

MANAGING UNEVEN LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE: A CHALLENGE FOR BUILDING-UP THE FIRST CORE CAPABILITIES IN 'LATECOMER' FIRMS¹

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Abstract

This paper explores certain problems of knowledge management that latecomer firms have to consider when they are building-up their first core capabilities. This paper particularly analyses the characteristics of the firm's knowledge base and problems associated with an uneven depth of knowledge.

Two types of unevenness are analysed: (i) unevenness in the levels of knowledge between technological fields (see table 1), and (ii) uneven depths of knowledge between organizational units related to the same knowledge field (see table 2). Based on that, this paper argues that the type and level of unevenness hinders the integration of knowledge, the knowledge creation process and the building-up of initial core capabilities.

According to some scholars, the main constraint on the process of re-building of core capabilities for the most innovative firms is located at the level of the organization. In contrast, the main conclusion of this paper is that latecomer firms that are building up their first core capabilities still have problems related to lack of knowledge. This sets up specific issues for knowledge management in latecomer firms. A high degree of unevenness in knowledge depth between fields and organizational units is an important issue to be explicitly tackled in a knowledge management system by latecomer firms.

This research is based on a detailed case study about the role of knowledge management in the process of building-up technological capabilities in a Mexican group that competes in the international frontier and has subsidiaries in US and Latin America.

¹ I wish to thank Vitro S.A. for being willing to open their doors to me. Any inaccuracies or errors in the text are, however, my own responsibility.

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