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A Note on Culture-sensitive Knowledge Management in OE-sales Area of Robert Bosch GmbH

Marc Kuhn
(Robert Bosch GmbH
70049 Stuttgart, Germany
Marc.Kuhn@de.bosch.com)

Abstract: A knowledge oriented culture is often considered as a basic infrastructure for successful Knowledge Management. Decentralized knowledge activities at Bosch follow the given company culture and do not try to affect cultural aspects at short notice. The internal analysis of knowledge culture bases on a Bosch-specific three-level model. This model is used for research activities on Bosch internal ´knowledge markets´. As result, a specific ´Knowledge Culture Index´ can be defined. This Index helps to show the potentials of knowledge management solutions in one single organizational context.

Keywords: Decentral Knowledge Management, Knowledge Culture, Knowledge Culture Index, Bosch
Categories: A.1, A.m

1 Introduction

In the automotive equipment area of Robert Bosch GmbH, information and knowledge represent strategic determinants for enterprise-success. Internationalization and branched out organizational structures complicate the development of methods and tools. Therefore, Bosch renounces the construction of a central ´Corporate Knowledge Management´. Rather knowledge management takes place in the context of specific enterprise functions. Experiences show that the reasons for the different success of ´lessons-learned-databases´ or ´knowledge-communities´ can be found in significantly different partial cultures of the respective organization areas. This statement confirms Bosch with their pursued strategy to anchor decentralized knowledge management. At the same time it reinforces the need to consider more cultural aspects during the conversion of knowledge management.

2 Knowledge Orientation of Different Cultures, a Methodology for Analysis

The question of 'measurability' of cultures is frequently rejected due to its reference to qualitative factors or soft facts. However, it is crucial to limit such cultural aspects in the approach of a measurement that refer only to a certain partial segment of the buzzword ´corporate culture´.

In the case of Bosch, separate fragments are examined which fix the degree of the knowledge-orientation of a corporate culture or a sub- or partial culture.

2.1 Basic considerations for the determination of a knowledge culture

By the use of the notion of corporate culture, both the system of corporate standards and the system of corporate values are described and marked in their effects. According to Schein there exists a visible corporate culture in the form of a symbolic system as well as a basic ´set´ of ´acceptances´ fundamental of a corporate worldview. These are underpinned by his three culture levels [Schein, 01].

All three levels are also decisive with the statement of a knowledge oriented corporate-culture. To build an ideal working model, it is necessary to define criteria within the separate culture levels and categories. These must be measured whether they affect the handling of knowledge.

Are there, for example some rituals which are typical for a culture of structured knowledge-documentation within a department or an enterprise area? Which guidance principles and behavioral directives lead to a culture in which employees consider their knowledge not as individual power factor?

2.2 Model of knowledge-oriented corporate culture

The execution of knowledge-audits with the enterprise areas which carry out an intense and conscious contact with knowledge according to own information and the first impressions of the knowledge managers, formed a basis for the formulation of the knowledge culture criteria.

Symbolic system (clipping)	
rituals	▪ There are regular formal and informal meetings for the exchange of information within and between the departments. [Cornelissen, 00] ▪ Conversations and meetings with superiors distinguish themselves not by political maneuvering and reserve, but are stamped by: openness, courage to the expression of feelings, speak ' the other one's language '. [Frey, 00] ▪ Company internal requests after information and knowledge are treated on the background of an internal customer orientation. [Krohmer, 99] ▪ Knowledge workers do not hold to their habits and skills (we have always worked in this way...) [Weggeman, 99]

Table 1: model of a knowledge-culture at Bosch - clipping from: symbolic system

This criteria classification was supplemented with research results from the areas of corporate culture and knowledge management. In the result Bosch defines for OE-Sales area a three-stage model of knowledge oriented corporate culture.

2.3 Investigation of a knowledge culture in Bosch OE-sales

To grasp the potentials of knowledge management solutions on the background of divergent cultural presuppositions, an efficient integration of the knowledge culture model in an internal marketing research measure is necessary. The quantification of the knowledge culture criteria makes possible the definition of indexes and the comparison of different knowledge cultures.

In a pilot phase, the responsible knowledge manager investigates different departments that are considered as potential target groups regarding the introduction of knowledge management and relevant tools. He modifies the knowledge culture criteria to statements which are valued by the investigated person by means of the Likert-scale (5 - full agreement with the statement, 1 - no agreement). The single scale values are settled to a **Knowledge Culture Index (KCI)**. This Knowledge Culture Index accepts values between 5 and 1.

3 Results of the Culture Analysis

3.1 Informative capability of indexes

The use of characteristics in connection with cultural factors provokes the legitimate reproach to cause a false exactness by a quantification of a qualitative subject. How efficiently is **KCI** on the background of the knowledge management topic? The **KCI does not** possess the quality to consolidate cultural characteristic to a decisive size specified on comma places. There is also no mathematical dependence between the index and the measurable success potentials of separate knowledge management instruments in the investigated departments.

Rather the **KCI** can be called a heuristic characteristic number which does not substitute the decision-making processes in the knowledge management, certainly, but actively supports this processes. Pilot projects in OE-sales area at Bosch show:

- Between the height of the determined **KCI** and the success of implemented knowledge management instruments consists a significant positive connection.

- The statement of the **KCI** prevents ´unprofitable´ investments in knowledge management technology. Employee groups with low KCI distinguish themselves often by rejecting attitude opposite these technologies.

- A detailed analysis of the **KCI** gives an explanation of strengths and weaknesses of the investigated areas in handling their knowledge. Specific implementation bases can be separated for situation-individual knowledge management solutions.

3.2 Application

In OE-sales area, Bosch develops knowledge management activities for different organization areas in differentiated range and intensity. Therefore culture-sensitive knowledge management can also mean to exclude separate departments entirely from the methods and tool implementing.

One of the main challenges will be to find solutions to influence different knowledge cultures. The company areas which are not suitable in accordance with KCI-statement for the contact with knowledge-datawarehouses and the participation in networks, must be taken on a long-term basis to an active knowledge work. The application of enterprise-internal communication instruments and the managers policies are success-critical to cause a positive attitude in the heads of the employees and with it a partial ´knowledge-cultural´ change.

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