

Relationship Knowledge Development Process: An Opportunity Space Odyssey

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Digitalization drives faster disruptions and changes in value-adding boundaries between products and services. As a result, new business opportunities arise for innovative entrepreneurs. In parallel, digitalization causes competitive drawbacks if management ignores market and environmental changes. According to Vahlne and Bhatti (2019) relationship knowledge development process strengthens the organizational network architecture as knowledge of existing or potential opportunities is carried within the firm's business network. The course of internationalization process is guided by the opportunity information flows and corresponding decision making.

Internationalizing organizations are engaged in different activities through various relationships wherein individuals coordinate and build the organizational network. Thus, organizational actions and decisions derive from the individuals comprising the organization (Coviello et al., 2017). Individuals embedded in relationships are the conduits of information gathering and learning through interactions and their inter-organizational interactions are essential learning sources for organizations. As organizations' learning agents in relationship interactions, these individuals provide a better understanding of relationship needs in particular and network in general. They also enable organizational ability to fulfill objectives through effective, timely decisions. Consequently, Cano-Kollman et al., (2016, p. 257; 259) recommend researchers to find the answer to the questions on "How is knowledge carried and inter-connected across space? How effective are these conduits?" They claim that these "conduits [connections] through which knowledge travels remain unexplored."

The Uppsala model of multinational business enterprise (Vahlne and Johanson, 2009; 2013; 2017) is situated at the micro-level, with the organization as the unit of analysis. In contrast to this focus on organization as the unit of analysis, Coviello, Kano, and Liesch (2017) emphasize the importance of individuals as it is their actions that interconnect the organization and environment and thus transform the opportunities into exploitable conclusions. The knowledge development and commitment processes occur at both ends of the interacting relationships, for example, between customers and suppliers (Vahlne & Bhatti, 2019). Considering that the exploration of individual learning in organizational relationships helps understand the sharing and application of acquired experiential knowledge within organizations. From above mentioned we develop two major propositions for our research.

Proposition 1

An effective relationship knowledge development process increases the speed of the internationalization process by facilitating communication exchange, capability development, resolving issues, and solution provision.

Proposition 2

Relationship knowledge development process increases opportunity identification and exploitation leading to internationalization, through knowledge accessibility, co-evolution in a close-knit network, backed by timely entrepreneurial decision-making.

Working on these propositions reflect several calls to study how organizations learn, acquire market knowledge and identify opportunities (Cano-Kollman et al., 2016; Vahlne & Jonsson, 2017; Vahlne & Bhatti 2019). As we discuss the role of an individual as the learning agent in inter-organizational relationships (Dimitratos et al., 2014; Jonsson, 2015), this work intends to propose how organizations can identify and exploit internationalization opportunities through the knowledge development process.

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