ideas are proposed with the purpose of trying to solve problems associated with knowledge transmission in strategic alliances.

Building Collaborative Advantages in Strategic Alliances

When firms undertake alliances or cooperation agreements they have to face some practical questions that basically can be grouped into two blocks (Navas

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