Information and Knowledge Sharing in Industrial Clusters: Theoretical Background and a Case Study

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Abstract: Information and knowledge sharing represents currently usually not sufficiently utilised source of the competitive advantage. If appropriately managed, this should lead to better performance, higher efficiency and improved cooperation and communication within as well as among organisations. The advantages and disadvantages of information and knowledge sharing are discussed. Based on the semi-structured interviews and subsequent statistical analysis, the researched industrial cluster reveals the real practices and enables the comparison with the theoretical prerequisites. The findings prove the ineffectiveness of the sharing processes. Therefore, the recommendations and suggestions for the improvements are provided and emphasised.

1 INTRODUCTION

During the past decades knowledge has emerged as the key to economic success and as a focus of thinking about organizational effectiveness, innovation and growth. Nevertheless, the research question how organizations should encourage and facilitate knowledge sharing to improve organizational performance is still very important. Therefore, the extent and potential of information and knowledge sharing (IKS) associated with organisational performance and activities is examined. Firstly, the general background is provided focused on the importance of knowledge, IKS and clusters. The following section describes the research methodology. Afterwards, the results and findings are discussed. The last part concludes the main implications and recommendations as well as summarises the limitations and areas for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Bartol & Srivastava (2002) define knowledge sharing as the action in which employees diffuse relevant information to others across the organisation. Knowledge sharing is the voluntary dissemination of acquired skills and experience to the rest of the organization (Davenport, 1997; Käser & Miles, 2002) and is the most important part of knowledge management (Bock & Kim, 2002). On the contrary, Lee & Al-Hawamdeh (2002) and Appleyard (1996) emphasise the necessary compensation being expected by the participants for their efforts. Information and knowledge have been recently considered as a critical organizational resource that might provide a sustainable competitive advantage (Foss & Pedersen, 2002). The real transformation to a competitive advantage has to be based on selecting employees who have specific skills, abilities, or competencies with respect to IKS (Jackson et al., 2006). Taking into consideration records in the well-established scientific databases, the information sharing in economic or industrial clusters has not attracted researchers’ attention yet. On the other hand, few studies on knowledge sharing in clusters have already been published (Connell & Thorpe, 2012; Li & Feng, 2011; Wang & Zhou, 2007). These basic processes themselves represent a topic currently studied from multiple perspectives. The variety of approaches and views is associated with many aspects.
6 CONCLUSIONS

Information and knowledge sharing represents an important source of the competitive advantage. Nevertheless, the utilisation of its potential is not sufficient and efficient even within member organisations of one particular cluster. Therefore, these issues require attention and should be supported especially on the individual and organisational level. For these purposes, particular recommendations as well as concepts are introduced to be employed within companies and among themselves.

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