Transfer of Marketing Knowledge in SMEs

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper was to investigate the differences in adolescents' parents' perception regarding the illegal drugs and drugs consumption among the adolescents. In order to carry out the research, a sociological questionnaire was developed, subsequently to a qualitative information obtained by organizing 6 focus groups. The field survey was conducted in the municipality of Arad consisted of polling through the questionnaire technique a number of 204 families of students from 12 high schools. The results showed significant differences at thresholds of less than 0.05 between the group with high school and university degrees for variable knowledge and symptoms, between the parent group of Catholic religion and the other two groups (Orthodox and neo-Protestant) for knowledge and drug variables and also significant differences depending of the family structure. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between groups regarding the financial level of the families and the living environment.

During the research there was also followed the perspective of the parents of adolescents on the most used drugs among the students: in their opinion, the most used drugs are marijuana and ethnobotanical, with 120, respectively 113 points, followed by ecstasy and cocaine, with 75, respectively 64 points, and on the last places on consumption are the other types of drugs tested, with scores below 35 points. The result of Chi-square test showed that the values of χ^2 are statistically significant for all drug categories, except for ethnobotanicals, in other words, the results can be generalized to the entire population.

Keywords: *parents; high school students drug use; information; prevention.*

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1. Introduction

One of the many challenges a company faces (like maintaining a steady cash flow, facing increased competition, keeping up with the constantly changing regulation, maintaining customer loyalty or all human resources related processes) is exchanging knowledge within the internal environment and with the external environment, micro and macro, especially when it comes to acquire new information and master it [16].

Although the Educational factor could be taken into consideration for the Macro Environment category, due to its contributions in research and innovation, it can be agreed that the lists of elements composing the internal, micro and macro environment of a company proposed by Kotler, Armstrong, Philip and Gary in *Principles of marketing* are comprehensive [12].

It is important to know all the components of these environments to be able to analyse them and improve company's relationships with them. At the base of these relationships stays a constant exchange of information and as many agree, information is nothing more than processed and analysed data, that once it is absorbed and internalized, it becomes knowledge [7].

2. Problem Statement

Knowledge of any kind is usually difficult to transfer because it has to be externalized first, therefore transformed into information that is then captured and stored as data [18]. This means that the difficulty resides in correctly codifying and de-codifying the data, in order to ultimately transform it into knowledge. Most probably, this is why "*in recent years, many Member States have undertaken measures to improve university-industry relations and in particular to facilitate knowledge transfer at a national or regional level*" [2].

Aiming to improve the knowledge transfer between the business world and institutions/ academies, many of the latter set up specific offices that nurture collaboration relationships and encourage putting the research results to good use. The personnel in these offices has to be specialized in recognizing and managing valuable knowledge resources, so that it can obtain the approval of all stakeholders.

2.1. Knowledge Types

"Explicit Knowledge: Knowledge that is easy to articulate, write down, and share" [1].

Figure 1. Company's environment and its threats

Source: Authors' representation

Explicit Knowledge is the one easiest to share by verbalizing or writing it down, it is the result of a rationalization and it can be all kind of documents or files. The bad news is that it usually is only the tip of the iceberg [14].

“Implicit Knowledge: The application of explicit knowledge. Skills that are transferable from one job to another are one example of implicit knowledge” [1].

Implicit Knowledge is the one that is expected from everyone to know, it can be thought of as a baseline. If tacit knowledge is the tip of the iceberg, the implicit knowledge would be the water - it can be said that icebergs float on water, but it's considered to be common knowledge, so this detail is usually left unsaid. It can be information or abilities.

“Tacit Knowledge: Knowledge gained from personal experience that is more difficult to express” [1].

Tacit Knowledge refers to intuition, inspiration, experience, know-how etc. that one has to have to be able to apply the explicit knowledge, so the underwater, unseen part of the iceberg.

