

Department of Business and Management Chair of International Business

**Knowledge sharing and organizational
culture as cornerstones for international
success. The case of Altana**

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Preface

The paper here following analyses the main aspects and features of the knowledge sharing process. More in details we point out the concept of knowledge, how it exists within organizations and the role it plays for the final ends of the business entities if properly exchanged with other employees. The study is performed in the form of a review, and it takes into account articles published in academically refereed journals in management; organizational behavior; human resource development; applied psychology; and information systems. Other than accredited press, also a book dealing with the emerging Italian SMEs was taken into consideration for introducing the last part of the research in which a real case is presented. The choice of the sources of information has not been a random one, rather it has represented a way through which to develop a critical thinking and interpretation of previous studies conducted by relevant authors of the academic word. The theory was further matched and combined with the results coming from the analysis of a real case study relative to a Venetian company, that is Altana.

The choice of the argument finds its main roots in the pivotal role that knowledge plays within business contexts for the achievement of a sustainable competitive advantage. This is why there has been a considerable growing interest towards the topic in the last decades from many important researchers and scholars. In particular we will focus our attention on all the aspects that allow to leverage knowledge within an organization, that is we will explore the main determinant factors that enable the knowledge sharing process. Furthermore deeper attention will be devoted to the role that a trust oriented corporate culture plays in this scenario. Finally, we will try to give some evidence of how the interplay between knowledge sharing and a trust culture could have impact on the internationalization strategies and activities undertaken by our target company.

To achieve this, there has been the need of identify the main enablers that affect the sharing process through conducting both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis. The collection of numerical data has been based on the submission of a questionnaire to a sample of 14 employees, while the gathering of qualitative information has been granted by interviewing the HR manager, the CED manager and the CEO of the company. By matching the outcomes coming from the survey and those emerged through the interviews, it has been possible to assess the strategic value of knowledge within a real working context, how the sharing process interplay with the corporate culture, and how it could influence the strategic decision making in the field of internationalization. More in details, we tried to give evidence about the impact knowledge sharing and corporate culture have on the internationalization process, by mainly focusing on the role of trust.

The present review consists of three chapters.

The first chapter aims at introducing the concept of knowledge as a valuable, rare and inimitable resource that enables organizations to achieve and sustain their competitive advantage. This is why we will refer to knowledge as a real strategic valuable asset. Nevertheless, by simply relying on the available knowledge is not enough for an effective exploitation, rather the ability to efficiently create, share and use knowledge will be crucial to obtain the desired benefits. Furthermore, some classifications of knowledge are provided. On one side we have the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, on the other the one between the generic and the firm specific form of it. Respectively, the tacit dimension is considered more valuable because it is unique and difficult to imitate, as well as the firm specific one that, as the name suggests, has specific application to the business setting in which it has been developed.

After having built a better understanding of knowledge, the attention has been devolved to the sharing process as a means of extremely importance to pursue innovation, better performance, and ultimately to improve companies' competitiveness. To be more clear, a deepening in the literature has been

conducted through the examination of the main theories that regulate and identify the principal factors that foster the sharing behavior. Among them we underlined the theory of reasoned action; the social exchange; the social capital and the social dilemma theory. Thanks to them, we are also allowed to understand which are the elements that may have a positive or a negative impact of the sharing process. In this respect a difference between the barriers and drivers to knowledge sharing have been identified. Among the drivers we could find interpersonal, individual and team characteristics, motivational factors, and organizational climate and culture; while among the barriers we could include the power of perspective, higher levels of apprehension, and lower benefits/costs ratios. Given the many benefits linked to knowledge sharing, companies have recognized the necessity to put all their efforts to emphasize the drivers and overcome the barriers by making in place the so called knowledge management practices. They consist of some initiatives such as work design; stuffing; training and development; performance appraisal; and compensation and culture.

In the second chapter, the focus is on the pivotal role played by culture for pursuing the desired benefits for which each company exists.

Corporate culture is meant as the set of beliefs, norms, and values that influence employees' behaviors, and in turn also the creation, sharing and use of knowledge. As argued by many authors, there is not a culture that could be classified as the ideal or as the best one, because culture is something unique. It is embedded in the specific basic assumptions, values, and norms of each business entity. Also in this section, classifications and theories concerning the shaping of different organizational cultures are provided to understand what is the appropriate nature a cultural context should have in order to be able to generate and sustain the competitive advantage. If the latter wants to be pursued through intensifying and achieving a required level of knowledge sharing, it becomes important to generate a cultural context oriented towards trust.

Trust is defined as the degree of reciprocal faith in others' intentions, behaviors, and skills towards organizational goals. It can assume multiple facets and manifest in numerous manners, but it mainly presents three aspects that are considered its principal antecedents: capability, benevolence, and integrity. According to these three dimensions, it is possible to establish a trusting environment based on employees' human relationships that, in turn, would allow to move towards a knowledge sharing oriented culture. Under this view, trust is identified as the linking factor: the starting point, as well as the primary objective to achieve for granting an efficient functioning of the examined organizational processes. Hence, trust determines not only the quality of the sharing process, but also the implementation of the acquired insights, that will reflect in a more satisfactory business performance. Better explanations in this respect are coming from some of the most accredited theories: incentive, social motivational, goal-setting-social-cognitive theory. The latter are more focused on the figures of the knowledge sender and receiver, and underline the importance of motivational mechanisms associated to them.

The third chapter takes on a different set up compared to the previous ones, given that it relies on the observations of a real case study. In particular in this section we have tried to give some evidence of the issues treated in the literature review. In order to do so, as mentioned above, we have taken under analysis the case of Altana, a small-medium enterprise that operates as a leader in the kids wear market sector. The prosperous growth and the numerous successes that have always characterized this firm at both national and international level, are certainly among the major features that attracted our attention for the research. As it will be shown later, Altana is a proof of positivity in the business world that has been achieved through a proper balance between, hard work and human relationships' care. The main features that characterize the firm are explained in the company profile that aims at pointing out which are the main aspects that have been useful to consider in conducting the research. The outcomes deriving from the descriptive analysis, and those from the

interviews given by the three members mentioned above, have allowed to understand that knowledge sharing is perceived to be a strategic asset for pursuing the set business benefits, such as more efficiency, more flexibility and innovation. Accordingly, we found evidence that trust has a crucial role within the organization. As argued by the CEO, it is the thing for which she fights every day. Under this perspective it becomes easier to understand that trust, by interplaying with other enablers (organizational structure, turnover, competitiveness, and so on), favors the leveraging of knowledge among employees through its sharing. This is possible because when the level of trust is perceived as high, then the sharing of knowledge becomes more likely to take place. Knowledge is exchanged and used because there is a real feeling that it can reveal relevant for the final purposes of the entity.

