



Original Article

Strategic alignment of knowledge management and value creation:
implications on to an oil and gas corporation

*Implicações do Alinhamento Estratégico da Gestão do Conhecimento na Geração de Valor: um
Estudo na Indústria de Óleo e Gás*

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Abstract

The research explores and describes if and how the patterns of value creation of a Brazilian state-owned corporation from the oil and gas industry are reflexes of the subjects' perception on strategic alignment of knowledge management. The design adopts data obtained through a survey applied to Knowledge Workers — employees assigned as internal consultants — of Petróleo Brasileiro S.A. (PETROBRAS) and the study development uses parametric and non-parametric statistics and multivariate analysis. The findings indicated that the subjects perceive the strategic alignment of the knowledge management from three different points of view, with reflexes in the perception on the corporate value creation: the balanced profile — extraordinary corporate value creation — the adjusted profile — moderate value creation — and the misaligned one — unsatisfactory value creation.

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Keywords: Strategy; Knowledge management; Value creation; Intellectual capital

Resumo

A pesquisa explora e descreve se e como os padrões de criação de valor de uma corporação estatal brasileira da indústria de óleo e gás refletem a percepção dos sujeitos sobre o Alinhamento Estratégico da Gestão do Conhecimento. O procedimento adota dados obtidos por meio de pesquisa aplicada aos Trabalhadores do Conhecimento — funcionários designados como consultores internos — na Petróleo Brasileiro S.A. (PETROBRAS) e a operacionalização usa estatísticas paramétricas e não-paramétricas e análises multivariadas. Os resultados indicaram que os sujeitos identificam o alinhamento estratégico da gestão do conhecimento de três pontos de vista diferentes, com reflexos na percepção sobre a criação de valor corporativo: o perfil equilibrado — criação corporativa de valor superior —; o perfil ajustado — criação de valor moderado — e o desalinhado — criação de valor insatisfatório.

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Palavras-chave: Estratégia; Gestão do Conhecimento; Criação de Valor; Capital Intelectual

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Introduction

The “cognitive era”, based on the economy of intangibles, leveraged the growth of the dynamics and complexity of the economic sectors, determining new management mindset for organizations, based on three drivers: (i) speed, with changes in real time; (ii) connectivity, associated with forms and means of communication; (iii) intangibility, related to the increase in the relevance of intangible assets that have revolutionized the way organizations are managed (Davis & Meyer, 1999; Edvinsson & Malone, 1997).

Thus, to rapidly adapt to industry fluctuations, defining consistent paths, and minimizing the compromise of their commitments — sometimes difficult to achieve path dependences (Ghemawat, 1991, 2005) — firms faced the development of specific skills to become flexible, expeditious, and assertive in order.

The concept of management effectiveness was reviewed, with the strategic positioning (Porter, 1980, 1985, 1990) and the existence and ownership of differentiated resources (Barney, 1986, 1991) — that determined the competitive power of organizations (Vasconcelos & Cyrino, 2000) — were gradually shaded by the ability of firms to permanently configure and reconfigure dynamic capabilities (Barney, 1997, 2001; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) and to improve their core competencies (Prahalad, 1997; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990, 1995, 1998) to achieve competitive advantages and go for the search for the superior value creation (Rezende, 2006).

Performance in the processes of development and improvement of intangible assets, capabilities and competencies (Barney, 1991, 1997; Collis & Montgomery, 1997) is directly associated with firms’ abilities to intensify their learning processes in search of creativity and innovation (Azevedo, 2013).

Intellectual capital — as the main input (Stewart, 1998, 2002; Sveiby, 1998) — and knowledge management — as the driving force behind the creation and re-creation of these essential resources (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997; Proença, 1999) — are bold elements to improve decision making and the effectiveness of permanent organizational learning (Barney, 2006; Pedersen & Dalum, 2004).

The Strategic Alignment of Knowledge Management — a mechanism for improving the capabilities of intellectual capital and the frontiers do organization development (Fleck, 2005; Mohr, 1982) — must have purpose, intensity and direction, so that the value creation proposal is aligned with the needs of the Business (Lopes, 2013; Rezende, 2006), acting as a link between “what” the company thinks and traces its strategy — strategic thinking — and the creation of value (Proença, 1999; Whittington, 2002).

In this context, the Strategic Alignment of Knowledge Management was pointed out as the core of the strategic discussions of organizations, showing that the generation of value to sustain competitiveness would be associated with: (i) Strategic Thinking — responsible for the purpose and process of direction; (ii) the development of Enabling Contexts — physical, mental and virtual spaces, made available and intentionally operational, for the creation and re-creation of knowledge; (iii) Cognitive Surpluses

— competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and experiences that exceed those required by the organizational positions defined in the company structure) that can and should be identified, mobilized and trained to enable superior performance and extraordinary value creation for the business (Alvarenga Neto, 2008; Lopes, 2013; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997; Rezende, 2006; Shirky, 2011; Whittington, 2002).

The framework modeled by Strategic Thinking, Enabling Contexts, and Cognitive Surpluses grounded the epistemological and ontological formulation of the archetype Strategic Alignment of Knowledge Management — which served as the guiding thread for the development of the present study.

So, the main objective of this investigation was to characterize how the subjects’ perceptions about the possibilities of the Strategic Alignment of Knowledge Management (SAKM) are reflected in the standards of value creation of a Brazilian state-owned oil and gas corporation — chosen for its importance, complexity and convenience in the access to the subjects of the research — despite the recently voluntary layoff incentive plan in the company, that ended up generating staff shutdown on the part of these knowledge workers. For that, an intracorporate survey was applied, focusing on the set of knowledge workers of the firm.

Theoretical framework and conjectures

The ad hoc conception of “Strategic Alignment of Knowledge Management” arises from discussions that have been carried out over the last decades on the essentiality of knowledge as the engine of flows and main resource of inventories of organizational value, emerging, according to Serenko and Bontis (2013), from the seeding works of Westerman, Senior, Schumpeter, Penrose and Polanyi — respectively on the years of 1768, 1836, 1912, 1958 and 1958 — but also, and principally, from Drucker’s (1959) concentrating research lenses, giving rise to the expression knowledge workers.

For Saint-Onge (1996), in environments with shortened business cycles, the appropriation and application of tacit knowledge would be the main drivers of value creation based on intellectual capital, provoking discussions on how to integrate and align knowledge, the cognitive surplus, to the strategic alternatives that are anticipated by the firms.

Zheng, Yang, and McLean (2010), given a survey applied to 301 organizations, affirm the importance of knowledge for greater adherence among culture, systems, structure, strategy, and performance, increasing the importance attributed to enabling contexts for the development of competences and establishing competitive advantages.

Bolisani and Bratianu (2018) reinforce the importance of aligning knowledge to the creation of organizational value given the scarcity of tangible assets being displaced by the inflow of available intangible resources, leading to new options on strategically thinking about business evolution.

So, the framework of the Strategic Alignment of Knowledge Management derives from the composition and interdependence among (i) the design of the organizational strategy — strategic thinking; (ii) the intention and capacity of organizations to

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