



Role and Contribution of Knowledge Management to Development the Competitiveness in Hotel Industry

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge represents a strategic resource of economic and social development today. It is the basis on which businesses can build sustainable operations and gain competitive advantages. Knowledge management (KM) has been embraced by businesses, particularly in the production and service sectors. However, the hotel industry has still not implemented knowledge management-focused activities to their extent. The introduction of a knowledge management strategy in the Egyptian hotel industry is taking place at a very slow pace. There is a growing awareness within the hotel industry of the need to undertake Knowledge management activities, develop a knowledge management strategy and the importance of human resources. Among researchers and managers, there is constant debate concerning the way knowledge management activities. A 54 questionnaire survey sample was selected and its size corresponded to the part of ten hotels in Cairo to determine their level of Knowledge Management and the extent to which Knowledge Management activities and strategies contribute to the development of a hotel's competitive ability. The empirical research shows that the hotel industry agrees with the fact that a developed Knowledge Management strategy and the implementation of Knowledge Management-focused activities significantly contribute to the achievement of hotels objectives and goals such as increasing productivity, developing employees, improving business efficiency and customer relation, improving human resource management and creating the environment that encourages innovations and consequently to the successful business performance. Successful business performance of hotels will help in gaining competitive advantages in the local, regional, and global markets.

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1. Introduction

Market development and globalization have affected the hotel industry and the strategies

through which each individual business gains its competitive advantage. Some of the most significant factors that will affect competitiveness in the hotel industry are: (1) the ability to interact,

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which means having special abilities in managing resources shared by several hotels. (2) The hotel's transformation into a learning organisation represents a new global strategy. (3) Human resources represent the centre of activity in the hotel industry, from the creation to the provision of products and services. (4) Technology and information have become an important link in achieving competitiveness. (Ioncica, 2018).

The competitiveness of the hotel industry is thus based on innovation, human resources, services, and costs that will affect hotel operations. An important source of competitive advantages can be seen in the quality of human resources, in their knowledge and competencies. A characteristic of the hotel industry is the very high level of personal contact between the employee and the guest, which brings into focus employee knowledge and skills, and the ability of employees to empathize with their clients. The defined elements on which competitiveness will be based should be included in all work processes to ensure the hotel can achieve its goals. (Bouncken, 2019).

Knowledge is becoming the key source of survival and success for an organization in the global economy. There is no doubt that today's successful organizations are those that continuously innovate, take advantage of new technologies, and utilize the skills and knowledge of their employees, which is not the case with organizations that manage only tangible assets. It seems that the new approach that organizations have towards intangible assets is what creates value. On the other hand, it appears that tangible assets can no longer ensure a long-term competitive advantage or competitive ability (Bouncken and Pye, 2020).

2. Literature review

2.1. Knowledge Management (KM) Concept

Knowledge Management authors emphasize the various aspects of managing knowledge, such as sharing knowledge among individuals, the construction of an educational system, the use of information technology, e-business, etc. This has resulted in many definitions. Managing strategic knowledge in an organization presents itself as a key factor that will assist business systems in achieving sustainable competitive advantages in a turbulent environment (Davenport, 2017; Jameson, 2017).

Knowledge has always been managed, implicitly at the least. However, effective knowledge management requires a new perspective and techniques, involving almost all factors within a complex organization. Knowledge management is the strategy of connecting implicit and explicit knowledge into activities and learning that enable people to find and use the collective knowledge of an organization. From the viewpoint of most enterprises, Knowledge management is the intentional, systematic, business strategy of optimization in which intellectual capital is integrated into the enterprise's business operations, making it a basis for future operations. (Bontis, 2018; Espinosa, 2018).

