

Chapter 7

Innovation and Knowledge in Academia

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ABSTRACT

It has recently become very popular among academics to study the process of knowledge transfer within their own organization, with the aim of improving their innovation and performance on a general scope. Knowledge can be divided into two main groups: “explicit” and “tacit” knowledge. The main interest lies in tacit knowledge, since it is one that includes the specific “know-how” of an organization. The cooperation between the different units of an organization promotes the transfer of knowledge between the different organizational areas and positions the departments in an ideal situation to promote innovation. To understand the evolution of the scientific production in terms of innovation and knowledge up until now, the authors conducted a bibliometric analysis of research on this topic collected on the Web of Science. The results show a growing interest in the relationship of both topics due to the fact that the number of publications is an upward trend.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, both innovation and knowledge have become enormously interesting to academics and professionals who are looking to make use of their fundamental concepts (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019; Suominen et al., 2019). Especially companies’ survival in the 21st century depend on knowledge, information systems and innovative strategy. However, Tushman & Nadler (1986) some decades ago already stated that competitive advantage could be obtained not only by managing effectively today resources and capabilities, but also creating innovation for tomorrow.

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The existing relationship between the creation of knowledge and the promotion of innovation in the organizations is a key issue in strategic terms and in the creation of a long-term sustainable advantage (Teece et al., 1997; Neirotti & Pesce, 2019). Thereupon, intangible assets are increasingly becoming the key asset of any business.

According to Grant (1996), knowledge represents most of the added value of an organization. In other words, it is one that understands the skills and “practical knowledge” of the production tasks of the organization (Grant, 1996). On the other hand, innovation is a way of creating knowledge in the sphere of an organization (Koo, 2019). The term innovation was primarily defined by Schumpeter (1935), although the concept has evolved over time and a number of other authors have contributed to the original definition. According to Schumpeter, innovation is product, process and organisational changes that originate from the difference in combination of existing resources and technologies. The application of these resources to different contexts is therefore understood as innovation (Urbancova, 2013).

Innovation cannot be defined only as the treatment of information and search for solutions to organizational problems, but rather, it is the process in which the company defines the problems it has to solve, to later offer a solution through the creation of new knowledge (Nonaka, 1994).

The departments within an organization can create synergies of knowledge among themselves and benefit from the knowledge developed by other areas. The cooperation and joint collaboration between the different units promotes the transfer of knowledge between the different organizational areas (Tsouri, 2019). This fact encourages at the same time the creation of synergies in terms of knowledge, and positions the departments in an ideal situation to promote innovation (Tsai, 2001, Kogut and Zander, 1992, Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998).

Organizations must guarantee the transfer of knowledge not only between different departments, but also between individuals. In this way, the creation of shared knowledge can be achieved as well as innovative proposals (Chiambaretto, Massé and Mirc, 2019; Cohendet et al., 1999, Jansen et al., 2005). In this sense, knowledge intermediaries called literally “knowledge brokers” are defined as key elements whose role is to act as an intermediary in the process of knowledge transfer between different units included within an organization (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997).

In addition, the exchange of knowledge is closely related to the company’s performance and competitive advantage (Kogut and Zander, 1992; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), and in particular to the capacity for innovation (Chiambaretto et al., 2019; Wijk et al., 2008).

According to Baum, Löff and Nabavi (2019), there is a complementary effect between the generation of internal knowledge through innovation and the acquisition of external knowledge. In the same way, they place special emphasis on the relevance of internal capacity to absorb external knowledge, with the ultimate goal of promoting innovation (Zhang et al., 2019). For these authors, the elements of internal knowledge are the R & D and innovation activities. In other words, they are the result of a company’s continuous and constant commitment to strive to create new knowledge.

In both academic and research terms, it is highly interesting to be able to study the research that deal with the same subject, in this case, about innovation and knowledge, and group them so that the reader can see at a glance which are the main trends and evolution (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004; Merigó et al., 2016). In the last decades, the scientific publications have become a key indicator in order to measure the quality and the state of the art of an investigation (Ekanayake et al., 2019) in an area of study, and the impact that generates this research in its environment (Gómez et al, 2005). Therefore, the bibliometric analysis is presented as a tool able to bring information about the global results of a research

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