

Importance of knowledge management in Mexico's large companies

Importancia de la gestión del conocimiento en las grandes empresas de México

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Abstract

Objectives: The objective of this research work is to know and analyze the importance of knowledge management through the main lines of research related to knowledge management and the extent to which it involves people working for the welfare of an entity. Through it, companies can create and disseminate vital information in a systematic and efficient way in order to achieve better performance in the areas of the organization and improve its competitive advantages. **Contribution:** If organizations leverage these resources, they will be able to implement a system of transmission and knowledge generation that allows them to improve their business processes, improve the capabilities of their employees and obtain greater Benefits. Conditions should be created that allow knowledge management and business process management to complement each other. It is recommended to map each level of the process of conception of the knowledge management project, to better understand the steps and requirements that take place in them, and also facilitate the identification of inputs, outputs, resources and controls according to company characteristics.

Mercados, Conocimiento, Gestión

Resumen

Objetivos: El objetivo de este trabajo de investigación es conocer y analizar la importancia de la gestión del conocimiento mediante las principales líneas de investigación vinculadas con la gestión del conocimiento y la medida en que involucra a personas trabajando para el bienestar de una entidad. A través de ella, las empresas pueden crear y difundir información vital de una manera sistemática y eficiente con el fin de lograr un mejor desempeño en las áreas de la organización y mejorar sus ventajas competitivas. **Contribución:** Si las organizaciones aprovechan estos recursos, podrán implantar un sistema de transmisión y generación de conocimiento que les permita mejorar sus procesos empresariales, perfeccionar las capacidades de sus colaboradores y obtener mayores beneficios. Se deben crear condiciones que permitan que la gestión del conocimiento y la gestión por procesos del negocio se complementen entre sí. Se recomienda mapear cada nivel del proceso de concepción del proyecto de gestión del conocimiento, para comprender mejor los pasos y requerimientos que tienen lugar en ellos, y facilitar, además, la identificación de las entradas, salidas, recursos y controles según las características de la empresa.

Markets, Knowledge, Management, Social

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Introduction

Uncertainty, volatility and risk are the factors that best define the current competitive environment. Given this situation, restructuring processes occur in multiple sectors of the economy and cooperation agreements constitute a key piece of the competitiveness of companies in the current knowledge society.

Access to complementary capacities and knowledge, together with the achievement of economies of scale and scope, allow alliances to be a mechanism through which companies build a competitive advantage. Through partnerships, companies can acquire and increase their knowledge-based capabilities, in an environment where such capabilities have an important strategic value (Oxley and Sampson, 2004).

In this work, we try to analyze from the Theory of the Knowledge-Based Enterprise (TEBC) the process of interorganizational knowledge transmission in the cooperation agreements so necessary to obtain the maximum possible benefit of the alliances.

The work is structured in different parts. In the first one, we will make a brief approach to the importance of strategic alliances for the company from different theories. Then, we will analyze the GCO process, to conclude by identifying the main problems of knowledge transfer in strategic alliances, as well as various solutions proposed to try to solve them.

Methodology to be developed

This work is carried out based on previous research and is done from the Theory of Resources and more specifically the Theory of the Knowledge-Based Enterprise (TEBC), where we will analyze the importance of knowledge transfer in cooperative agreements. Once analyzed the business cooperation from different approaches, we will explain the GCO in the alliances to later analyze the problems that arise from the transmission of knowledge.

From the Theory of Resources, the objective of alliances is the formation of value through the obtaining, exploitation and development of resources and capacities.

Sometimes, the only way to access the resources necessary for the company is cooperation, when they are rooted in other companies (Chung, Singh and Lee, 2000). From the Resources approach, it is argued that companies capable of developing and managing alliances better than competitors - what Kale, Singh and Perlmutter (2000) qualify as the ability to manage alliances - can obtain a sustainable competitive advantage, unless these can mimic the partnership management activities that make the company create value (Ireland, Hitt and Vaidyanath, 2002).