Ultimately, we made some considerations about how the sharing process, fostered by the company's corporate culture, affected the internationalization strategies undertaken by Altana, and in turn how the culture of this firm has been impacted by the international activities. Also in this circumstance, it seems that the strong culture of the business entity acts as the main factor through which it becomes possible to be ready to face all the new challenges.

1. Knowledge and knowledge sharing

1.1 Understanding knowledge

The concept of knowledge has always been considered a relevant factor in organizations, but it is only in the last decades that it has become increasingly popular in the literature, with knowledge being recognized as one of the most important resources for organizations. There exist many definitions for knowledge, the most ancient one finds its roots in the philosophical debates started with Plato who considered knowledge a “justified true belief that lies in human minds and exists only if there is a human mind to the knowing”. However, presently there is no single agreed definition and the numerous competing existing theories underline its different aspects, facets and characteristics.

Davenport and Prusak defined knowledge as “a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insights that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new ideas. It originates in the minds of knowers” (Davenport and Prusak, 1998:5); while in 1995 Nonaka and Takeuchi argued that knowledge is a “dynamic human process of justifying personal belief toward the truth”. Despite the light nuances that we can get from the provided definitions, we can state that commonly knowledge is considered a valuable resource necessary for the achievement of competitive advantage for organizations.

As sustained by the resource-based view (RBV), a company’s competitive advantage lies in the combination of its productive resources. More in details, this theory, first popularized by Hamel and Prahalad in their book “Competing for the future” (1994), conceives firms as a bundle of resources. It is these resources, and the way they are combined, that make organizations different from one another and in turn allow them to deliver products and services in the market. The central question addressed by the RBV, as pointed out by Barney (1991), deals with finding not only why firms are different, but also how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage (Hoskisson et al., 1999:437). According to Barney, a sustainable competitive advantage is so called because it is realized through the implementation of a value-creating strategy (competitive) that

cannot be simultaneously copied and undertaken by other competitors (sustainable) (Barney, 1991, p.102). In order to be successful in this achievement, an organization should properly mix its strategic assets, that consist in four main types of resources: 1) financial resources, 2) Physical resources, 3) human resources, and 4) organizational resources (Barney 1991). This is the reason for which we commonly refer to the VRIN framework of Barney. That resources will make the company successful if they are valuable, rare or unique, inimitable, and non substitutable.

Similarly, Sanchez and Heene (1997) stated that organizational knowledge is rare and unique because it is path dependent, meaning that there are no two organizations that have undergone exactly the same history or the same learning experiences; it is difficult to imitate because it is casually ambiguous: it is embedded in a complex network of formal and informal interpersonal relationships and in a shared and often unspoken system of norms and beliefs; and it is valuable and non substitutable because it allows to attain the desired goals in a manner different from rivals. Given that knowledge, as a resource, satisfies all the four requirements underlined above, it is possible to consider it as a real strategic asset exploitable for the achievement of organizational objectives and success (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002).

Knowledge exists at multiple levels within the organization (individual, group and organizational levels), and it is the result from the particular history of internal and external interactions, and from the particular learning processes of the organization (Minu Ipe, 2003).

In general terms, when a resource is available to business companies, it needs to be properly managed in order to be effectively used and exploited for the main purposes of the firm itself. That is to say, if an organization owns valuable and promising resources, but it is not able to efficiently administer and coordinate them, it won't be possible to gain the related advantage. Thus it is not enough to have the right and useful knowledge if there is not an organized system able to make it yield the best.

In other words, as for every kind of resource exploitable to achieve the desired objectives, also knowledge needs to be managed, or better it needs to be involved in some kind of knowledge-management initiatives. Knowledge management is normally used to refer to those practices that are implemented with the sole (major) objective of gaining competitive advantage through increasing marketing effectiveness, developing a customer focus, or improving product innovation (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002). These practices want also to grow the conviction among company managers, consultants, and scholars that organizational knowledge may constitute a key strategic resource (Boisot 1998; Spender 1996; Nanda 1996). In sum an effective management is necessary for increasing the knowledge stocks that will sustain organizational success.

Several academics and consultants, such as Prusak and Davenport, have argued that creating a culture that values creativity, continuous improvement and the sharing of ideas is necessary for knowledge management initiatives to succeed. This aspect suggests that in order to effectively organize its knowledge assets, an organization should motivate its employees in exploring and exploiting new opportunities through the application of new ideas. More in details, an organization's ability to effectively leverage its knowledge is highly dependent on its people creating, sharing and using it.

1.2 Knowledge classifications

Many scholars have developed and proposed different theoretical approaches about organizing knowledge. The said approaches, related to various views, cognition, language, and social aspects, will contribute to analyze knowledge under different perspectives and will help to answer in a more complete manner to the question "what is organizational knowledge?".

1.2.1 Degree of articulation and degree of aggregation

The most extended and yet debated organizational theories of knowledge remark a systematic distinction along two dimensions: degree of articulation and degree of aggregation. The pioneers of these researches, who provided a valid support to such distinction, were mainly Polanyi (1966, 1969), Spender (1996), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), Blackler (1995), and Lam (2000).

According to how it can be articulated, knowledge is classified as tacit or explicit. The concept of *tacit knowledge* is a cornerstone in organizational knowledge theory and refers to knowledge that is tied to the senses, skills, physical experiences, intuition, or implicit rules of thumb. As argued by Polanyi (1966), it is hard for people to enunciate because it is practical, developed by individuals, often unconsciously, as they attempt to master various tasks over a period of time. *Explicit knowledge*, on the other hand, refers to forms that can be easily communicated to others since it is uttered and captured in drawings and writing. It has a universal character, supporting the capacity to act across contexts. Although both types can make a contribution, it can be argued that organizations are more likely to derive benefits from tacit knowledge; this is due to the ease with which the explicit form can be disseminated and to the fact that the tacit one more readily satisfies the requirements for a resource to be valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and to substitute. That is to say tacit knowledge can be more considered a strategic asset through which a firm can achieve competitive advantage.

For what the degree of aggregation concerns, we can distinguish between individual and collective forms of knowledge, where the former is held by one person and the latter emerges from the interaction and dialogue among the members of a community or an organization. From the combination of these two dimensions, four classes of knowledge generate (Blackler 1995):

- Individual – tacit (or embodied knowledge);
- Individual – explicit (or embrained knowledge);
- Collective – explicit (or encoded knowledge); and

- Collective – tacit (or encultured and embedded knowledge).