According to Robert W. Weisberg's book, "Creativity: Understanding Innovation in Problem Solving, Science, Invention, and the Arts" (2006) [22], the practice of innovation is possible to be taught and learned. This finding is especially pleasing because Drucker (1986) [4] has established that practicing innovation is what entrepreneurship is all about. Of course, innovation is nothing without a knowledge base and it must be first materialized and then perfected over and over again, before it comes to be commercialized, but innovation can be still considered the base of the business [21].

2.2. Core Marketing Processes

According to Hanvanich et al. [8], marketing knowledge resides in these 3 core processes: Product Development Management (PDM), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Supply Chain Management (SCM).

As it is known especially in the food industry as farm-to-fork, the supply chain includes all the actors involved in the production and delivery of a product to its final consumer. The network includes all kinds of suppliers, distributors, resources, institutions and information, as it has to offer a comprehensive view over the entire production process. Incorporating key supply chain components within the company usually is cost reducing and can significantly improve the business performance [10].

Customer Relationship aims to strengthen the relationship between the company and its customers, in order to correctly assess customers' needs, to have a high customer success and satisfaction degree, to make targeted marketing communications, to have efficient sales support and technical assistance, so that the clients are happy with both the product or the service and with the customer service [26].

Promoted and supported by researches from MIT, Harvard and other universities, like Utterback (1996) [20] or Christensen, Anthony, & Roth (2004) [17], market-driven innovation is also related to the Customer Relationship dimension of marketing [25].

Product Development refers to all 6 steps that need to be taken when launching a new product or improving an old one, from identifying a need in the market, to product developing and design, to building the road map for the product, to developing and releasing the MVP (minimum viable product) to users, to ultimately going over user feedback [8].

When it comes to improving old products or releasing new ones, out of the three types of innovation, the technology-driven one and the design-driven one are most likely to result in something completely out of the ordinary. At the end of the process, Product Development teams gather precious knowledge throughout the whole process, so it is essential to transfer it correctly and completely [3].

When it comes to marketing knowledge in particular, companies find it challenging to try to transfer it within the internal environment, from the more experienced employees to the novices, from the avant-gardists to the traditionalists and so on and so forth.

When talking about transferring marketing knowledge, identifying the best method of transfer according to the type of marketing knowledge is particularly difficult because “no clear statement about the forms that marketing knowledge can take, or its content” [16]. This is why this article proposes a 9 types of marketing knowledge by crossing the main marketing processes with the main types of knowledge.

The authors consider this crossing to be relevant because it is the simplest way to cover all marketing core areas and to include all types of knowledge that are related to them.

Table 1. Types of Marketing Knowledge

TYPES OF MARKETING KNOWLEDGE		Core Marketing Processes		
		<i>Product Development Management</i>	<i>Customer Relationship Management</i>	<i>Supply Chain Management</i>
Main Types of Knowledge	<i>Tacit</i>	Tacit Knowledge regarding Product Development	Tacit Knowledge regarding Customer Relationship	Tacit Knowledge regarding the Supply Chain

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<i>Explicit</i>	Explicit Knowledge regarding Product Development	Explicit Knowledge regarding Customer Relationship	Explicit Knowledge regarding the Supply Chain
<i>Implicit</i>	Implicit Knowledge regarding Product Development	Implicit Knowledge regarding Customer Relationship	Implicit Knowledge regarding the Supply Chain

Source: Authors' representation

3. Aims of the research

“The ability of the firm to use knowledge from outside its boundaries plays an important role in its competitiveness and innovation abilities” [23].

The knowledge almost never gets completely transferred from the sender to the receiver and there are many causes of it. There are perturbations in all communication, as shown by the SMCR Communication model, where “noise” is also represented [5]. From Rothwell’s perspective, there are 4 types of noises that usually interfere with the process of transmission and reception of a message: 1. Physical noise – environmental distractions; 2. Physiological noise – biological discomfort; 3. Psychological noise – biases; 4. Semantic noise – poor choice of words and grammar [17].