In addition, the more dynamic the environment, the lower the possibility of the company disposing of all the necessary resources, and in this sense, alliances allow access to them and are a continuous source of learning (Ireland et al., 2002).

As an extension of the Resources approach, the Knowledge-based perspective considers organizational knowledge as a factor that contributes to the company's objective of achieving a competitive advantage (Foss, 1999; Grant, 1996; Liebeskind, 1996; Quinn, 1992) and that this can and should be managed in order to improve the company's results (Oliveira, 1999)

Through the management of strategic alliances the possibility of creating income relationships increases (Dyer and Singh, 1998), through: investments in specific assets, knowledge exchange management, adequate combination of resources and complementary capacities and governance mechanisms efficient. Relational income can be understood as "superior benefits generated jointly by the exchange relationship that cannot be generated by any of the companies in isolation and that can only be created by joining the joint contributions of the two partners of the alliance" (Dyer and Singh, 1998: 662).

On the other hand, a series of knowledge is shared in a social network that, when managed together, fosters the development of innovations (Rodan and Galunic, 2004). That is, the heterogeneity of knowledge shared by companies that make up a social network improves the individual result of companies, especially that of their innovation policy (Rodan and Galunic, 2004: 556).

This relationship will involve the company's ability to exploit the network structure, and its ability to expose itself to the existence of diverse knowledge, with whose combination innovations can be developed.

Results

The development of an appropriate GCO implies working on the best possible strategic design to create, maintain, transfer and apply the organizational knowledge developed by the partners and achieve competitive objectives. Knowledge and, especially that of tacit character, is the most important strategic resource that a company can control, having a series of unique characteristics such as the possibility of being used simultaneously, that does not deteriorate with use and that can be combined with Other knowledge For these reasons knowledge must be encouraged and protected at the same time. To acquire or learn from the tacit knowledge and know-how of the partner companies of an alliance, it is advisable to develop close cooperative agreements, which are those derived from the construction of relational capital (Kale et al., 2000). In these agreements it is easier to detect where the information and valuable knowledge of the partner is located. Based on the TEBC, Lane and Lubatkin (1998) establish that companies try to learn from the knowledge transmitted to develop their capabilities faster than their rivals and improve their competitive position. Kale et al. (2000) argue that differences in the processes of accumulation, codification and way of sharing knowledge explain the differences in the ability of companies to learn from alliances. Therefore, the GCO process is key to promoting learning, with the consequent positive effects it has for the results of the alliance.

On the other hand, Conner and Prahalad (1996) mention that due to the importance that knowledge has acquired, it and its application to business activity are the basis for the existence of the company, justifying at the same time that the presence of knowledge enhances the possibility of opportunistic behavior in alliances. Within these, Inkpen and Dinur (1998) consider that three issues should be analyzed when considering the possibility of creating and managing knowledge processes:

a) What processes do the partners use to access the knowledge of the alliance?

b) What kind of knowledge is associated with the different processes and how should such knowledge be classified?

c) What is the relationship between the levels of the organization, types of knowledge and transfer of it?

Based on all this, Inkpen and Dinur (1998) identify four key processes: technology sharing, socio-alliance interaction, personnel transfer and strategic integration. These four processes make up the sources of knowledge creation, since it is in them where the different types of knowledge of the partners converge and become accessible.

In addition, they add that the process of knowledge creation is dynamic since it involves the interaction of several organizational levels of different companies and the contact of different individuals participating in the agreement, which can increase, expand and internalize knowledge. There are two main lines that we could highlight to define the advantages that are obtained from the creation, transfer and ways of sharing knowledge in strategic alliances.