This is about an interdisciplinary business model that involves all the aspects of knowledge within an enterprise, and which encourages learning and innovation through knowledge-focused activities and processes. In the beginning, KM was often defined as a process in which knowledge was collected, organized, managed, and finally distributed throughout the organization, to expedite work. Knowledge management is the intentional and systematic coordination of employees, technology, processes, and organizational structures for the purpose of creating added value through re-use and innovation. This coordination is achieved by creating, sharing, and using knowledge, as well as by incorporating the best practices and lessons learned into the organizational memory to ensure continuous organizational learning (Furunes, 2019).

In addition to the above-mentioned definitions, many other definitions exist which emphasize and focus on different components of Knowledge Management such as human capital, organizational culture, human capital etc. Knowledge management is defined as the systematic management of knowledge necessary for achieving business goals and sustainable development, as well as related processes, for the purpose of achieving competitiveness and business excellence in the global market. The basic aim of KM is to create business excellence and achieve competitive advantages in the market. In other words, this means that key knowledge will be ensured within the organization, at the right time and in the right place. Other KM aims include: (A) the efficient development of new and existing knowledge, keeping in mind the organization's strategy and the

individual aims of employees; (B) The targeted distribution of new knowledge and the transfer of knowledge to new employees; (C) Efficient distribution of knowledge and information to everyone within the organization; (D) The optimal use of knowledge. Knowledge Management is a continuous process that strives for the promotion of key knowledge within the organization. (Gronau, 2019; Kyriakidou and Gore, 2019).

In practice, KM most often includes the identification and mapping of intellectual assets within the organization, as well as gathering and using new knowledge to gain a competitive advantage. Competitive advantage will be gained at the moment when the key knowledge is put to use and is helping and contributing to the achievement of hotels objectives and goals such as increasing productivity, developing employees, improving business efficiency and customer relation, improving human resource management and creating the environment that encourages innovations etc. (Ogaard and Marnburg, 2020)

2.2. The Importance and Challenges of KM Applications in the Hospitality Industry

The hospitality industry is characterized by its outputs of service products, which primarily satisfy the demand for accommodation, food and beverage, for the achievement of the final service products, hospitality companies collaborate with a variety of service industries (i.e., convention agencies, online travel agencies, tour operators, carriers, entertainment, shopping and local sightseeing agencies) in which some compete, and others collaborate with each other. Abdullah and Selamat (2015). One common characteristic of hospitality companies with these service providers is especially dominant: their service processes are becoming knowledge-based or knowledge-intensive due to the great influence and use of information and communication technology (Kahle, 2016). For example, Sheldon (2017) argued that the tourism and hospitality industry is one of the largest users of information technology (IT). Moreover, the industry is knowledge-intensive as a result of the nature of the service product, where the service delivery occurs as a result of interaction between customers and employees and where it is required that employees are knowledgeable of customers' needs in order to achieve customer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2019).

In the hotel industry, only a small number of hotels have implemented KM systems, although they are likely to gain benefits from KM due to chain requirements of an overall quality standard of their geographically dispersed hotels (Bouncken, 2019). Existing efforts in KM practices are particularly observed within hotel chains, which have to deliver an overall service quality standard. For instance, a case study of anecdotal character conducted by Bouncken (2019) of the Accor Hotel Group with 3500 hotels worldwide, 130 000 employees and which owns brands like Formula One, Ibis, Novotel and Sofitel, revealed that the corporation is developing KM-based strategies and is engaged in KM activities. The Accor Corporation in Germany (with 6000 employees) has implemented a KM system based on three components: (a) IT-based knowledge accumulation; (b) access to the IT-based knowledge system; and (c) motivation for knowledge use and creation. An Internet-based intranet has been modified and improved with the aim of incorporating data about best practices, service innovations and training possibilities. Another example of the KM approaches is that of the Hilton Corporation, which operates 2700 hotels in more than 70 countries. The Hilton University, an established corporate university, is developing a learning culture for Hilton Hotels by encouraging and offering a consistent approach to training for team members at all levels using e-learning technology (Baldwin- Evans, 2016). Although Hilton International emphasizes knowledge sharing and on-the-job mentoring with respect to the competency development of its members, they introduced 2012 a new innovative e-learning system that is highly cost-effective and can advance generic skills in terms of communications and customer service. The foregoing examples demonstrate that some actors in the industry acknowledge their position in a knowledge-intensive industry that requires continuous advancement of learning and knowledge-sharing activities in order to improve their business. However, these examples are only some of the few. A recent study shows that hospitality management considers KM and information to be relevant concepts, but they are confronted with too many unclear KM strategies, activities, and implementation techniques (Bouncken and Pyo, 2020). This finding is confirmed by Yun (2020), who argues that the tourism and hospitality

