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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the relationship between Knowledge Management (KM) and its practices in fulfilling the functional and operational expanse of Organizational Learning (OL). The paper finds that the effect of KM is irreplaceable. But it is not equivalent to promoting self-critical reflection, the questioning of everyday routines and patterns of action (expressed in leadership and milieu knowledge), which should lead to innovations and finally to the generation of strategic competitive advantages.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management: An Answer to Turbulence:

Knowledge as a competitive factor has made the leap into the headlines of the business press since the late 1980s and massively since the beginning of the 90s. Concepts such as information and knowledge society as well as Knowledge Management (KM) have become indispensable in the headlines. There is no doubt about the special importance of knowledge in the company. While the potential for success of other resources in the enterprise seems to be limited, knowledge is the only resource that can multiply or specify in use and justify the uniqueness of a company or its non-imitability of its products like no other resource. The increasing turbulence, caused by expansion and fragmentation tendencies, by globalization and internationalization, makes management representatives look for new opportunities and risks for companies. As a result, knowledge-intensive products / services and new markets are considered as risks the rapid obsolescence of own knowledge and the new competitors (Nonaka, 1994).

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Against this background, KM in organizations is the task of identifying all relevant knowledge potentials and their systematic exploitation by optimizing the flow of knowledge along the core processes. Persuaded that a pragmatic further development of the theories and perspectives of Organizational Learning (OL) some necessary instruments were developed that deal with topics such as identification, acquisition, development, distribution, use, and to preserve knowledge (Ghani, 2011). Examples of such instruments are specialized databases, for example, 'knowledge maps' or 'yellow pages' for experts. The focus is on the idea that the bewildering amount of data and information has to be utilized in a suitable form of systematization and categorization, if possible, with increased use of information technologies. Thus, the users can, hopefully, acquire and generate competitive knowledge from both internal and external sources. In addition, the aim is to replace the knowledge that is usually tied to people from the knowledge carriers and to transfer them to the availability of the company. From this perspective, KM often comes into practice as information, data, and software management. In summary, the use of such tools means that more innovations are made, the company stands out from the competition, uniqueness and non-imitability are developed and thus ultimately strategic competitive advantages arise.

Table 1. Conceptual Differences between Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning

Scale	Object	Subject	Process	Goals	Product
Organizational Learning	Surrounding Knowledge leadership skills as a meta knowledge about dealing with expert and product knowledge	Organization	Decentralized delegation to system members	Explication of knowledge for the purpose of reflection Checking the legitimacy of knowledge assets	Generation of: <i>new expert knowledge</i> <i>new product knowledge</i>
Knowledge Management	Expert product knowledge	Management assigned staff department	Centrally planned and controlled Central Knowledge Management and Distribution	Exploration of knowledge for the purpose of collection, systematization and preparation of knowledge through decontextualization. Comparison with the existing environmental and leadership knowledge	Quantitative extension, order of and access to: <i>existing expert knowledge</i> <i>existing product knowledge</i>

Indirectly it is demanded, organizations have to go on the way to a learning organization. If we summarize the intentions namely, the use of these instruments should not just spark fires, but trigger lasting changes. Also targeted are OL processes. Correspondingly, measures of KM have to accept the question of whether they achieve or at least support the ultimate goals.

Organizational Learning: A Stowaway of the Knowledge Management: However, OL is not so harmless: learning processes always include the possibility of the unexpected, incomplete controllability and profound change. Structures, roles and functions can be called into question, the self-image of a company and its players are disturbed. OL brings uncertainty to a company. In that sense, OL is an atypical process, alien to organizational logic. It can be assumed that social systems, such as companies, tend to avoid and reduce insecurity, favoring stability and repetition (Ruggles, 1998). With the establishment of organizational routines this can be served. Guaranteeing reliability is an invaluable value of social systems, and from this they draw a distinction from the environment and identity. If the task is formulated for the system members to question the consistency of their own organization, an essential basis for cooperating is put to the disposition. OL as a strategic program triggers fears. If KM is seen as the associated gateway, then the chances of realization would have to decrease according to the above logic.

Knowledge Management: Success Expectedly or Unexpectedly?