1.- Promote the development of innovations. To maintain their competitive position, companies must strengthen their R&D policy. However, very few organizations have all the resources and capabilities necessary to achieve this goal. For this reason, strategic alliances become an instrument through which companies share knowledge for innovation and, thus, can create and maintain sustainable competitive advantages. Companies with efficient cooperative agreements have better access to valuable information about new technological opportunities than those that act in isolation. This leads to better results in new products (Soh, 2003). On the other hand, for companies to adopt innovations, it is necessary that their structure be flexible, which can be facilitated by generating higher levels of knowledge through cooperation agreements (Peña and Aranguren, 2002).

To enhance the development and dissemination of new technologies, allow their use by small businesses and enable the influence of government actions in the innovation process, complex systems of relationships between companies, universities and public and private institutes of investigation.

These relationships facilitate the creation, storage and transfer of knowledge, skills and instruments that delimit new technologies (Quintana and Benavides, 2003).

2.- Access to new knowledge.- By sharing knowledge and having access to resources and capabilities that the company does not have, it is possible that it develops strategies that it could not perform in isolation and that allow it to create greater added value. If an agreement is developed with a company well established in the market, valuable information and capabilities that increase the value of the company can be accessed (Gulati and Higgins, 2003). Subsequently, the information will be transformed into knowledge through the learning process. For this, Information Technology (IT) plays a key role.

Therefore, the generation of cooperation advantages based on the exchange of knowledge will depend on the interest, on the capacity of absorption and collaboration of the partner that receives the knowledge, on the means of transmission and communication, and on the transparency of the transferor.

Obviously, not all partners have the same abilities to learn and assimilate knowledge, so there is always a risk of imbalance and opportunism.

On the other hand, if we enter the process of knowledge generation and exploitation (March, 1991), we can disaggregate two stages in the development of an alliance (it may be that in a cooperative agreement only one stage occurs, but to obtain the maximum benefits of the collaboration it is recommended that both occur).

- Exploration phase.- In this stage the speed of capacity development is increased and the risk of acquiring and exploiting external knowledge is minimized (Lane and Lubatkin, 1998). The objective is to explore new resources and capabilities that the company does not have through cooperative agreements, being able to be oriented to the acquisition of know-how and the learning of any type of skills and resources in the partner companies and / or to create resources and specialized capabilities in combination with those of another company.

Cooperation has an important role in the processes of knowledge transfer and learning, since the communication that occurs in strategic alliances, favors the creation of a common knowledge base and enhances learning between companies, improving the absorption capacity. This is why Inkpen (1998) considers that the governance structure of an alliance becomes a "laboratory" for learning.

- Exploitation phase.- It is characterized by "the use and development of things already known" (Rothaermel and Deeds, 2004). The knowledge generated in the previous stage is exploited next to the one that the company has by itself. Sometimes, alliances only go through this stage, that is, it is directly about taking advantage of joint knowledge between companies, without exploring new fields that are unknown.

Companies seek to establish and maintain competitive advantages by acquiring and sharing tacit and explicit knowledge and adapting to changes in the environment. Access to such knowledge is facilitated by the similarities between the partners and by the development of an effective decision-making system in the alliance (Saxton, 1997). In order to share this knowledge it is necessary to carry out an effective transmission of it. The use of this common knowledge allows the company to increase its know-how and / or its technological capabilities, thus configuring alliances as an important instrument for business learning, since through them diverse discoveries are discovered. opportunities, the organizational knowledge base is developed and formed (provided through the GCO) and, finally, the transfer of knowledge between the partner companies is possible (Hamel, 1991; Osborn and Hagedoorn, 1997).

The benefits obtained from the transmission of knowledge developed by a company in an alliance are for the company itself, but also for the partners as the knowledge base to be shared is being increased (Inkpen, 2004: 414). In this way, the similarity of resources and capacities of the partners is increased after the formation of the alliances (Mowery et al., 1996).

For Inkpen (2000), the relationship between the knowledge acquired in an alliance is a key element for the subsequent organizational learning process. Accessing the knowledge of the partner requires a good policy of shared decisions, where the commitments on the benefits that are generated are stipulated and where the recognition of the opportunist behavior of the partner is facilitated (Saxton, 1997).

