

Chapter 2

“Shaken, Not Stirred”: Knowledge Transfer in the Hospitality Industry

Bernardete Dias Sequeira
University of Algarve, Portugal

João Filipe Marques
University of Algarve, Portugal

António Serrano
University of Évora, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The tourism and hospitality industry depends heavily on the ways its workers use their knowledge in order to provide the best possible experiences to clients. Hence, it is of paramount importance for all tourism organizations, particularly hospitality ones, to have a knowledge management approach that allows them to retain their best workers and therefore keep their clients satisfied. The main objectives of the research presented in this chapter were to analyze how hospitality organizations have been managing their organizational knowledge—namely, how they stimulate knowledge transfer between individuals and groups within the hotels—as well as to identify the best practices and new solutions given the challenges presented by the knowledge society. This chapter presents some of the results concerning knowledge transfer of a larger empirical study on knowledge management in the hospitality industry based on three case studies in three different hotel groups operating in the Algarve, Portugal.

INTRODUCTION

As Manuel Castells (2002) wrote, one of the main issues of contemporary society is the use and application of information and knowledge. We live in a society whose material bases have suffered a revolution in information and communication technologies — a revolution that induced in-depth changes in social relations, political systems, and values systems. Whereas in the industrial society work was based on physical activity and its results were tangible, in the post-industrial society most jobs are related to the

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“Shaken, Not Stirred”

use of computer systems that need specialized knowledge. Physical capacity has been substituted by intellectual skills (Fialho, Silva, & Saragoça, 2011). Given this new reality, all workers and professionals must constantly renew their knowledge. Therefore, promotion of the creation, acquisition, and diffusion of new knowledge using organizational tools specifically developed for these purposes is of vital importance in all organizational contexts (Nonaka & Konno, 1998).

To manage knowledge — e.g. to find and stimulate intellectual capital (IC), to store it, to sell it, and/or to share it — became a critical economic activity for individuals, companies, and even nations (Stewart, 1999). Hospitality and tourism organizations are not exempted from this trend. The tourism and hospitality industry depend heavily on the ways its workers use their knowledge in order to give clients the best possible experiences (Zaei, 2014). Hence, it is of paramount importance for all tourism organizations, particularly hospitality ones, to have a knowledge management approach that allows them to retain their best workers and therefore keep their clients satisfied.

The main objectives of the research presented in this chapter were to analyze how hospitality organizations have been managing their organizational knowledge — namely, how they stimulate knowledge transfer between individuals and groups within the hotels — as well as to identify the best practices and new solutions given the challenges presented by the knowledge society. This chapter presents some of the results concerning knowledge transfer of a larger empirical study on knowledge management in the hospitality industry based on three case studies in three different hotel groups operating in the Algarve, Portugal.

ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE: CONCEPTUAL SPECIFICATIONS

One of the most important contributions to the clarification of the concept of “organizational knowledge” was Nonaka and Takeuchi’s book *The knowledge creating company: how Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation* (1995). In this book, the authors, largely inspired by Michael Polanyi’s text *The tacit dimension* (1966), recognize unequivocally the distinction between “tacit” and “explicit” knowledge. According to the perspective initially developed by Polanyi, people can only acquire new knowledge when they face concrete situations that provide them with new experiences. Those experiences are internalized, recurring to concepts the individuals already knew. When facing new experiences, people adapt previously known concepts and reinterpret their language. That is why all knowledge is based on a tacit element (Polanyi, 1966).

Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in human action and the involvement of individuals in practical contexts. It consists in a personal knowledge that is hardly transferable through verbal language. People know more than they can transmit, not because of a lack of ideas or verbal competences but because often their knowledge goes beyond language possibilities (Spender, 2001). Explicit knowledge, in turn, is an organized set of information, transmitted in a clear language, which can include numbers and diagrams (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997). Each of these types of knowledge represents the two faces of the same coin; depending on each other, they mutually reinforce each other.

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997), this knowledge typology is based fundamentally on its accessibility. On the one hand, explicit knowledge is produced from formally collected data and stored information. It may be written or taped. It can be stored in books, libraries, patents, databases, reports, procedure manuals, regulations, etc. It is easily identified, seized, shared, and applied. On the other hand, tacit knowledge is highly personal and difficult to formalize. This kind of knowledge is deeply embodied

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