Knowledge transfer can also be subject of various perturbations, which is why it is very important to know exactly which is the type of knowledge we are trying to transfer and which is the best way to do it, in order to minimize the noise [11].

Mentorship is a knowledge transfer technique that can be used for both new-hire programs and high-potential programs. Informal mentorship is also useful, but it is usually based on compatible character traits, more than on business and career related attributes and also it is more than often left to the chance [6].

A more structured, formal approach on mentorship has several advantages like giving more people, even to the shy ones, the opportunity to be a part of such program, a better match made between the mentor and the mentee based on defined objectives and/ or set abilities to be improved, specific knowledge to be acquired etc. and also the possibility to quantify (to some extend) the effects of mentorship for the employees and the organization.

Guided Experience can take many forms like heuristic conversation, an interactive user-controlled platform etc. but it always involve high input from the learner and a low input of the teacher. This also means that the learner has more control over the learning process and that the teacher only has to make sure that the learning objective is never lost from sight, that all needed information is available and to answer all questions of the learner. This technique can be used to transfer any kind of knowledge; explicit and implicit knowledge are easier to structure in a lesson and FAQ way, but it could also be periodically updated with case studies and/or simulations with situations met by seniors in their practice, to transfer also tacit knowledge.

Work Shadowing is a learning method with very low interaction levels. The novice has to attentively observe the senior while working and register all the information. Questions are rarely asked in real time and very few verbal explanations are offered to minimize the level of disruption for the senior, but this method is very useful for the novices that have a certain level of theoretical, explicit knowledge and need to put it in a context (implicit knowledge); also, there can be occasions when while shadowing new situations appear and the novice can observe first-hand how such situations are handled (tacit knowledge).

Paired Work is a collaborative intensive way of learning and it consists of pairing novices in order to work and learn by doing and from each other. This method assures tacit knowledge transfer by putting into practice theoretical knowledge, as it implies that the needed explicit and implicit knowledge is already appropriated. This learning technique can be used to complete the knowledge transfer right before the novices start being completely autonomous and is safe because all the decisions are made in two steps, by two people, although it does not involve the time and effort of a senior.

Simulation is a great way to transfer (mainly) tacit knowledge, because it involves practice in a safe environment, where novices can learn meaningful and useful lessons from their mistakes without affecting the business.

Community of Practice is a knowledge transfer technique first proposed in the book *Situated Learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) [13], that consists of a group of people united by a personal or professional interest that learn from each other's experiences. It can be an either physical or virtual space, it can work either by answering specific questions or exposing specific situations as they happen or even both. Because it usually implies that the CoP members already have the basic explicit and implicit knowledge necessary for practice and only need specific details, this method is best

when trying to transfer tacit knowledge, but can be used for all three types of knowledge.

Formal training is a very structural type of learning and is best suited when trying to transfer explicit knowledge, as the base for further learning activities. Lessons' goals, objectives and contents are clearly defined and are easy to evaluate, which makes it the best way to transfer essential, basic information in a correct and complete way, independent of the learner's level.

E-Learning is a newer type of formal training, but it has the same main specificities. The advantage of this training method compared to formal training is that the teacher can record the lesson and in this way his or her time is fructified best. Also, the novice can review the explanations as many times as he or she needs. Another advantage is that the programs of the teacher and the learner no longer need to be matched.

4. Research Methods

After the research made to find out about current theories regarding the types of marketing knowledge, we realised that the literature does not offer a specific answer. Many other authors have tried to find a way to categorize marketing knowledge, so we tried it too, by combining the perspectives of the two subjects in the matter – knowledge transfer and marketing.

By analysing marketing knowledge from both a core marketing processes and main types of knowledge points of view, we discovered that marketing knowledge can be transferred easier, with specific methods to each of the 9 types identified.

This brings us to the research referring the knowledge transfer techniques that can be adapted to each type of marketing knowledge in order to better overcome their specific perturbations that ultimately led to the conceptual model of marketing knowledge sharing.