According to Nonaka (1994), organizational knowledge derives from a series of ongoing transformations among these different generated classes according to which the ideas and skills of different individuals is divulged and combined into collective routines and shared knowledge bases, encoded knowledge is internalized by individuals, and the individuals share their skills with one another. Even though other authors have proposed other views of this issue, there appears general consensus about the idea that collective knowledge emerges from the interaction and dialogue among members. In sum, it is on these interactions that most knowledge-management initiatives focus. In this respect, it is important to notice that companies are likely to undertake different Knowledge-management strategies depending on what type of knowledge they consider most valuable. Broadly speaking, the chosen management practices try to foster the *sharing of knowledge*, ideas, and experiences among individuals or groups for a better exploitation of knowledge as a major source of competitive advantage.

As explained above, tacit knowledge is considered to be a major resource compared to the explicit form of articulation. However, any advantages from the tacit must result from the ability of individuals to apply it by involving the working team or group, thus the ability to share this knowledge with others. In other words, both explicit and tacit knowledge do clearly make a separate and useful contribution to performance, so we cannot consider them as two separate entities because they are effectively inseparable. Explicit knowledge is always grounded in the tacit one. In this respect, Polanyi remarked (1969) that even a formal science such as mathematics relies on the non-exact judgment of individuals (Nonaka and Krogh, 2009). Thus, it is necessary to understand how individuals interact and how this interaction affects companies' performance. The concept of *knowledge conversion* explains how tacit and explicit knowledge interplay along a continuum, where the notion of continuum refers to knowledge ranging from tacit to explicit and vice versa.

Nonaka's theory of organizational knowledge creation points out the dynamic interaction between the two forms of knowledge, specifying that in some circumstances the tacit dimension is required to understand the explicit one, while in some others it is the explicit that it may contribute to generate further tacit knowledge. In the theory the specific conversion refers to two elements:

- personal subjective knowledge (tacit) that needs to be socially justified and brought together with other's knowledge in order to make interaction possible (for example, a manager who identifies an exploitable investment opportunity needs to use his/her tacit knowledge in an explicit form - memos, charts, analysis, video, and statements - for involving other members of the working group and to make it feasible), and
- tacit knowledge that may give rise to new explicit knowledge (and vice versa) through a four steps processes, the so called SECI model: socialization (tacit to tacit), externalization (tacit to explicit), combination (explicit to explicit), and internalization (explicit to tacit). Thanks to the SECI model, knowledge is able to adopt alternating forms so as to mutually enhance tacit and explicit elements.

1.2.2 General and firm-specific knowledge

As stated above, the resource-based theory, and in turn the knowledge-based theory, sustain that knowledge is often considered a firm's most important resource. A further distinction that affects the degree of relevance attributable to such resource exists, and it depends on its specific characteristics. On one side we have general knowledge, on the other firm-specific knowledge (Wang et al. 2009).

The former is generally built upon the knowledge available in the market, thus it is less specialized; the latter is rather generated from already existing knowledge: it has specific application to the business setting in which it has been developed and less applicability outside of the producing firm. Although both types of

resources are critical for firm operations, the firm-specific form plays a more impressive role in terms of economic performance. In other words, firm-specific knowledge is associated with higher developmental risk (Barney, 2001; Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000; Priem and Butler, 2001) and it is not easily tradable or reusable outside of the company. This makes imitation from rivals difficult, so we can argue that firm-specific knowledge has greater potential to serve as a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

The development of firm-specific knowledge requires firm-specific human capital, or simply key employees. As for the firm-specific resources, also key employees are not redeployable outside of their company, this leads to a serious problem of disincentive in making new firm-specific investments. For this reason an organization needs to adopt effective employee governance mechanisms aimed at reducing key human capital's fear of potential holding-up from the company (Wang et al., 2009). In other terms these mechanisms intend to align employees' goals with those of the firm.

A possible solution to this problem is represented by the advancement of two governance mechanisms: the economic-based and the relationship-based ones (Wang et al., 2009).

The economic-based mechanism (or explicit mechanism) mainly relies on the practice of employee stock ownership. In this way employees will be benefited from any positive economic performance of the firm, thus they will be motivated in putting more effort and commitment by gaining tax advantages, and by financing capital acquisition. The company could also use this approach as a form of control for the key workers' behavior in developing firm-specific knowledge. In sum, employee stock ownership provides both a measure of residual control and a vehicle for profit-sharing to encourage productive efforts.

The relationship-based mechanism (or implicit mechanism), instead, is aimed at building trusting relationship with key employees. As stated above human capital with an adequate degree of specificity is imperfectly redeployable, this means that key employees are valued less outside of the boundaries of their firm. This is

due to the fact that they are too specialized on the particular needs of that company (Williamson, 1985). Consequently, after having contributed to the investment, they could be in a weak position if the company for which they worked will not hold them. As a matter of fact, without substantial trust between the firm and its key employees, a company might not be able to realize the potential economic rents that could be generated from its specific knowledge resources (Cornell and Shapiro, 1987). However, the development and maintenance of a trust relational governance leads to some costs because long-term investments, especially in human resource practices, should be sustained by the firm. Examples of such costs could be recruitment benefits and training, team based performance appraisal, and long-term employment policies (Collins and Smith, 2006). Certainly this approach will be adopted if the benefits from the relational governance will outcome the incurring costs.

In sum, explicit and implicit governance mechanisms can be fundamental in influencing the performance impact of firm-specific knowledge.

1.3 The sharing process: going behind the mere knowledge

There is enough evidence about the importance of organizational knowledge; but in order to gain and sustain a competitive advantage it is not sufficient to simply rely on staffing and systems that focus on selecting employees enjoying specific knowledge, skills, abilities, or any needed form of competence. Organizations should go a step further and recognize the necessity of considering also how to share expertise and knowledge among its individuals. This means that companies should effectively emphasize and exploit the already existing resources by fostering knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is considered a fundamental means through which knowledge is transferred and disseminated from one person to another, allowing to pursue innovation, better performance, and ultimately a competitive advantage for the organization (Jackson et al., 2006). The sharing process is retained to be of primary importance for improving

firms' competitiveness. Where problems and failures of different nature occur, a plausible explanation can be attributed to the lack of consideration about how the organizational and interpersonal context, as well as the individual characteristics, influence the sharing behavior (Carter and Scarbrough, 2001; Voelpel, Dous, and Davenport, 2005). In this respect, it is necessary to underline a fundamental distinction between two dimensions of the process that, according to the evidence, tend to show different patterns within companies.

On one side we have knowledge donating, that is referred to the voluntary and spontaneously share of knowledge; on the other side we have knowledge collecting: in this case knowledge is "given" only if it is explicitly required by an individual.

In addition, scholars are keen to point out a further demarcation line, albeit subtle, between knowledge sharing and transfer. The former purely occurs among individuals, while the latter is typically referred to the movement of knowledge across different units, divisions, or organizations (e.g Wang and Noe, 2010; Szulanski, Cappetta, and Jensen, 2004). Nevertheless, in this work, we are going to use interchangeably the two terms.