Achieving the objectives proposed in each of the previous phases is a process that is not without difficulties. Once the key processes of our work have been analyzed, we will identify the most relevant problems of one of the most important stages of the GCO, such as the transfer of knowledge, as well as different alternatives to solve them so that the subsequent learning process is more cash.

In some cases, alliances fail or their results are lower than expected because there are some problems in sharing knowledge among the companies involved. In this section we try to collect the main problems associated with knowledge and their resolution methods.

To apply these solutions to the problems of GCO, a series of factors must be assessed, among which are: the creation of an optimal collaboration environment, training, previous experience³, the inclusion in the corporate culture of cooperative behavior, the level of trust, the ability to transform tacit knowledge into explicit and the learning capacity of cooperating companies.

First of all, partners must understand the potential outcome of the partnership and be willing to share knowledge-based capabilities. Next we analyze the problems related to GCO in alliances as well as their possible solutions (see Table 1):

- Cooperation-competition dilemma.- There is a dilemma that has been widely treated by literature (Khanna et al., 1998; Kale et al., 2000; Inkpen, 2004; Oxley and Sampson, 2004) and it is none other than the level of knowledge to be shared in a cooperative agreement. It is clear that the success of an alliance is associated with high levels of cooperation and with the circulation of knowledge and free information among the partners. However, allowing the member access to their own knowledge base can encourage their opportunistic behavior. The solution will be to try to share the highest level of knowledge to promote learning and increase results, while protecting basic skills to avoid opportunistic behaviors and jeopardize the competitive situation of the company.

This dilemma can produce a mutual distrust between the partners. The objective will be to develop techniques and mechanisms to reduce mistrust and opportunism and increase collaboration between partners. Das and Teng (1998) mention that it is important to establish formal agreements on the contribution of resources that are required for the proper functioning of the agreement - for this, it will be necessary to establish an open and clear communication between the partners (Kale et al., 2000) -, as well as the formalization of effective control mechanisms and the generation of trust. Therefore, we can say that trust and respect become essential elements to enhance cooperation (Kale et al., 2000: 217), but if trust in the partner is excessive, the company can become a goal easy for the exploitation of their capabilities by partners (Zeng and Chen, 2003: 588).

Problem	Solutions
Cooperation-competition dilemma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Establishment of formal agreements on the contributions * Effective control mechanisms and trust building * Reduction of the scope of the agreement * Integrated conflict resolution processes
Specificity, complexity tacit character of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Create common space in the alliance * Trust generation * Modification and adaptation of tacit knowledge to the local conditions of the partners * HR practices * Use of Information Technology

Technological diversity and Knowledge DEDD	* Knowledge of the complementary and compatible partner * Use of Information Technology
Governance structure	* Formal Organizational Forms * Organizational independence * Information Technology Support
Cultural barriers for collaboration	* HR practices: incentives, promotion, teamwork * Benchmarking system * Use of Information Technology

Table 1

Source: self made

To solve the problem of the degree of strategic knowledge to share in an alliance Reuer, Zollo and Singh (2002) and Oxley and Sampson (2004) propose the reduction of the scope of the agreement. This implies defining the limits of the product groups, brands, fixed assets or activities in which the partners participate. Finally, mention that the integrated conflict resolution processes have positive effects for the alliance (Kale et al., 2000: 223), especially for the benefits derived from learning (since the idea of justice is transmitted) and protection (improves the strength of the agreement).

- The specificity, complexity and tacit nature of knowledge.- In relation to the problem discussed above, for alliances to meet their objectives it is essential to share specific knowledge among the participating partners. There are some difficulties in relation to transmission and the way of sharing knowledge, especially when it is specific, complex and tacit. This type of knowledge is difficult to maintain and transmit because it depends on context, experience, language and prior knowledge, so it is difficult to explain to another. The same problem arises with knowledge that is specific in a context or culture. Transferring tacit and specific knowledge is an expensive process that takes a lot of time. The common space created in an alliance allows members to share their tacit and explicit knowledge, their skills and their productive processes. Likewise, if an adequate level of trust is generated, it is possible to create and exchange new knowledge, especially tacit, generated in the agreement. This knowledge is absorbed and assimilated by companies, which allows them to increase their capabilities (Inkpen, 1998).