The 57 marketing managers of national companies were asked questions about their company's organizational culture, the view on knowledge transfer and how they handle the marketing knowledge transfer specifically, through a structured interview, maintaining their anonymity. In this way, we could test the need for and the validity of the conceptual model of marketing knowledge sharing.

5. Findings

5.1. Conceptual Model of Marketing Knowledge Sharing

Out of the three types of knowledge analysed in this article, the tacit knowledge is the most difficult to articulate and transfer because it comes from experience and connections made between information. Useful tacit knowledge can be gathered by involvement into various social contexts, stepping outside the comfort zone and having diverse individual experiences. According to Hedlund et al. (1998) [9] this also means that this type of procedural knowledge is resistant to introspection, so we are not aware we have it until we need to put it in practice.

Because Sternberg et al. [19] has shown since 1995 that tacit knowledge is important in achieving performance in several professional domains, although it is characterized by being highly personal, gained by action and mostly useful in practice, it is of interest for professionals to try and transfer it successfully especially in business environments that are complex and dynamic, where employees must be flexible and able to learn on the job.

Because of the importance and difficulty in transferring tacit knowledge, more than explicit and implicit knowledge, this research focuses more on the procedural knowledge transfer techniques and less on the classical methods that are used to teach expressive knowledge, that it is easy to articulate, store and access. This research does not try to diminish the importance of theoretical, explicit knowledge; on the contrary, it tries to help to equilibrate the balance between it and tacit knowledge precisely because the two are complementary and absolutely necessary for a deep understanding of any domain [14].

Table 2. Conceptual Model of Marketing Knowledge Sharing

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF MARKETING KNOWLEDGE SHARING		Types of Marketing Knowledge								
		EKPD	EKCR	EKSC	IKPD	IKCR	IKSC	TKPD	TKCR	TKSC
Knowledge Transfer Techniques	Mentorship	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Guided									
	Experience	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Work									
	Shadowing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Paired Work							x	x	x

Simulation							x	x	x
Community of Practice	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
E-Learning	x	x	x						
Formal training	x	x	x						

Source: Authors' representation

5.2. Interviews

After the research and the creation of the conceptual model of marketing knowledge sharing, a test to see if it is indeed suitable was in order. We interviewed 57 marketing managers around the country, with different ages, experiences and business domains, to validate it.

Most (25) of the companies we selected have market shares in their respective markets of 21% - 40%, being followed by the 16 companies that have a market share between 41%-60% and the 13 companies that have 0%-20%. 28 of the marketing managers we interviewed lead a department of 4-10 people, 21 of them have departments of only 3 people, 7 companies have marketing departments of 11 to 15 people and only one has over 15 people.

32 of the respondents have an experience of over 10 years, 21 of them have worked in this domain between 5 and 10 years and the rest have had marketing jobs for under 5 years.

The majority, 21 managers, have had this position for 5 to 10 years, 17 respondents have been marketing managers for over 10 years, 15 respondents for 3 to 5 years and only 4 respondents for under 3 years.

In order to describe the company from an organizational culture point of view, the authors used the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) [24].

Figure 2. Companies' characterization according to OCAI

Source: Authors' representation

The options the respondents had were Create/ Adhocracy Culture which is dynamic, entrepreneurial, Collaborate/ Clan Culture which is people-oriented, friendly, Control/ Hierarchy Culture which is process-oriented, structured and Compete/ Market Culture which is results-oriented, competitive (See Figure 2).

The majority of the managers, 21, identified their companies as Competitive, 14 of them characterised their companies as Collaborative, 13 of them characterised their companies as Creative and the rest of 9 as Controlling (See Figure 2).

In order to characterize the companies in a more complete way, the authors chosen the theory of Rayees Farooq, regarding the basic dimensions of knowledge sharing [15].