Given the importance of sharing knowledge and ideas within a company, we are going to provide some "instruments" with the objective of building a better understanding about which are the factors that influence, characterize, and determines this process. In particular in this section we would like to realize a literature review in which the main aspects and the critical antecedents of knowledge sharing will be identified. More in details, an accurate investigation of the contribution provided by many researchers who already explored this wide and complex field, will allow to focus our attention on the main drivers of knowledge sharing, on why people share (or not share) information with co-workers, on what are the main barriers that an organization may face when trying to foster knowledge sharing, and on whether there exist possible solutions to overcome these difficulties.

1.3.1 The main theories

Researches on knowledge sharing draw on several theories that try to identify the principal factors that encourage and analyze the nature of knowledge sharing behavior.

The most accredited theories, taken under consideration by the major scholars, are the following (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002; Wang and Noe, 2010):

- theory of reasoned action;
- social exchange theory;
- social capital theory; and
- social dilemma theory.

According to the *theory of reasoned action*, the intention to engage in certain behaviors depends upon the attitudes toward those behaviors, as well as upon perception of norms related to it. Furthermore, the said attitudes are determined by the beliefs regarding the outcomes coming from the undertaken behaviors and the relative evaluations. This reasoning applies also for knowledge sharing, thus there exist attitudes and norms that favor this process.

The other theories aim at identifying the factors that affect people's attitudes toward sharing and their perception of norms for engaging in such practice.

For the *social exchange theory* organizational members regulate their interactions on the basis of a self-interested analysis of costs and benefits. Obviously they will be more likely to share what they know if the perceived benefits will outweigh the costs. The benefits we refer to are not of tangible nature, rather they refer to status improvement, job security or promotional prospects and future reciprocity; the latter represents a mutual give and take of knowledge. From this perspective, knowledge sharing will be positively affected when an individual trusts that this behavior will be reciprocated in the future.

On the other hand, the *social capital theory* refers to close interpersonal relationships existing among individuals and consider such relations as valuable organizational resources able to facilitate the interactions among firms' members; this is necessary for conducting successful actions. There are three

dimensions of social capital: structural, cognitive, and relational (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The structural dimension includes ties or connections among members in the network (e.g. structural holes, centralization); the cognitive one refers to shared language and narratives among members that contribute to improve mutual understanding and communication; the relational one, instead, is considered the effective part of the social capital. Social capital describes network relationships in terms of interpersonal trust, existence of shared norms, and identification with other individuals. The relational dimension, therefore, deals with the nature or quality of network connections. The first two forms of social capital determine whether or not employees have the opportunity to share knowledge, while the third one identifies whether or not they have the motivation to share what they know.

Generally the opportunity to engage in knowledge sharing behaviors increases when individuals spend more time together and when communication is more effective. Although this opportunity may exist, a person may not be willing to adopt such behavior. In fact, the willingness or motivation is higher when employees trust and identify with one another. This is the key though which relational social capital should encourage knowledge sharing.

Last, but not the least, there is a contribution also from the *social dilemma theory*. It describes how the rational behavior of a single individual can lead, at the end, to not-optimal outcomes from the collective standpoint. In this context the dilemma stays in the fact that knowledge sharing can be conceptualized as a particular case of paradigmatic social situation (for this reason we say social dilemma) in which individual rationality, simply trying to maximize individual benefits, can lead to collective irrationality. A popular representation of that is the tragedy of the commons (Hardin and Garrett, 1968): if in a group there are on one side members who contribute to share new ideas, and on the other some who do not give any contribution, then everyone will have access to the shared information anyhow. But if each of them will act as a free rider, then the common will no longer exist.

1.3.2 Drivers of knowledge sharing

In this section we will focus on the principal factors that encourage and affect knowledge sharing among employees. This aspect is of extreme importance since organizational knowledge is determined by the extent to which it is shared within organizations. In this respect, the literature has given evidence of a significant influence on the following factors:

- organizational culture and climate;
- interpersonal and team characteristics;
- individual characteristics; and
- motivational factors.

Organizational culture and climate.

When we talk about organizational context and climate we refer to a wide range of elements that influence the knowledge sharing practice. First, we need to examine the main effects of a firm's culture and climate, where for climate we mean the contextual situation at a point in time linked to thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Thus it is temporal and subjective to manipulation. In contrast, culture refers to an evolved context in which specific situations are embedded. It is rooted in the history, it is collectively held and sufficiently complex to be handled (Wang and Noe, 2010).

It seems logic that generally climate tends to be highly influenced by organizational culture. There exist some cultural dimensions that likely encourage knowledge sharing, but trust has attracted most attention by many scholars. In fact, a trust oriented culture not only results to alleviate the negative effects of perceived costs on sharing, but it also emphasizes team cooperation: a necessary condition for knowledge sharing. Similarly companies that foster individual competition may pose a barrier to share what they know (Kankanhalli et al., 2005).

Management support is also considered a critical factor that is positively associated with employees' perception of a knowledge sharing culture (e.g.

employee trust, willingness of experts to help others) (Connelly and Kelloway, 2003; Lin, 2007). In this regard, researchers found that managers with knowledge and expertise who give attention and importance (e.g. through control of rewards for desired behaviors) to sharing knowledge among employees, are likely to create a supporting climate for the practice here discussed.

Moreover, researchers have shown that knowledge sharing may be facilitated by having a less centralized organizational structure (Kin and Lee, 2006), since this allows to create a work environment that encourages interaction among workers, such as through the use of open workspaces, utilization of fluid job rotation and encouraging communication across teams. On the opposite a more hierarchical structure tends to discourage knowledge sharing.

Interpersonal and team characteristics.

The features to which we refer includes the effects of turnover, diversity and social networks. It seems deducible that the longer a team has been formed, the higher the level of cohesiveness and the more team members are likely to engage in sharing behaviors (Wang and Noe, 2009). The opposite is true if the turnover level is higher. Similarly, the presence of minorities within work groups (e.g. gender, educational level) can have a negative impact in this engagement. A valid support comes from the study of Sawng et al. (2006). They revealed that teams in large organizations with higher female-male ratios were more likely to engage in knowledge sharing with other members. If this outcome represents just a particular focus on the topic, the research of Phillips et al. (2004) and Thomas-Hunt et al. (2003) results in a more generic finding. In fact, they found that socially isolated members are more likely to disagree with others and contribute their unique knowledge within a heterogeneous team. In conclusion it is reasonable to argue that homogeneity is largely preferred to heterogeneity if our intent is to encourage the knowledge sharing process.