The degree of codification of knowledge, its difficulty or ease to be transmitted also depends on the organizational forms that exist in the environment. Therefore, Lam (1997: 973, 976) tries to relate the codification of knowledge, the culture of society and the functioning of institutions. Believes that the British (Western) have a high degree of articulable knowledge, compared to Asians where the team culture makes the knowledge is in the work groups and it is very difficult to code and transmit it. In this way the transmission of knowledge between them is inefficient. The modification and adaptation of tacit knowledge to the local conditions of the partners will be one of the appropriate strategies to solve this problem.

IT can be used as an aid to try to transmit knowledge, as well as some organizational measures and human resources practices, such as working in inter-company teams, promoting open communication or establishing reward systems, as they can motivate to the company to share and transfer tacit knowledge (Guadamillas, 2001; Oxley and Sampson, 2004).

The importance of IT in the GCO is due to the fact that knowledge, under certain conditions (for example, codifiability), is likely to be treated as an 'object' apt to be divided into different modules, stored and transferred (Zander and Kogut, 1995; Sanchez and Mahoney, 1996).

On the other hand, when knowledge is explicit, it is easier to transfer and share, but they have a lower strategic value than tacit knowledge (Zander and Kogut, 1995). Acquiring this type of knowledge can be the main reason to participate in alliances.

- 3.- Technological and knowledge diversity.- Another important factor to achieve the advantages of collaboration is the technological and knowledge diversity among the partners (Kwak, 2004), defined as the degree to which overlaps occur in their technology portfolios (Oxley and Sampson, 2004). If the technological level of the partners is very different, they will have little knowledge and capacity to share. But when this is similar, its transmission will have no interest since it will not generate value.

Therefore, there must be certain differences in technological capabilities between partners in an alliance (Oxley and Sampson, 2004). Ideally, the knowledge of the partner is complementary and compatible (Inkpen, 1998), that is, that companies have comparable basic knowledge but different specialized knowledge⁴. The heterogeneity of knowledge enhances creativity and innovation in the company, while improving business results.

IT is essential for the adequate coding of knowledge, which facilitates the understanding of the knowledge to be shared by all the partners involved in the agreement (Kogut and Zander, 1992).

4.- Organizational form of the alliance or structure of government.- The lack of common routines, clear lines of authority and less hierarchical organizational forms can make cooperation more difficult. Although all organizational forms are inconvenient, partners must implement one that is optimal according to the nature of the agreements. The more hierarchical forms facilitate the control of processes and results, but involve high costs and more bureaucracy (Oxley and Sampson, 2004).

The governance structure, according to the TCT (Pisano, 1989; Oxley, 1997; Kale et al., 2000; Oxley and Sampson, 2004: 723) is also an important mechanism to achieve a balance in the cooperation-competition dilemma. This is especially difficult when companies are direct competitors in the final product market or in their strategic resources.

To solve organizational problems, alliances must have formal governance structures, and to the extent possible, organizational independence. In addition, the mechanisms and systems that facilitate the process of sharing and transmitting knowledge can be very useful to eliminate barriers to cooperation. Thus, IT will facilitate communication in the alliance by reducing negative effects of inadequate governance structures. Pisano, Russo and Teece (1998) recommend the adoption of hierarchical and protected government structures in strategic alliances.

5.- Cultural barriers to collaboration.- They are often difficult to detect and resolve but have a strong influence on the success of alliances. One of the most important is the culture of companies that promote and reward individualism, so that workers are reluctant to share what they know since they will not have incentives (Hansen and Nohria, 2004: 25).