Figure 3. Companies' characterization according to Conceptualization of knowledge sharing table Rayees Farooq

Source: Authors' representation of findings

The respondents had the possibility to choose more options to describe the companies they work in, but the preferred characteristics were motivation (55), interpersonal trust (51), altruism and management support (49), work value diversity and organizational structure (44) and organizational culture and goal commitment (41) (See Figure 3).

IT&C infrastructure is on the sixth place with 40 choices, reward systems on the seventh (38), formalization on the eighth (37), communication and collaboration on the ninth (36) and on the last, team membership (32) (See Figure 3).

Out of the most popular types of knowledge transfer techniques, the one chosen the most (55) was paired work, the second is formal training (51) and the third (49) work shadowing (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. Most common knowledge transfer techniques

Source: Authors' representation of findings

E-learning and guided experience are popular to the same extent, being chosen by 33 of the marketing managers, mentorship is not as common (29), next to simulation (26) and community of practice (24) (See Figure 4).

The respondents were also asked to which specific core marketing process they consider that a formalized knowledge transfer system would be useful for.

The options they had were each of the 4 core marketing processes, all of them and none of them. 43 out of the 57 respondents said they consider that a formalized knowledge transfer system would be necessary for all core marketing process. But the ones that chosen only one the 3 core marketing processes set the podium to SCM (6), PDM (4) and CRM (2) (See Figure 5).

Only 2 of the managers interviewed responded that for none of the core marketing processes a formalized knowledge transfer system is needed (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Formalised knowledge transfer techniques utility in marketing core marketing processes

Source: Authors' representation of findings

The last question, but one of the most important ones regards the type of marketing knowledge is it the most difficult to transfer within the companies of the interviewed managers.

As expected, the tacit types of knowledge were considered the most difficult to transfer overall: tacit knowledge regarding product development (14), tacit knowledge regarding customer relationship (8) and tacit knowledge regarding supply chain (11) (See Figure 6).

The implicit types of knowledge were the second most difficult to transfer, as it follows: implicit knowledge regarding product development (5), implicit knowledge regarding customer relationship (6) and implicit knowledge regarding supply chain (9) (See Figure 6).

The least difficult to transfer were considered to be the explicit ones: explicit knowledge regarding product development (1), explicit knowledge regarding Customer relationship (1) and explicit knowledge regarding supply chain (2) (See Figure 6).

Figure 6. Challenges of marketing knowledge transfer in SMEs

Source: Authors' representation of findings

6. Discussions

In order to ensure the relevance of the interviews, we asked the marketing managers for how long have they had marketing related jobs. To the same objective, we also asked for how long have they been the managers of their marketing department.

To the objective of relevance still, the authors made sure that the overall process of knowledge transfer is understood and the qualitative variables like the context of the transfer and the individuals involved in it are taken into consideration.

54 of the interviewed marketing managers consider that efficient knowledge transfer can be related to business performance, but out of the 57 respondents, 51 companies have formalized knowledge transfer and only 6 do not.

When asked, 5 out of the companies that do not have a formalized knowledge system yet consider implementing a formalized knowledge transfer system. Out of the same 6 companies, 4 advocate for the implementation of formalized knowledge transfer systems in their company.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of the paper was to find out which types of knowledge transfer techniques are best suited to stimulate the absorption of (new) information for each of the 9 types of marketing knowledge resulted by combining the three main types of knowledge with the three main marketing processes.

The purpose was fulfilled through the critical analyse of the current literature and the interviews with the 57 marketing managers of Romanian SMEs.

With the help of the first step, the authors understood the difficulties at a theoretical level and came up with the Conceptual Model of Marketing Knowledge Sharing. The second step was made to verify if the conceptual model also applies in practice.

By correlating the question regarding the types of knowledge transfer techniques that are used within the marketing department and the question regarding the type of marketing knowledge that is the most difficult to transfer, the authors came to the conclusion that the Conceptual Model of Marketing Knowledge Sharing was validated by practitioners.

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