

Understanding the relevance of knowledge flows.
How to realize the benefits of knowledge transfer processes

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Synthesis

Managing and exploiting knowledge flows is an imperative for all firms. Since Drucker's (1969) study, scholars, practitioners, and analysts agree on the importance of production, diffusion, and use of knowledge as a critical driver of the world economy. Consequently, the economic performance of individuals, organizations and countries is considered to be strongly determined by knowledge assets (Phelps, Heidl, and Wadhwa, 2012). Being knowledge tacit or explicit, organizations need to recognize it as a valuable resource and tap into the intelligence and skills of employees in order to create an effective organizational knowledge base and remain competitive in the global marketplace. Consistently, investigating knowledge, how this may be accumulated and then used as well as its consequences for individual and organizational performance is still a hot topic in several fields of research. Starting from this premise, this dissertation proposes four studies on different yet interrelated topics. They are categorized into three research areas: cognition in knowledge-based processes, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer, and knowledge utilization.

As for the first research area, Chapter 3 grounds on social capital theory by relying on the importance of firms' external network to their innovativeness and performance. As economic actions are embedded within larger inter-organizational sets of linkages (Burt, 1992), external contacts play a critical role in the procurement of strategic assets and the identification of critical opportunities. This is particularly crucial when the focus is on top management team members, who are actively involved in the formulation and implementation of strategic decisions (Daily & Schwenk, 1996) while being linked to external entities to the organization. As a result, they are considered as boundary spanners (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). While existing literature has mostly explored the impact of top management team's external information networks on organizational outcomes (e.g.,

Beckman, Bird Schoonhoven, Rottner, and Kim, 2014; Knockaert, Ucbasaran, Wright, and Clarysse, 2011), little research has been done on both the other boundary-spanning activities TMT members engage in in external networks and the mechanisms by which they affect the strategic decision making process within the focal organization.

The second research area (i.e., knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer) inspired the studies included in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Scholars acknowledge that the success of knowledge management activities is strongly linked to intra-organizational knowledge sharing processes, that is to the extent to which employees share what they know with others inside the organization (Connelly, Ford, Turel, Gallupe, and Zweig, 2014; Wang, Noe, and Wang, 2014). This argument is consistent with the idea that individuals' knowledge will not have much impact on the organization unless it is made available to other individuals. Based on this, Chapter 4 suggests that knowledge management benefits from organizational settings that motivate individuals' sharing of intellectual capital (Cabrera, Collins, and Salgado, 2006). Accordingly, it integrates the literature on new organizational forms and on individuals' motivation with the purpose of explaining how such views may affect employees' intra-organizational knowledge sharing behaviors.

Grounding on the literature on organizational learning, Chapter 5 offers a study on the incentives resulting from innovators engaging in strategic partnerships, such as licensing agreements, which, following recent research (e.g., Srivastava & Wang, 2015), allows the licensor to benefit from the vicarious learning opportunities spelled out by its downstream technology buyers. As a result, engaging in licensing-out is likely to reward the licensor by broadening its knowledge base and foster its innovation capability.

The third research area relates to knowledge utilization and is addressed by Chapter 6. Grounding on the assumption that sharing knowledge is not *per se* enough to

provide the organizations with a critical source of competitive advantage, this Chapter contends that, in order for knowledge to lead to superior performance, it has to be applied, utilized to support commercial ends and innovative purposes (Haas & Hansen, 2007). Job design dimensions and individual creativity are investigated in order to understand to what extent they affect employees' knowledge utilization behaviors.

Consistently with this, my dissertation contributes to extant research in four main ways. It advances the literature on the outcomes resulting from top management team members building connections with external actors and the related cognitive processes they ground on to exploit the externally acquired knowledge. It deepens the understanding of the antecedents of knowledge exchange relationships built within the organizations and enriches the literature on the learning processes occurring among firms involved in formal partnerships (i.e. licensing agreements). Finally, it provides empirical evidence on individuals' orientation to apply available knowledge and information for superior performance, while emphasizing the importance of individual creativity and job design dimensions. As a result, it allows to strengthen the understanding of firms' absorptive capacity's main dimensions: both the potential absorptive capacity, which grounds on the acquisition and assimilation of new knowledge, and the realized absorptive capacity, which rather refers to the transformation and utilization of knowledge (Jansen, Van den Bosch, and Volberda, 2005; Zahra & George, 2002).

Keywords: top management team, vicarious learning, knowledge transfer, knowledge utilization.

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