Another cultural barrier arises when managers and workers consider that the time dedicated to communication and collaboration with other members is not productive. This lack of communication makes it difficult to identify both problems and the right people to solve them.

Human resources practices, such as incentives, promotion, selection and recruitment systems and teamwork, facilitate the transmission of knowledge and can help solve cultural problems related to the rejection of collaboration. Also, benchmarking systems can help identify and learn the best practices of the partners, so it is necessary to work together to achieve the objectives of the alliances.

For their part, IT can contribute to the reduction of differences in terminology and language of knowledge to be shared by partners, thus facilitating their objective of achieving competitive advantages.

Due to the importance of IT in the problems raised, we consider it convenient to deepen its analysis. Within business cooperation, IT can play a fundamental role as a support tool in its operation and, to some extent, help explain the spectacular growth of collaboration agreements and strategic networks in recent years (Gulati, Nohria and Zaheer, 2000). IT is very useful for the transmission and storage of knowledge or the evaluation and control of the results of activities, key aspects in the operation of an alliance.

Thus, the advantages of the GCO and the application of IT in alliances (or networks) are related, in the first place, to the management of the social capital of the company as an intensive resource in knowledge and information by each partner.

Second, the role of IT is of fundamental importance in facilitating and supporting the processes of sharing knowledge and information among partners, which generate specific routines of the relationship, and the possibility of obtaining relational income (Dyer and Singh, 1998). In many cases, these routines make alliance partners the largest and most important source of ideas and information, which can generate a stream of innovations. However, organizational differences, knowledge structures and the structure of available IT influence how knowledge will be managed between organizations in order to leverage the competencies and experiences of participants (Schmaltz, Hagenhoff and Kaspar, 2004).

The advantages of alliances can arise at two different levels: (1) individual, through the creation of value that arises from the dynamics of the interaction between the management of the alliances and the social capital in each company, and (2) dyadic, through the creation and improvement of knowledge sharing routines. These can be defined as “regular patterns of interaction between companies that allow the transfer, recombination or creation of specialized knowledge, and are institutionalized as inter-company processes that are designed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between partners” (Dyer and Singh, 1998: 665).

Conclusions

The main objective of this work was to analyze the importance of the GCO process within cooperative agreements, as well as highlight its relevance in determining their efficiency. Cooperative agreements can be a mechanism for the company to create and maintain a competitive advantage, as it provides advantages such as: access to resources and complementary capabilities, entry into new markets, increased competitive power of the company, economies of scale and scope and increases in learning.

The main factors to achieve these objectives and obtain advantages of cooperation have been the generation of adequate inter-organizational learning and the development of the transmission of knowledge in alliances. The theoretical approaches of resources, knowledge and social capital recognize strategic and social aspects for the establishment of alliances that the typical economic approaches that analyze this question are not able to gather.

Some important problems that arise in strategic alliances increase the difficulty of achieving an effective development of collaborative activities, in which knowledge is shared and transmitted.

The main one is the specificity and the tacit nature of knowledge that hinders its storage and transmission. In addition, distrust between partners and cultural barriers to collaboration have the consequence that they are more reluctant to participate in cooperative agreements. An excessive technological diversity of knowledge among the partners can present a problem for their learning. Finally, the governance structure of an agreement must be adapted to the objectives of the alliance and the specific requirements of the companies.

To solve these problems we have proposed some solutions, such as the use of IT, the use of some organizational measures and human resources practices and the reduction of the scope of the agreement. Finally, it is important to consider all the solutions explained, because currently, the advantages based on the traditional economies of scale and scope are gradually reducing their importance. Alliances direct companies to build competitive advantages with their partners, which they cannot build in isolation without the help of their rivals.

The main factor for this is the development of an efficient process in which knowledge is shared and transmitted, since it allows companies to achieve and maintain competitive advantages over their rivals. Therefore, we believe that cooperation will be an increasingly used strategy in the future.

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