

## Chapter 12

# Conceptual Model for Corporate Universities

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### INTRODUCTION

In today's corporate surroundings, business organizations are facing increasingly complex and volatile circumstances, characterized by rapid change. More and more, knowledge is critical for individual success in our information society. Consequently, processes related to its acquisition and management tend to have great value to specialists in the field of learning and training.

Learning from knowledge and experience accumulated in the past contributes to improvements

in performing business practices and processes and to the creation of knowledge assets implicitly stored in its results. As ongoing learning and sharing of knowledge lead to innovation (Law & Ngai, 2008), organizational members should have a shared vision to guide them in a common direction, generating tension that leads to learning (Kulkarni & Freeze, 2006). Thus, corporate university (CU) plays an important role as a source for business (Crocetti, 2002). It is a centralized learning utility that manages resources to support a strategic approach to organizational education (Gregg, 2005). This educational model provides a management structure to develop and implement employee learning opportunities aligned with the organization's future learning vision (Gould, 2005).

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In this article, we discuss how effective corporate university initiatives assist in the evolution and management of innovation and contribute to developing sustainable competitive advantages that are necessary for firms to thrive and survive in the dynamics of the global age.

First, as a background of our work, this article provides an overview of corporate universities. Then we present our conceptual model, called 3M Model, and develop its three strategic visions that should be considered to assist the creation and evolution of CU: the motive vision (alignment of corporate learning with business strategies), the model vision (operational approach to organizational education) and the moment vision (the dynamics of the real-time environment). Based on the research of organizational learning, applied in CU context, and knowledge management processes, we interspersed 3M Model with the Hierarchical Model for Knowledge Management as proposed by Prat (2006). This work introduces an useful conceptual tool to evaluate the CU maturity of a given organization and improve its potential role as a strategic and business-led development platform steeped in the dynamics of a real-time environment.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Organizational Learning**

In order to improve information sharing and knowledge generation, organizations need to develop a greater awareness of processes and strategies in organizational learning. The organizations' abilities to continuously leverage and renew their knowledge – in other words, knowledge innovation – make much difference in achieving corporate excellence and competitive advantage (Rademakers, 2005). Depending on the type of innovation – evolutionary or revolutionary – the demands towards relevant knowledge resources vary. An evolutionary innovation requires no

knowledge from external domains, unlike revolutionary innovation that demands knowledge out of the organization's domain (Paukert, Niederée, & Hemmje, 2006). In any case, innovation is a knowledge-intensive process that leads to problem solutions and requires efficient knowledge management.

Although knowledge technology provides a basis for organizational memory and learning, knowledge management strategy should be connected with knowledge assets of the organization in combination with the organization's overall knowledge processing capabilities that comprise knowledge practices and their alignment with its vision and plans (Holsapple & Jones, 2006). On the tactical level, the organization is concerned with identifying and formalizing existing knowledge, acquiring new knowledge for future use, archiving it in organizational memories and creating systems that enable effective and efficient application of knowledge within the organization (Macintosh, Filby, & Kingston, 1999). On the operational level, knowledge is used in everyday practice by professional personnel who need access to the right knowledge, at the right time and at the right location (Crocetti, 2002).

Broadly speaking, learning leads to innovation and it ranges from individual needs to the organization's management of new ways of thinking and process improvement. In essence then, a prerequisite for organizational learning is individual learning, which can be viewed as an ongoing process of forming, storing, retrieving and modifying mental models and schemas in response to the dynamics imposed by a competitive environment (Spector & Davidesen, 2006). Equally important, learning occurring within or by a group, an organization, or any cultural cluster – defined as social learning – includes procedures that enhance the enterprise's ability to adjust to dynamic and unexpected situations and representing important processes that contribute to individual's abilities to understand information,

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