Knowledge Management Process in Multi-Site Provision of Service

Rodrigo Valio Dominguez Gonzalez, University of Campinas, Limeira, Brazil

ABSTRACT

Differently from manufacturing operations, which have a combination of tangible and intangible resources, services are characterized by intensive competencies and knowledge. Several services intensive organizations present a model called multi sites. In this model, the service provider company has several work teams, called in this work full service sites, installed full time at client sites. The challenge for these organizations is to manage the knowledge acquired in these various sites in order not to lose the knowledge created from the improvement, problem solving and innovations implemented in the processes of customer. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the stages that constitute the knowledge management process in the multi-sites service provider company context. The research results point to a model based on joint working between sites and full service center for excellence. The latter’s mission is to identify, assess, store and distribute knowledge among sites, acting as a department that centralizes the knowledge management process.

KEYWORDS

Center for Excellence, Knowledge Management, Multi-Sites, Network, Service

1. INTRODUCTION

Service operations have been placed in a prominent position in the economy. This importance is confirmed by Korczynski et al. (2000), who emphasize the tendency of modern corporations to combine the production of physical goods to services and report that, currently, services represent a great opportunity for organizations to be differentiated and gain competitive advantage.

Differently from operations focused on the production of physical goods, services are characterized as labor intensive. Thus, the employee’s knowledge and skills stands out even more on any other organizational asset (Evanschtizky et al., 2007).

It is widely recognized in the literature the value of knowledge to lead and sustain competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). One should take into account that much of the service operations are labor intensive and thus, the knowledge and expertise makes it the most valuable asset to these organizations.

Not all necessary knowledge to provide a service can be developed and accumulated in a single firm (Edvardsson and Oskarsson, 2011). Many organizations focused on provision of service operate in a format of providing services sites. In each site provision of service are developed many knowledge and expertise. When the organization fails to manage this knowledge, diluted among several sites, it becomes less competitive and loses a significant portion of its assets.

Given the importance of the knowledge for the increase the competitiveness, knowledge needs to be managed within the structure of organizations. Knowledge management (KM) is mainly focused on connecting people, processes and technology in order to expand the corporate knowledge (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2001).

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Chong & Chong (2009), Smedlund (2009), Cormican & O’Sullivan (2003), Durst & Edvardsson (2012) and Liao et al. (2011) define KM as any process that encompasses the stages of acquisition, storage and distribution of knowledge and skills, without necessarily being labeled as KM. Such processes related to KM should be able to maximize access to knowledge throughout the organization, accelerating the learning of new employees and building more knowledge (intellectual capital) in order to increase organizational capacity (Anantatmula & Kanungo, 2010).

The exchange of knowledge is the central aspect of KM and thus organizations must engage in the development of a structure that facilitates and encourages the appropriate creation, sharing and use of knowledge (Smedlund, 2009; Durst & Edvardsson, 2012).

Much of the knowledge is not coded explicitly, remaining unspoken, manifesting as competences and skills of individuals (Rechberg & Syed, 2014; Billington & Davidson, 2012). Thus, it becomes essential for organizations to create environments that encourage and facilitate knowledge sharing, emphasizing the role of the organizational structure and culture as facilitators of this process (Pandey & Duta, 2013).

Taking into consideration the importance of knowledge for service companies, the main objective of this article is to analyze the stages that constitute the KM process in the multi-site service provider company context. Thus, this paper has the mission to answer the following question: How does a company that providing service for many clients manage their knowledge in order to make it an institutionalized asset?

Many studies deal with the KM process (Durst & Edvardsson, 2012; Gonzalez & Martins, 2014; Lee et al., 2012; Liao et al, 2011), however, there is a theoretical gap about the KM process in multi sites provision of service environment. This type of organization has several sites provision of service where a variety of knowledge is developed. The success of this type of service operation is related to the implementation of an organizational process that allows the identification, retention, storage and distribution of knowledge, promoting its transformation (Scarso & Bolisani, 2012).

Besides this introduction, the paper is structured in four other sections. The next section addresses the theoretical framework used to base the field research. Then, we present the methodology adopted for the field research. Subsequently, we present and analyze the case of a service provider company. And finally, we discuss the final remarks.

2. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

It is a known fact that KM is one of the principal means of achieving competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). All organizations need to process knowledge in order to promote their strategy, and KM is the process responsible for such processing. These different visions denote the diversity of subjects surrounding the KM. Two main characteristics can be observed from these approaches. The first addresses the KM as a subject restricted to the IT scope. One of the main problems about the contribution of IT on KM is the difficult and/or impossibility to register the tacit knowledge of individuals, because it is impossible to absorb or scan the contents of the human mind and store it in a database (Bhatt, 2002). Other approaches, in turn, are based on organizational development, with regard to the organizational structure and culture to facilitate and enhance the interaction between individuals, fostering knowledge sharing (Rechberg & Syed, 2014; Rowley, 2001).

KM should combine IT with the organizational development, including the organizational culture and structure, being an activity that develops, stores and transfers knowledge, aiming to provide the necessary information so that the organization members take the right decisions (Lee et al., 2012; Alavi & Leidner, 2001).
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