

Chapter 25

Knowledge Management as a Tool for Influencing Customers: Revisited

Richard Brunet-Thornton

University of Economics, Czech Republic

Vladimír Bureš

City University of Seattle, Slovakia

Petra Marešová

University of Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

Tereza Otčenášková

University of Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

This chapter revisits an earlier published model of the Cost-Benefit Analysis method focused on KM projects. Although it continues to centre on the customer and the general market environment as knowledge sources used to evaluate the appropriateness of a Knowledge Management (KM) project, it expands the discussion to incorporate the latest research on this topic. In addition, the tangible and intangible benefits of a successful KM deployment continue to be stressed; it highlights the various barriers and sets recommendations that may be pursued. Given the on-going nature of this condition in the Czech Republic, the authors continue to pursue an active research protocol.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology and globalisation create change in society while rivalry and competition in the business arena rises. This serves as a call to action for many firms that can no longer simply convince customers to buy whatever they sell. To rise above this challenge, enterprises have to understand their customers as former techniques prove no longer viable. This chapter discusses potential solutions to issues relative to successful KM implementation based on the national

experience. It offers an overview of possibilities to the monitoring of benefits associated with the latter. Moreover, an existing evaluation system is applied to KM that includes both a description and the particular steps and activities required for implementation. To facilitate comprehension, illustrative examples are provided for each stage. The authors' intention is that the nature of this chapter and the discussion herein appeals to both the academician as well as the KM practitioner especially those individuals and organisations resident in the Czech Republic.

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This chapter comprises four main sections: KM benefits; KM benefit-evaluation; the current situation in the Czech Republic, and KM assessment methods. Although many readers are familiar with the concepts and tools examined in this chapter, the discussion is of particular interest given recent research specific to Czech small and medium-sized enterprises. As mentioned previously, many of the details serve to enforce the practicality of the various concepts thereby rendering them more conducive to management and/or KM practitioner. From a practical perspective, the chapter serves as a working guideline.

KM benefits are reviewed as to their influence on the enterprise and in turn, how they affect the customer or end user of the products and services. From a Czech stance, findings compiled from questionnaires substantiate the national view. The following section reassesses the various methods available for evaluation purposes. Integral to this chapter in that it exposes the current Czech context, the third segment analyses the various factors at play within this Central European country. Lastly, KM assessment instruments are appraised using concrete examples and a case study.

CUSTOMER-RELATED KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

There are several concepts that assist to understand the customer and design relationships. However, this is no easy task as the customer knowledge is subjective and difficult to extract and manage. To facilitate the process, Knowledge Management becomes a suitable option. It not only improves customer understanding, but equally business processes performance. It enables effective responses to customer needs in a timely manner with a better quality of service. Based on this premise, Srisamran and Ractham (2014) further develop the concept of Customer-Centric Knowledge Creation as the process for the creation of knowledge based on customer knowledge within the Customer

Relationship Management (CRM) context. These are often enterprise-wide, customer-centric, technology-driven, and cross-functional. The main objectives of this process are to enable organisations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the customer, embed customer knowledge into organisational knowledge, and create a customer-focused mind-set in organisational members. Reformulated, it is to sustainably create knowledge focused on customer knowledge in an enterprise. Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) has many domain applications. For instance, conceptualisation of knowledge leadership and customer knowledge management within a project context is known but still rudimentary. Therefore, Yang et al. (2014) conducted research with the following objectives. Firstly, to assess the associations among knowledge leadership, customer knowledge management, precision instrument sales project, and organisational performance. Secondly, to determine whether project performance mediates the effect of CKM on organisational performance. Thirdly, to examine the role of data complexity in the relationship between CKM and project performance. Their study empirically investigates a sample of precision instrument sales projects in the Taiwanese high-tech industry. The findings indicate that adoption of knowledge leadership is associated with CKM. In addition, these analyses suggest that implementation of CKM influences organisational performance through project performance. The results also indicate that the positive relationship between CKM and project performance depends on data complexity. Furthermore, Soto-Acosta et al. (2014) extend their previous KM studies by analysing factors that impact Web Knowledge Sharing in small- and medium-sized enterprises. They develop an integrative research model, which analyses these relationships using structural equation modelling on a data set of 535 Spanish companies. Results suggest that technological and organisational factors, IT expertise and commitment-based human resources practice, positively influence web

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