industry adapts slowly to KM strategies due to the complexity of the concept, which requires certain skills in data mining, statistics and substantial knowledge of tourism and hospitality management. Enz and Siguaw (2020) found that innovative ideas and best practices championed in hospitality companies both begin and end with individuals. Unfortunately, when managers who have brought about creative ideas for implementation leave their job, many findings of the practices that they initiated are discontinued. These findings indicate something about the nature of hospitality best practices where two factors, in particular, reduce the permanence of innovative initiatives: first, there is the high mobility of managers in the industry; second, there is a high rate of consolidation through mergers and acquisitions. This results in difficulties in maintaining the benefits of individual learning in the organizational system. Therefore, hospitality companies may particularly benefit from KM systems with respect to the codification of best practices and innovative ideas.

2.3 The Effect of KM on the Competitiveness of Hotels

Today, companies are increasingly thinking about the value of intangible assets and how they can be measured. This has resulted in a range of tools, frameworks and approaches by which intangible assets or some of their forms can be measured. Frameworks and approaches that are focusing on the intangible assets at the level of the country include Knowledge assessment methodology and Scorecards by World Bank, the European KM Forum Assessment model, The Australian Knowledge Framework, Science and Technology scorecard, methodology used in the Global Competitiveness Report by World Economic Forum etc. (Ross, 2015 and Stacey, 2016). Approaches focusing more on intellectual capital as a type of intangible assets have four categories: market Capitalization Approach, Return on Assets Approach, Direct Intellectual capital Approach and Scorecard Approach (Davenport and Prusak, 2018; Hitt et al., 2018; Pyo et al., 2018). In the attempt to use this approaches a certain number of problems

developed, such as, how to precisely define intangible assets and their component parts, which method, tool, and technique are best suited for precisely measuring the value and contribution of intangible assets towards achieving hotel's goals within a specific business system. The problem is partly caused by the intangible characteristic of these assets or capital. There is a difficulty in measuring the exact value and magnitude of the contribution that intangible asset brings to the achievement of objectives, goals, and consequently to the competitiveness of the country, Knowledge represents a form of an intangible asset, and its value depends upon how it is put to use. Therefore, knowledge can be of great value in one situation, but of no value in another. This leads to the conclusion that measuring and managing knowledge is not an exact science, such as accounting. Therefore, many different methods exist by which intangible assets or KM are assessed and evaluated. Although KM can fit into all processes and places within an organization, two basic areas exist that are linked to KM. They involve improving an organization's performance and managing organizational changes (Nonaka and Nishiguchi, 2019; Grizelj, 2019 Yun, 2020). By using KM, an organization seeks to gain competitive advantages by realizing the value of intellectual capital that can be found within the organization.

By using KM, the hotels can achieve a range of benefits: it can improve the management of their intellectual capital; expand their expertise; increase the number of special skills; safeguard their existing intellectual capital; enable employees to develop their skills; improve the services provided to clients; offer a larger number of products and services of improved quality; ensure greater control over costs; enhance its reputation and value of the organization; manage ideas and risks in a better way, increase employee and customer loyalty, etc. KM may also serve as a process that enables the hotel to identify its most valuable intellectual assets. Therefore, KM also serves as a mechanism that will help to develop a new organizational culture (Uysal, 2017). Some benefits that arise from KM are shown in Table 1.