Against this background, it seems unlikely at first that concepts such as KM prevail on the "market". Why a concept such as OL, which cannot be anchored sustainably in companies, be replaced by another if the latter has similar intentions and claims? It could be assumed that KM beyond the leadership speeches in the foreseeable future also enter into the background of scientific discussion, as it attempts to mutate companies to learning organizations. Contrary to expectations, however, the subject of KM is experiencing a sustained boom, and corresponding activities are on the agenda. The view on the semantics provides clarification, in particular the questioning of the conceptual investment of KM. Considering the qualities of the structural elements of the practice of OL and the practice of KM, significant differences become apparent. The following table gives an overview; which starts by summarizing our reflections on difference. The compilation makes clear why the two concepts can cause different connotations among potential users and clients: If the

Forms of Knowledge: A Necessary Distinction: In order to clarify the scope and effectiveness of KM in contrast to the concept of OL, a distinction of knowledge forms (Prusack, 1997) can be enlightened in more detail. *Product knowledge* is explicit and refers to products, processes and the served markets of a company. In terms of content, it is determined by the question to which problem solving a product contributes in which form, which technologies are suitable in the sense of the most error-free and cost-saving production possible. It also includes the sequence in which the production steps must take place in order to ensure sufficient standardization while retaining variation possibilities. Finally, product knowledge also includes the entrepreneurial ability to estimate when a product's contribution to problem solving is no longer sufficient and product sales are no longer guaranteed. Product knowledge originates in an organization from different sources: employees with different professions, functions and tasks, customers, consultants and partners.

Expert knowledge includes knowledge about the relevant environments of an organization. The selection and deployment of expertise is usually specialized, viz., certain departments, agencies or external consultants. This knowledge is necessarily explicit and includes information about how business elements in organizations can be designed differently than before.

Leadership knowledge refers to the real hierarchical structure of an organization, the actual coordination of the division of labor, the organization's standards of authority and discipline and the motivation possibilities of employees. As meta knowledge it passes indirectly, the action, and determines how to proceed with the expert and product knowledge in the organization. Leadership knowledge is rarely more explicit knowledge, and its explication comes, what will be shown later, in a different way and with different consequences than those of the expert and product knowledge along.

Environmental knowledge has similar characteristics to leadership. It is rarely explicated and can only be understood in the organization or its environment through concrete experience. For example, what expectations can be addressed to whom, whose initiatives are successful, how to controls work and how to manage, what intentions are made to whom in which language? It cannot be clearly distinguished from management knowledge and social knowledge.

Social knowledge is hardly mentioned in organizations, but it acts as a permanent framework of all perceptions and

interpretations. Correspondingly, social knowledge seems self-evident and it is hardly ever recognized how it influences organizational decision-making processes. This knowledge is relevant to organizations insofar as it limits the general framework and defines what an organization is, how it works, what standards of conduct apply within and outside the organization, what to expect from a member of an organization, and what legal requirements (e.g. employment contracts, sales contracts, company forms) apply to organizations.

Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning: Reflections on Difference

In light of the discussion of the various forms of knowledge, the concepts of KM and OL can now be differentiated as:

- The scope of KM is smaller, above all, the organization is excluded as a reflection object, the explication of environmental and leadership knowledge and its questioning is not subject matter
- The goal of KM is therefore shorter; it lies more in the preservation, enhancement or order of expert and product knowledge in the context of what is permitted by the existent milieu and management knowledge
- Content orientation is limited to product and expert knowledge, process control is centralized and focused on dedicated groups.

Instruments of Knowledge Management

From the notions used above, KM aims to increase efficiency, reflected in key features of the instruments.

Reduction to specific forms of knowledge: Not all knowledge that exists in principle can be processed with reasonable effort. It probably makes little sense to collect any special knowledge. From an organizational point of view, it is indispensable that the necessary knowledge for an adequate task management can be made generally available. Consequently, there is a limitation to expert knowledge and knowledge about products, technologies and production processes. This is immediately accompanied by the subject matter experts.

Decontextualization and lexicalization of knowledge: The collected knowledge is isolated from the concrete contexts of application and prepared in general form; this is necessary so that third parties, especially novices, can take over this knowledge. Correspondingly, this knowledge presents itself in the form of a lexical inventory, in which knowledge components are compiled predominantly as an additive.

Deficit coverage as a model of knowledge acquisition: The inventories of knowledge serve to cover a self-diagnosed or externally diagnosed deficit. The insinuated idea of the learning process thus contains the elements: (a) of a learner who has a deficit to fill, (b) a well-defined knowledge gap for which there are exactly matching knowledge elements (c) the learner is responsible for comprehensively learning the already existing knowledge. Exploratory and self-directed learning is not part of the program. In other words, knowledge is not generated by learners, but taken over. Often, the acquisition of knowledge is also decoupled from immediate practice.

