

Organizational learning in multinational companies from a heterogeneous perspective

Horst J. Lechner

Faculty of Business, Economics and Management, University of Latvia, Latvia

Abstract

Knowledge exchange and learning in Multi-National Companies (MNCs) is a cross-border process in two respects, as it involves crossing organisational borders on the one hand and national borders on the other. The MNCs were not created by the calamity of markets to buy and sell knowledge, but by its superior effectiveness as a structural vehicle for the cross-border transmission of that knowledge and the learning procedures. Organisational as well as national restrictions have to be crossed, which is an extremely difficult and complex task. However, for MNCs, the highly differentiated knowledge in the several geographically spread plants and the allocation and use of this knowledge throughout the whole organisation is the key to competitive advantage. This paper presents a theoretical approach to knowledge and learning sharing in MNCs from a homogeneous resp. heterogeneous perspective. Thereby focusing on the influence of the multinational or multicultural context on the knowledge and learning sharing processes. The paper therefore provides a subsidiaries-analysis of the main international or inter-organisational contextual factors that influence knowledge sharing and learning and suggestions for dealing with the problems arising from cultural differences with regard to successful knowledge and learning exchange.

Keywords: subsidiaries, knowledge sharing, cross-border, multi-national companies, MNC, change management