Talking about social network we mainly refer to the so called *communities of practice*: work related groups of individuals who share common interests, or problems, beyond the boundaries of the organizations; in this manner they are

likely to learn from each other through on-going interactions. This not only facilitates knowledge sharing, but also enhances the quality of information exchanged (Wang and Noe, 2009; Cross and Cummings, 2004; Hansen, 1999; Reagans and McEvily, 2003).

Individual characteristics.

The main results from this perspectives come from the study of Cabrera et al. (2006). The researchers found that individuals with great openness to experience tend to have a high level of curiosity resulting in a pique interest to seek others' ideas insights. In addition employees with higher level of education and longer work experience are more likely to exchange their expertise and have positive attitudes toward sharing (Constant et al., 1994). Furthermore, individuals with higher experience are more likely to share useful knowledge when other employees ask for that. That is to say expert workers are more likely to engage in the knowledge collecting process, rather than in the knowledge donating one. Similarly, several studies have shown that people who are more confident in their ability to share useful knowledge (that is people aware about the potential of what they know) are also more inclined to express intentions to share, consequently they report major commitment and engagement in the knowledge sharing behavior (e.g. Cabrera et al., 2006; Lin, 2007; Wang and Noe, 2009). However, this is not always the case. There are several circumstances in which a higher degree of experience, and major awareness of knowledge potential tend to refrain employees from sharing their ideas with others. The most accepted reason to explain this phenomenon is attributed to the fear of losing a position of prestige and advantage in relation to other individuals within the company (Wang and Noe, 2009).

Motivational factors.

According to Stenmark (2001) and Ipe (2003), people are not likely to share knowledge without strong personal motivation. Broadly speaking motivational

factors can be divided into internal and external. Internal factors include perceived benefits and costs (Wang and Noe, 2010), interpersonal trust and justice, reciprocity, and individual attitudes; while external ones comprise relationship with recipient and rewards for sharing.

For what the perception of benefits/costs concerns, the social exchange theory suggests that individuals evaluate the ratio and, in turn, base their decisions on the expectation that it will lead to rewards, such as respect and reputation. Obviously a positive perception of this ratio will positively impact the knowledge sharing practice, and vice versa.

Examining trust and justice, meant as two key components of interpersonal relationship, is of extreme importance given that the described practice involves providing knowledge to another person or to a collective (e.g. working team or community of practice) with expectation of reciprocity. The latter implies that individuals will consider knowledge sharing a give-and-take process (Schultz, 2001). Based on this view, trust can be seen as an antecedent of knowledge sharing that positively affects the practice. Researchers have examined three dimensions of trustworthiness (Chowdhury, 2005; Mooradian et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2007; Wang and Noe, 2009):

- capability (i.e. individuals tend to share less knowledge with team members whom are perceived to be very capable);
- integrity (i.e. people are more likely to share knowledge when they believe in the honesty and fairness of other members); and
- benevolence (i.e. the trustee is believed to have good will to the trustor).

However, the latter form of trustworthiness does not show enough evidence of relation with knowledge sharing behavior (Bakker et al. 2006).

Individual attitudes refers to how individual behaviors are influenced by attitudes and beliefs. Based on this assumption we can argue that individuals' expectations of the usefulness of their knowledge can improve relationships with others, this will in turn positively impact the intentions to share it.

Talking about the external factors, one of the most influential ones is the relationship with recipient. It consists in the relationship between the sender and the recipient and it is affected by two aspects: trust on one side, and power and status of the recipient on the other. According to Kramer (1999:163) trust is extremely important as one of the most critical dimensions influencing the actions of individuals within organizations. He also stated that trust not only affects the way knowledge is shared, but also that barriers to trust exist and they may rise from the perceptions that members are not contributing equally to the community, or that they might exploit their own cooperative efforts. On the other hand the impact coming from issues of power on knowledge sharing has the following tendency: a) individuals with low status and power in the organization tend to direct information to those with more status and power, and b) individuals with more status and power tend to direct information more toward their peers than toward those with low status and power (Ipe, 2003).

The second external factor we highlighted regards the rewards for sharing that is seen differently by researchers. According to the social exchange and social capital theories, intrinsic rewards such as promotions or bonuses are positively related to knowledge sharing, but extrinsic forms of rewards, that is monetary ones, have a negative effect toward the process (Brock and Kim, 2002; Brock et al., 2005).

1.3.3 Barriers to knowledge sharing

In this section we will focus on some factors that in different manners tend to discourage or obstacle the exchange of insights within firms. For this reason we will refer to them as barriers to knowledge sharing.

As remarked many times, culture plays a dominant role in this respect. More in details when an organizational culture is built on norms and values that emphasize the sharing of knowledge, people are more induced to share because they see it as natural, rather than something they are forced to do (McDermott

and O'Dell, 2001). This would be the ideal situation in the specific, but unfortunately it is not always the case. If, on one side, culture may act as the main facilitator, on the other it could also represent an inhibitor. Since an organization's culture is reflected in its structure, stories, values and beliefs, it appears that when these aspects are not inclined to encourage the sharing of what is known, it is not appropriate to change this "essence"; rather it seems more reasonable to shape the knowledge management on the basis of the specific corporate culture (McDermott and O'Dell, 2001).

Even if the cultural aspect is among the most influential, there are other components that we need to take into account.

The **power of perspective**, for example, is considered an obstruction to knowledge sharing when individuals retain that the knowledge they hold is a source of power able to confer them prestige, better reputation and positions. In this case people may refrain from sharing what they know because, in this manner, they believe to increase their expert and they are also afraid to lose their distinctiveness.

Furthermore, knowledge sharing is inhibited when the **level of apprehension** among employees is high. Evaluation apprehension may result from self-perceptions that what has been shared is inaccurate, and thus this may be the object of criticism from others. Some researchers sustain that a possible solution to reduce apprehension could be found in a trust and innovation oriented culture, but this needs still to be proved.

In the previous section we made reference to the **benefits/cost ratio**; in particular when individuals find this ratio too low the perceived costs may refrain members to share their ideas. This scenario may occur in those situations in which people do not feel enough incentive or stimulated in engaging in such behaviors and rather they believe that sharing knowledge is just a waste of time.

1.4 Favoring knowledge management practices

As underlined several times in the previous sections, knowledge is one of the most important resources for the dynamic business environment in which companies operate, and knowledge sharing, in turn, has become necessary for being competitive. However sharing is hard to ensure, because knowledge is initially generated and stored within the employees (Chow and Chan, 2008). In this regard, some scholars like Szulanski (1996), and Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) stated that knowledge sharing is the cornerstone of knowledge management. Thus the aim of this paragraph is to try to identify the most effective management practices aimed at fostering the sharing process. The review here following mainly takes into account a study of Cabrera and Cabrera (2005).