Knowledge Forms and their Ability to Communicate

It has already been suggested that KM focuses on specific forms of knowledge. One reason lies in the unequal possibilities of processing the different forms of knowledge. Another cause becomes clear when one looks at the patterns that successfully build and communicate leadership and milieu knowledge. Typically, the teaching of leadership and milieu knowledge takes place in small circles and in direct exchange. The interactions do not follow classical pedagogical patterns, but knowledge and insight are generated jointly by the participants. The participants all see themselves as experts who talk about the discussion of knowledge, which they constantly present to each other and lead each other to advice. Joint generation instead of individually isolated deficit coverage is a learning model that is incompatible with the predominantly propagated methods of KM. If one were to learn leadership and milieu knowledge "normally", as outlined, prepared and conveyed above, one would not do justice to the specific character of this form of knowledge. Reproducing reception based on written documentation is just as ineffective as classical lecture. Leadership and milieu knowledge are thus not suitable to be prepared in lexical form and made accessible to the situation-unspecific mediation.

The diversity of the various forms of knowledge is therefore momentous when one thinks of the preparation, transfer and learning. Knowledge has to be called up by the knowledge carriers before it can actually be presented. In the case of factual product and expert knowledge, this is usually quite feasible. However, if one attempts to retrieve leadership and milieu knowledge in analogous form, one encounters a peculiar phenomenon. The corresponding knowledge initially seems to be simply available to the knowledge carriers: they make strongly generalized, highly condensed statements in a striking manner. These are, according to the regular information of the knowledge carriers, the condensate of a long practice. Linguistically, these statements sometimes appear in the form of memorabilia or proverbs. The statements are substantiated and illustrated by the description of highly specific events and prototypical anecdotes (Wei Zheng, 2005). The knowledge carriers always emphasize the merely heuristic value of their explanations, the high degree of situational dependence as well as the indispensability to build up their own experiences. From the perspective of the organization, the difficult explicability of leadership and milieu knowledge is not even undesirable. Leadership and milieu knowledge have the function of stabilizing and continuation of organizational processes and functional processes. If they are addressed in a critically investigative manner, this will stabilize an essential, if not the central, basis of organizational legitimacy. The critical discussion of leadership and milieu knowledge always calls this question (Blackler, 1995): the contingency of supposedly secure and shared knowledge becomes apparent, beliefs, positions and positional power become visible, the unpredictability of the market and competition becomes apparent. At this point, it is becoming clear that KM can not only convey the specifics of leadership and milieu knowledge, but also not convey them at all. For incorporating leadership and milieu knowledge into the curriculum requires the willingness of the enterprise to conceive of itself as a learning organization that disposes of its own foundations. If KM were to routinely bring leadership and milieu knowledge into the canon of learning content would have opened the door to the learning organization. A system destabilizing effect is

basically not to be excluded and that is not the intention of KM. It is about the identification, acquisition, development, distribution, use, preservation and evaluation of existing or of suitable knowledge in the sense of optimization.

The Prospects of the KM and OL

Most KM measures do not actively engage the majority of company members in the process of knowledge generation; rather, they remain consumers who have the task to fill their own knowledge deficits. This order also remains separate from the actual work orders. Knowledge generation and appropriation activities do not become part of the work task, but remain alien to individual and common activities. This development is supported by another factor: KM remains in the responsibility of fewer positions and people. There is therefore a justified risk that KM will be instrumental, alien to the work assignment and not an integral part of the corporate culture. The fact that only selected positions are responsible for the maintenance and expansion of the body of knowledge is momentous.

Thus, the limits of knowledge are not changeable by the company members, at least not permanently. While allowing the development of local knowledge, it is the explicit task of knowledge managers to identify and make available locally generated knowledge. This gives rise to two phenomena of unpredictable significance: On the one hand, knowledge becomes an "object of desire" for employee where knowledge becomes an internal competitive advantage, which gives the company members advantages in the internal labor market as long as this knowledge remains individually bound. There is no doubt that knowledge is a valuable asset, but it cannot be in the company's interest to step up an in-house distribution struggle. On the other hand, knowledge, before being released for distribution, is, so to speak, legitimized by a delegated body, authorized as useful for the purposes of the enterprise. The idea of a selecting and censoring entity is not very far. The fact that knowledge is "managed" by specially mandated bodies is a meaningful signal with ultimately unpredictable side effects.

Conclusion

KM appears as a domesticated variant of organizational learning. Thus, there is much to suggest that it is so successful because it does not seek to change the organization, but uses its inherent tendency for reproduction and inertia. However, KM is indispensable for specific operational purposes: for the introduction of newcomers or the training of apprentices, a well-functioning KM is stress-reducing and highly economical. It supports a comparable introduction in terms of content, rapid integration and functionality, secures communication and serves to maintain the organizational culture. Training, socialization and diffusion of existing knowledge are organizational preserving and optimizing functions. It can be assumed that the limited explicability of leadership and milieu knowledge is even the cause of their particular effect. Leadership and milieu knowledge are seen as the object of OL which constitutes the characteristics of successful companies that are difficult or impossible to imitate.

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