Table (1)

Benefits and effects of applying Knowledge Management in business systems

Point of Focus	Benefits
Directly connected KM effects	Greater and simpler access to knowledge improved understanding of relevant expertise enhanced creation and sharing of knowledge more efficient renewal of knowledge.
Internal benefits and effects: focus on operations	Employees possessing knowledge are motivated to use it improved re-use of technologies and lessons learned lower operating costs – fewer operational errors faster decisions making less time needed from design to production.
Improvements linked to products and services	Greater customer satisfaction greater demand for products and services; larger orders improved company-customer relations
Ultimate Benefits	The improved image on the market greater profitability of the business system enhanced employee satisfaction and loyalty constant change management “sustainable business systems” community of employees and social relations gaining sustainable competitive advantages.

Adapted from Uysal, 2017

Through KM application, a business system can improve its market image, augment its profitability, create a harmonious community between employees and systems and, ultimately, ensure its sustainability and competitiveness (Wenger, 2018; Von Krogh et al., 2019).

The five ways in which KM can help to create added value include the financial dimension, innovation, processes, clients, and employees (Sveiby, 2017; Bayraktaroglu and Kutanis, 2018; Ruhanen and Cooper, 2018). Knowledge Management initiatives can create added value for an organization based on the fact that the use of key knowledge helps to bring about direct savings and increased income (financial dimension); that by efficiently developing, sharing and using key knowledge, business systems can develop faster and introduce new products and services (innovation); and that if knowledge and KM are a constituent part of processes, these processes will be more efficient and more effective (focus on processes). A better understanding of clients and their needs makes it possible to design the right offering, ultimately creating client capital (focus on clients).

Knowledge Management should become an integral part of all strategic initiatives of an enterprise as well as an integral part of its overall business strategy. In this way, Knowledge Management will have a much greater effect on improving business performance. Many companies have launched KM projects and activities focusing on external structure such as collecting information and knowledge from customers; internal structure such as the creation of the organizational culture that encourages sharing of knowledge and distribution and collecting of implicating knowledge of workers and competences of the

employees (Ingram and Baum, 2018; Connelly et al., 2019; Styhre, 2020).

Not many of mentioned companies are from the hotel industry. In most hotels more often than not Knowledge Management related activities remain isolated and are seen as being outside the strategic concept. While the application of KM initiatives in a department will clearly help to improve the KM process within that department, the question remains as to whether it will ultimately have any effect on the hotel’s overall performance. Exceptions are those companies in which knowledge is of vital strategic importance, such as consultancy firms, institutes, research organizations, etc. Efficient KM will help to create an environment for employees in whom they will be able to develop, learn and share their knowledge. Their job satisfaction should grow considerably, an indication of efficient human capital management (focus on people).

3. Methodology

The study focused on Knowledge Management strategy and its importance in achieving competitive advantages in large and medium-sized hotel companies (Kotler et al., 2019). For the purposes of this empirical research, the questionnaire consisted of three parts and was based on previous research in this area. The first part of the questionnaire was entitled “Competitiveness and human resource management in the hospitality industry”. For this purpose, 54 forms were distributed (five forms in each hotel). Only 35 forms from the answered forms were valid (64.8 %). Data was collected on the organization of human resource management in the hotel business, the impact of different aspects in gaining competitive advantages of hotel

companies, HR managers' expectations in terms of the efficiency of human resource management, etc. The second part was entitled, "Knowledge management in the hospitality industry" and provided insight into the existence and development of a Knowledge Management strategy in the hotel. Questions focused on the assessment of existing instruments and activities relevant to Knowledge Management, the reasons that would motivate a hotel to introduce Knowledge Management programs, Knowledge Management's contribution to achieving the hotel's goals, and the obstacles that hinder the implementation of Knowledge Management initiatives in the hotel. "Knowledge as a strategic resource of the hotel" is the third part that gave insight into the new knowledge in the hotel, the activities aimed at collecting knowledge and experience of employees, the obstacles to the implementation of new ideas, the new categories of knowledge, skills, and competencies important for the hotel industry.