In particular we are going to explore all the relevant initiatives that organizations might adopt with the purpose of facilitating and encouraging the sharing of knowledge (Wright et al., 2001). The focus will be on: work design; staffing, training and development; performance appraisal and compensation; and culture.

The work design contribution towards this process derives from the ability of enhancing social networks. For instance, rather than designing stable and individualized jobs, work should be conceptualized as a sequence of assignments where employees work closely with each other on a series of projects. Such designs are able to favor the formation of ties across functions, geographical locations, business units and companies (Mohrman, 2003).

A first approach to be used, in order to encourage cooperation among members, is the organization of work around teams. This would give employees the opportunity to operate closely each other and to create a group context in which knowledge exchange is facilitated, especially when the rewards are based on the achievement of team results (Noe et al., 2003). Thus, such practice would increase the need for coordination and collaboration. Another way to allow the required interaction, is the introduction of the so called cross-functional teams.

The latter provides at establishing close relationships and creating strong linkages among employees of different groups, having in turn a positive effect on knowledge sharing (Kang et al., 2007). Furthermore, given that a high degree of interaction is needed when interdependent tasks are performed, it seems clear that by increasing the level of interdependency, workers have strong incentives to work together, and in turn more situations for sharing knowledge are created (Noe et al., 2003).

Communities of practice represent another way of work design that is very effective for leveraging knowledge exchange (Noe et al., 2003). We already discussed what these communities are and we can easily imagine that the formation of such informal groups would cut formal business boundaries (Legnick-Hall, 2003).

Dealing with the staffing practice, we refer to the recruitment process of employees. This phase should rely on the identification of individuals who will have a higher probability of agreeing on the same norms and who are more likely to identify themselves with the core values of the organization, thus with the corporate culture. The Person-organization fit, or equivalently the P-O fit, is a hiring practice that emphasizes the compatibility between organization and employee characteristics. It usually makes reference to the individuals' values, beliefs, personality and needs (Chatman, 1991). Similarly, Robertson and O'Malley (2000) reported in their study that often HR managers reject most candidates because they are not "one of us". This way of doing is particularly important when a knowledge sharing culture wants to be emphasized, in fact in this manner workers who are more likely to share the values that the firm is looking for will be selected (Lengnic_Hall, 2003; and Pulakos et al., 2003).

Training and development programs help to increase the general degree of self efficacy among organizational individuals. Consequently, employees will feel more assured of their abilities and, in turn, they will be more likely to exchange their knowledge with others. But this is not enough. In fact, such programs are very useful for helping workers to acquire organizational values, norms, and

shared cognitive schemata that will favor interaction among employees, strong interpersonal ties, common language and norms, and identification with the community (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005; Kang et al., 2003).

The performance appraisal and compensation practices have been identified in the so called “rewarding knowledge sharing” of McDermott and O’Dell (2001). According to them, a way to encourage knowledge sharing is making this behavior critical for career success. Specifically, if employees understand that leveraging what they know is the only way to build their reputation, to be appreciated and, in turn, to improve their position within the company, then they will be more motivated in undertaking this behavior. The main idea is: “it is what you share about what you know and not what you know that gives you power” (McDermott and O’Dell, 2001). This approach leads also to another fundamental benefit: it helps to reduce the perceived costs of this behavior. Employees usually sustain that they are reluctant in sharing knowledge with others because it takes too much time. In their opinion it is not convenient to spend time for something that is not productive for their job (Husted and Michailova, 2002); but if they are aware that this is the only way to advance their careers, then they will no longer consider knowledge sharing an opportunity cost or time that could be spent on more productive activities (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005). Nevertheless, these systems should take great care when implemented. Employees will be more willing to share their ideas in organizational climates that are safe and non-judgmental (Oldham, 2003). This means that performance evaluations should have a developmental, rather than a controlling, focus (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005).

Last, but not the least, we need to talk about the role of culture in knowledge management. One of the major ways in which culture influences knowledge management practices is by establishing strong social norms regarding the sharing behavior and by creating an environment of caring, trust and cooperation (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005). In particular it is relevant to notice that trust, together with expectations of reciprocity, are the factors that mainly

determine the willingness of individuals in sharing what they know within their work environment (Davenport and Prusack, 1998; Faraj and Wasko, 2001; Irmer et al., 2002; Kang et al., 2003; Leana and Van Buren, 1999; Robertson and O'Malley, 2000; Settoon and Mossholder, 2002; Zarraga and Bonanche, 2003).

2. Matching knowledge sharing and corporate culture: the role of trust

“Culture is a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Shein, 1995:9).

“The culture that exists in each organization is tremendously essential seeing that a strong culture that inculcates the sharing of knowledge among workers does facilitate the organization in increasing its competitive edge” (Ling, 2011:331).

“Shaping culture is central for an organization’s ability to manage its knowledge effectively” (Karlsen and Gottshalk, 2004:9).

These are just some of the most impressive citations of some scholars and researchers, but they are enough to understand the pivotal role of corporate culture for pursuing the desired benefits for which each company exists.

In this chapter we are going to focus on culture seen as an influencing of the knowledge sharing behavior within organizations.

Furthermore, deep attention will be given to the role of trust as a key factor for the sharing practice among employees. The study will take into account the main theories that characterize the traditional, but also the most modern and influential literature in the field of the subject matter.

2.1 The role of culture within organizations

One of the most challenges when studying culture lies in the way it is defined. Whereas some scholars referred to it in terms of ideologies, sets of beliefs, basic assumptions, shared sets of core values, important understandings, and collective will (Sackman, 1992), others argued that culture includes more explicit, observable artifacts such as norms and practices (De Long and Fahey, 2000; Hofstede, 1998), symbols, as well as language, ideology, rituals, myths, and ceremony (Pettigrew, 1979). On one side, this richness of attributes could be

viewed as a set of opportunities furnishing a multitude of ways to explain what culture is and why it is important; but, on the other side, the same richness could represent an obstacle to this intent by creating confusion among readers.

In this review we are going to consider one of the most ancient and accredited definitions of organizational culture provided by Shein (1985). According to him, culture is viewed as the group of shared values, beliefs, and practices that govern the life of people within a community. More precisely, it exists at three levels: basic assumptions, values, and artifacts.

At the deepest level, culture consists of basic assumptions, also called beliefs. They represent the interpretative schemes that persons use to perceive situations and to make sense of ongoing events, activities, and human relationships, thereby forming the basis for collective actions (Maanen and Barley, 1985).

