Exploring Intra- and Inter-Organizational Knowledge Transfer in Sponsorship Alliances and Networks - An Empirical Case Study Analysis

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Introduction
Knowledge management in business administration is gaining more attention in recent years. Due to many technological developments, there are new opportunities for the development, storage and use of knowledge for many corporations (Hansen et al., 1999). In addition, the demands on corporations in competition have fundamentally changed. The proportion of intangible value components within the corporation has increased significantly, which stresses the importance of knowledge for the corporation's success. Thus, the management of knowledge is a key factor in competition and firm success and is critical for the future of the corporation (Grant, 1996).

In the current knowledge management literature it is generally assumed that there is a relationship between knowledge transfer and performance and / or degree of innovation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Those companies are considered as successful, which are able to transfer the knowledge as efficiently as possible from one department to another or exchange within their network (Dyer & Hatch, 2006). Various studies show that a large number of relationships with other business units may have influence on knowledge transfer and performance (van Wijk et al., 2008). Despite various analyses on the topic only few empirical studies provide information in the field of marketing with just a handful studies using case study methods (Haas & Hansen, 2005).

This research examines intra- and inter-organizational knowledge transfer within sponsorship alliances and networks. Sport sponsorship is particularly relevant because sponsorships are foremost characterized by a high degree of multi-personality, immateriality and creativity leading to knowledge intense processes within sponsorship alliances and networks. In order to contribute to value creation, sponsorship-relevant knowledge within the corporation and with external suppliers and partners must be exchanged on a regular basis. As empirical research is absent the objective of this research in progress is to contribute to the following research question: How and why is intra- and inter-organizational knowledge transferred in sport sponsorship alliances and networks?

Knowledge Based View of the Firm (KBV)
The KBV is based on the key assumption that knowledge is the most important strategic resource and therefore has a particularly large contribution to the increase in value of the corporation (Grant 1996; Eisenhardt & Santos, 2002). In management theory, this assumption has far-reaching implications. In contrast to the resource-based view, companies are not considered as a bundle of resources and capabilities, but as social units in which people interact. According to the KBV, the main task of the company is the management of knowledge processes. Knowledge management comprises a wide range of processes, including initiation (also sourcing or assimilation), transfer (also sharing) and integration (also application or exploitation) (Alavi & Leidner, 2001).

Research Design and Data Analysis
This research is exploratory and methodology is qualitative. As the research objective is about examining a phenomenon within its complex real-life context and obtaining in-depth understanding, a case study design is the most appropriate approach considering the guidelines on qualitative data collection and analysis outlined by Yin (2009). Three case studies with sponsoring corporations from Germany operating in different industries represent the empirical basis. In total, 31 interviews with sponsorship decision makers and employees were conducted. Secondary data such as company magazines or newsletters was used for triangulation purposes. Content analysis was applied for systematic data analysis. The interviews were first tape-recorded, transcribed and then analyzed with computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).
Results and Conclusions
The preliminary result is that effective sponsorship is positively influenced by the appropriate combination of different knowledge domains, perspectives and taxonomies of internal units and external stakeholders (particularly professional service firms, also sponsored properties) and its exchange between the stakeholders. This is specifically the case when it comes to activation, leverage, and evaluation of the examined sponsorships.

Internal knowledge transfer takes place between individuals, groups, departments, and other business units within the company boundaries. The transfer of knowledge varies depending on the size of the sponsorships, experience with the sponsored properties and prior sponsorship-related knowledge of internal stakeholders (cf. van Wijk et al., 2008). The external transfer of knowledge goes beyond the company boundaries and incorporates external partners, such as agencies and service providers, since this offers the opportunity to obtain sponsorship-related knowledge that would be internally impossible or very difficult, slow and expensive to develop. Sponsorship-specific knowledge is transferred both in explicit (or codified) and in implicit form depending on various sponsorship-specific characteristics (size, duration, prior knowledge, etc.). Given the special property of knowledge, transferring knowledge is a difficult process. Effective knowledge transfer is achieved by ongoing communication of sponsorship information.

References