Table 2

Contribution of Knowledge Management in achieving selected objectives of hotels.

Statement (Variables)	Arithmetical Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Increasing productivity	4.50	0.618	1
Employee development	4.44	0.511	2
Improving business efficiency	4.39	0.502	3
Avoiding the duplication of procedures and processes	4.33	0.686	4*
Increasing sales	4.33	0.594	4*
Better customer relations	4.33	0.485	4*
Creating new business opportunities	4.33	0.485	4*
Greater flexibility of the enterprise	4.33	0.594	4*
Reducing operating costs	4.28	0.669	9*
Gathering information more quickly	4.28	0.669	9*
Increasing revenue	4.28	0.669	9*
Attracting/retaining employees	4.28	0.461	9*
Improving HRM	4.22	0.647	13
Ensuring faster access to markets	4.11	0.471	14*
Increasing market share	4.11	0.758	14*
Product/service innovation	4.11	0.583	14*
Developing employee competencies	4.06	0.539	17
Improving decision making	4.00	0.594	18
Improving response times	3.94	0.802	19
Improving innovations	3.83	0.707	20

Note: * Variables with identical average scores have the same rank.

4. Findings

According to the scores of respondents, Knowledge Management makes a vital contribution to accomplishing the objectives of hotels. Average scores range from 3.83 to 4.50.

Target respondents were human resource managers or, if the hotels did not have such a manager, other managers were considered as being the most knowledgeable of the existing state of knowledge and human resource. Eighty per cent of the total number of hotels filled out and returned the questionnaire. The study sample was selected, and its size corresponded to the part of large and medium-sized hotels in Cairo "ten". Earmarking financial resources, mobilizing employees, and launching Knowledge Management projects and initiatives are efforts that are justified by their contributions to achieving a hotel's goals. The empirical research carried out, assessed which of the goals of a hotel were affected by Knowledge Management initiatives. By accomplishing its selected goals, the hotel can also increase its competitive advantage in the market. The contribution of Knowledge Management to achieving the selected goals of hotels was rated using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all important", and 5 "exceptionally important".

Knowledge Management is seen as making the greatest contributions to increasing productivity, ensuring employee development and improving business efficiency. On the other hand, an average score of less than 4 was given to the variables "Improving response times" (a score of 3.94) and

“Improving innovations” (a score of 3.83). According to the opinion of respondents, Knowledge Management has a slightly smaller effect on these variables.

In Table 3, the t-test for independent samples was used to analyze the difference between average scores for Knowledge Management contributions to accomplishing selected objectives, according to the size of hotels.

Table 3

Test for independent samples (difference in average scores for Knowledge Management contribution to selected objectives, by hotel size).

No.	Statement (Variable)	A.S	T-test	Sig
1	Improving business efficiency	4.44	0.459	0.653
2	Improving decision making	4.00	0.000	1.000
3	Improving response times	3.78	-0.875	0.394
4	Improving innovations	3.89	0.324	0.750
5	Reducing operating costs	4.22	-0.343	0.736
6	Gathering information more quickly	4.11	0.000	1.000
7	Avoiding the duplication of procedures and processes	4.11	-0.718	0.483
8	Increasing sales	4.33	0.343	0.736
9	Faster access to markets	4.22	-0.676	0.509
10	Improved HRM	4.44	0.784	0.444
11	Developing employee competencies	4.11	0.426	0.681
12	Better customer relations	4.44	0.970	0.346
13	Increasing revenue	4.33	0.343	0.736
14	Increasing market share	4.11	0.000	1.000
15	Increasing productivity	4.67	1.155	0.265
16	Creating new business opportunities	4.44	0.970	0.346
17	Greater flexibility of the enterprise	4.33	0.000	1.000
18	Employee development	4.67	2.000	0.063
19	Attracting/retaining employees	4.33	0.500	0.624
20	Product/service innovation	4.11	0.000	1.000