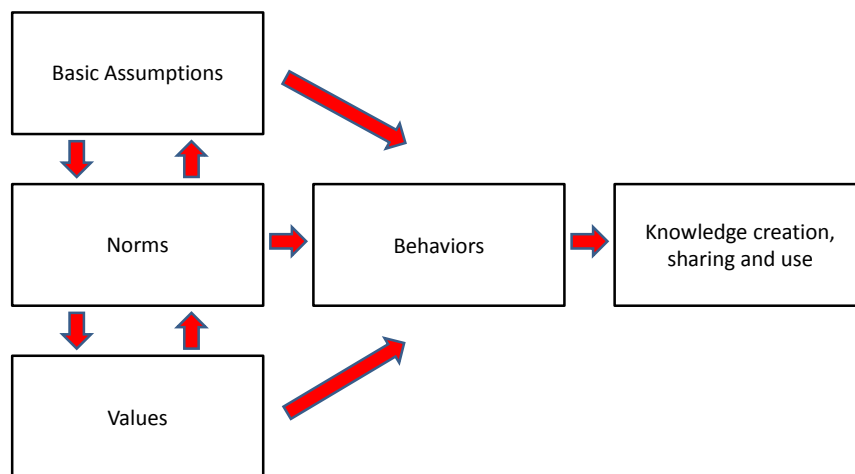
Next, we find values. They represent a more visible manifestation of culture and they allow to express beliefs and to identify what is important to a particular group. The main distinction between assumptions and values stays in the fact that the former are preconscious and invisible, while the latter are more evident, datable and people have a greater awareness of them. For this reason Shein (1985) makes it clear that the values alone are merely a reflection of underlying cultural assumptions. It is these values that will provide mechanisms through which organizational members are able to interpret signals, events, and issues related to corporate norms (Bansal, 2003). For norms we mean the shared behavioral expectations that develop over repeated interactions between individuals and become relatively stable over time (Bettenhausen and Murningham, 1985). Under this perspective, values can be seen as a set of social norms that determine the rules adopted by people to communicate and interplay with others within any context (De Long, D.W., and Fahey, 2000).

At the third level it is possible to find artifacts, that is, the most visible manifestation of culture. Artifacts materialize in elements like art, technology, but also in any other thing that is evident and audible (Pettigrew, 1979). As an

example of artifact, we can consider a firm's knowledge management initiative that could represent the manifestation of assumptions about knowledge, ideas and other insights.

The three dimensions just described are going to affect the behaviors of individuals within an organizational setting; in turn, these behaviors will have an influence on the way knowledge is generated, shared, and used. A graphical representation of that appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Culture Elements Influence Behaviors



Source: adapted from De Long and Fahey (2000)

Following a similar pattern for corporate culture classification, it is also possible to distinguish it along two dimensions: the visible and the invisible one (McDermott and O'Dell, 2001). The visible dimension could be identified in some organizational aspects, like in its mission, espoused values, and philosophy but also in its structure, stories and spaces. Broadly speaking, physical structures, like buildings, décor and office layout, can constitute a reflection of the assumptions

we considered before (McDermott and O'Dell, 2001). Moreover, all these tangible elements constitute the artifacts in which the corporate culture of a given firm is embedded. According to McDermott and O'Dell, and coming to the focus on knowledge sharing, the visible sphere of culture could be found also in the link existing between the knowledge sharing process and the consequential solution of practical business problems as well as in the tools, rewards and recognition systems that match the style of the company with the purpose of sustaining the knowledge sharing practice.

The invisible dimension, rather, resides in a deeper level of organizations where "seen but unspoken" (McDermott and O'Dell, 2001:78) set of core values guide both what people do and how they make sense of each other's actions. These values reflect the background of the organization that everyone is able to recognize, but no one, or just few, is certain about how to articulate them (McDermott and O'Dell, 2001). The manifestation of the invisible form could materialize in the networks used to share knowledge. The latter are based on already existing networks and are commonly used in the daily work and life.

McDermott and O'Dell (2001) stated that these two layers of culture are linked by the behavior of organizational members. As a matter of consequence, we can argue that also the knowledge sharing behavior contributes to determine the connection between the visible and the invisible dimension. More in details, the core values of a corporate culture are not communicated through orientation programs, rather they are shared through members' action, way of speaking, and way of interpreting the organization around them. As an example, in a company that strongly values technical work, we expect that people are likely to routinely perform extensive technical analyses, ask each other about the technical basis for a decision, criticize or praise the technical quality of each others' work, and discuss other people's technical background. This example makes clear how individuals' behavior reflects a strong shared belief in the value of good technical work (McDermott and O'Dell, 2001). Furthermore, it has been found evidence that usually core values are more likely to be carried out by groups of peers that

have regular contact with the majority of employees, other than greater experience. These groups represent the main vehicles through which useful insights are communicated. A study by Von Krogh et al. (1997) defined these persons as the “knowledge activists” and described them as those who take “informal” responsibility for energizing and coordinating knowledge creation and sharing efforts throughout the corporation. Other than peers, also a supervisor (e.g. manager, director etc.) is identified as a powerful means able to link the visible and the invisible dimension through actively involving his/her collaborators in the knowledge sharing behavior. In fact, as it will be pointed out in the next chapter, the knowledge sharing behavior is likely to produce benefits if it occurs in any corner of the organization, regardless of the role played, but for such achievements it is fundamental that employees could find support and motivation in their representatives (e.g. a leader). The latter will set himself/herself as a practical example by giving the first evidence of how to behave in this regard. We can conclude that there is a considerable level of leaders’ involvement when we talk about corporate culture and knowledge sharing behavior.

However, our intent is to provide evidence about the importance of culture in the knowledge sharing process, by taking into account the role played by trust.

In order to do so, we would like to first investigate the main ways through which organizational cultures actually influence knowledge related behaviors. In this respect a framework developed by De Long and Fahey (2000) is proposed. According to this model, culture is expected to act towards knowledge sharing as reported in the following statements:

- “culture shapes assumptions about which knowledge is important”. In this manner the cultural component affects and determines which knowledge is perceived as useful, important, and valid knowledge (i.e. relevant knowledge). These beliefs cannot occur in an organizational vacuum, rather they are shaped by values and norms;

- “culture mediates the relationships between levels and knowledge”. This though embodies all the unspoken norms, or rules, concerning how ideas, and other insights, are distributed and shared between the organization and its individuals. It dictates which knowledge belongs to the organization and which instead remains at individual level;
- “culture creates a context for social interaction”. Here the reference is to the rules and practices that characterize the environment within which people communicate and interact; it is this context that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of employees. In particular, the impact of culture on the context of social interaction can be assessed at three levels: vertical (interaction with the senior manager), horizontal (interaction with peers), and special behaviors that promote knowledge sharing and use (sharing, teaching, and dealing with mistakes) (De Long and Fahey, 2000; Ipe, 2003).