Note: T-test for independent samples A. S. – Average value; Sig. – Reliability

The results indicate the average score given to the contribution of Knowledge Management in achieving the selected goals of hotels. They confirm that Knowledge Management contributes to improving decision making, gathering information more quickly, increasing market shares, enhancing the flexibility of hotels, and facilitating product/service innovation in both large and mid-sized hotels. The remaining statements show that average scores for the contribution of Knowledge Management to achieving goals are higher in large hotels than in mid-sized ones. However, the differences are incidental, that is, they are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), leading to the conclusion that Knowledge Management contributes equally to attaining goals in both large and mid-sized hotels. In the majority of statements, the contribution of Knowledge Management to accomplishing selected goals was given a higher score in almost hotels. The results of

the t-test for independent samples indicate that the differences observed are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), leading to the conclusion that Knowledge Management contributes equally to achieving goals in hotels in both large and mid-sized hotels. Based on the data obtained, it is evident that Knowledge Management provides an important contribution to accomplishing the goals of hotels in Cairo. Its greatest contribution is seen in increasing productivity, facilitating employee development, and improving business efficiency. Knowledge Management contributes equally to achieving goals in large and mid-sized hotels. Knowledge management strategy in hotels is still rare. In practice, we see the implementation of individual projects that are generally aimed at resolving a single current problem (Lorenz and Cullen, 2014). The research has shown that Knowledge management strategy is perceived as having a high

degree of influence on gaining competitive advantages in hotels.

5. Conclusions and implications

Knowledge is the new battlefield for countries, corporations, and individuals (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2015; Quinn et al., 2016). Accordingly, managing knowledge at the level of countries, organizations and even individuals is increasingly becoming a precondition to success in the new, global knowledge economy. Business systems need to develop strategies, mechanisms, and tools to help them manage key strategic knowledge and, in this way, accomplish their goals and become more competitive in the marketplace (Yang, 2018). This paper seeks to provide an overview of some of the goals of hotels that Knowledge Management can influence.

The study has shown that Knowledge management makes a vital contribution to accomplishing the objectives of the hotel industry. It contributes strongly to improving decision making, gathering information more quickly, increasing market share, enhancing the flexibility of hotels and facilitating produce and service innovation etc. By achieving these objectives, hotels increase their competitiveness. Knowledge management equally contributes to attaining goals in both large and mid-size hotels.

The hotel industry agrees with the fact that various Knowledge Management initiatives can have a powerful influence on accomplishing the hotel's goals that are, ultimately, the basis for gaining competitive advantages. Despite this, however, only a fairly small number of hotels have developed a comprehensive Knowledge Management strategy. Implementation is based on the introduction of specific programs and projects. The reason for this comes from a number of facts:

- Investment in Knowledge Management is a long-term project.
- Investment requires considerable resources and usually involves making wide-reaching changes in the hotel.
- Benefits from investment in Knowledge Management and the contribution of Knowledge Management to achieving the hotels' goals are often difficult or almost impossible to quantify. Benefits are most often of an intangible nature.

- Most benefits cannot be seen in the short period (one year), and need more time.

All the above are deterrents to implementing Knowledge Management not only in hotel industry but other industries as well. Despite this, however, it is encouraging that managers are aware of the important contribution that Knowledge Management can make to enhance the competitive ability of hotels. This should encourage manager to start at least activities in there hotels that focus on intangible asset and it proper development. Further research, should be oriented towards identifying methods that would assess more precise which Knowledge Management initiatives contribute to accomplishing the goals of hotels, as well as identifying which intangible benefits have an indirect effect on gaining competitive advantages. The study recommends that Knowledge Management should always be a primary consideration in the hotels and must be develop all tools of Knowledge Management through the allocation of the financial budget.

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