For all the reasons mentioned above, it seems imperative to create an organizational culture that encourages its members to share useful insights in the workplace, with the aim of making better evaluations, taking better decisions, and solving business problems (Ling et al., 2009). In order to obtain these outcomes, it is necessary to ensure the correct functioning of the exchanging process through the establishment of a working environment in which the existing culture accepts knowledge sharing as part of its rituals, norms, and values (and not just as imperative regulations). In this regard, it has been found evidence of the fact that the knowledge sharing process should be something occurring naturally and it should be never given for granted. This means that in the moment in which an employee believes that his/her co-workers are automatically aware about every insights, problems will begin and this will impact the proper functioning of the entity. Here the meaning is that every worker should automatically share what he/she knows with his/her colleagues, regardless of the kind of knowledge and of the role played. Major support to this aspect is also given by the study of De Long and Liam (2000) who

found that culture influences knowledge sharing by as much of 80 percent. Similarly Stoddart (2001) stressed that knowledge sharing can only work if the culture of the organization promotes it.

These issues appear to be particularly critical also in the managerial field, meaning that an “ad hoc culture” is a relevant condition for successful knowledge management and exploitation (Damodaran and Olphert, 2000), while an inappropriate one represents the biggest impediment for an effective process to take place (Damodaran and Olphert, 2000). Numerous studies (e.g. Cameron, 2002; Wagner, 2003; Rowley, 2002) found that such practices are more efficient if there is: lack of competitive climate, presence of a trusting environment, accountability for sharing within a team, focus on innovation, and opportunity for spontaneous and voluntary sharing.

2.1.1 Two dimensions, four cultures

In order to better understand the many facets culture presents, we refer to the study conducted by Goffee and Jones (2009). They claimed that culture is simply “community” and communities are built on shared interests and mutual obligations, and thrive on cooperation and friendship. Further, they divided this community into two separate distinct human relations dimensions: sociability and solidarity.

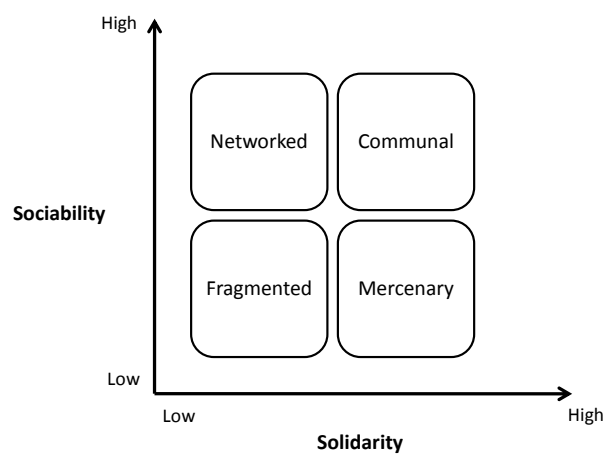
Sociability measures the degree of friendliness or kindness among employees. If such degree is high, then workers are more likely to spend time together in sharing ideas. In this circumstance a face-to-face communication is preferred, reciprocity is largely expected, and everything is going to happen in a natural and informal manner (Carneiro, 2010; Goffee and Jones, 2009).

Solidarity, instead, measures the extent to which workers are able to quickly and effectively pursue shared objectives in the best interests of the organization, in spite of their personal tie (that is in spite of sociability) (Carneiro, 2010; Goffee and Jones, 2009; Munro, 2003). As a matter of fact, when the degree of solidarity

is high, then even if employees do not know each other they bring together to act as one single person, in addition they also mature a strong sense of response to organizational obstacles and there is low tolerance to poor performance.

By matching these two measures, Goffee and Jones (2009) identified four different types of culture:

Figure 2. The four dimensions of culture



Source: adapted from Goffee and Jones (2009)

- 1) **networked** (high sociability, low solidarity). Workers will be very willing to share information as long as they can be given good reasons for doing so. This type of culture often requires high levels of trust;
- 2) **communal** (high sociability, high solidarity). The willingness to share knowledge will be combined with a very clear focus on what is really needed. Usually team based work is likely to be adopted;
- 3) **fragmented** (low sociability, low solidarity). People tend to work as individuals. Hence, organizations belonging to this “category” and willing to encourage the knowledge sharing process, should appeal to the self-interest of the individuals;

- 4) **mercenary** (low sociability, high solidarity). Workers want to ensure the right performance of tasks because of their very utilitarian approach to knowledge. If this type of culture exists, the emphasis will be on the realistic short-term solutions that deliver value and not on vast accumulations of knowledge.

According to Figure 2, it can be argued that organizational culture depends on its degree of solidarity and commitment to a common goal, as well as on the amount of socializing existing among its workers (Goffee and Jones, 2009). Furthermore, it is fundamental to notice that there exists no particular culture that can be labeled or identified as ideal or as the best one, because each culture presented above is appropriate for different specific business environments (Goffee and Jones, 2009). As a result, companies' superiors (e.g. top manager and managers) should be able, in first place, to determine and assess their organizational culture, no matter if it is networked, communal, fragmented, or mercenary so as to consequently shape it accordingly (Ling, 2011).

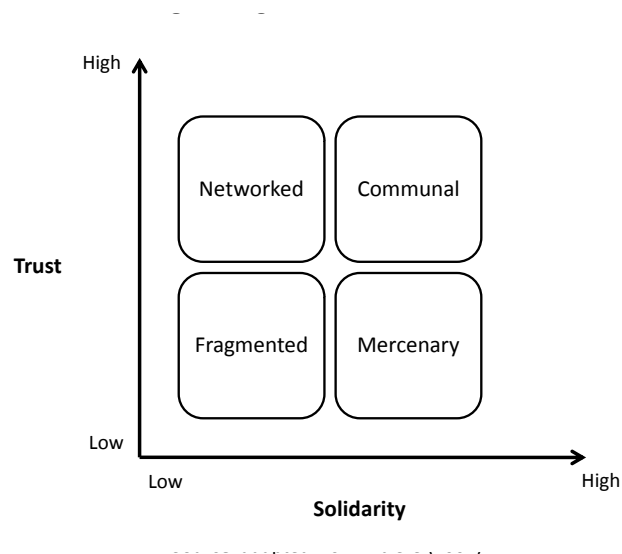
This is why many researchers note that treating culture as a unitary concept reduces its value as a simple analytical tool (Martin, 1992; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998a; Pettigrew, 1979). Rather, it would be preferable to study it by looking at the many different facets that characterize each unique organizational culture. Equivalently, there have been also some other scholars who proposed the same point, but using a different perspective. According to them one of the major reasons for the widespread popularity of culture stems from the argument (or assumption) that certain organizational cultures lead to superior performance (Ogbonna and Harris, 2000). Particularly, stronger cultures are perceived to play a substantial role in generating competitive advantage; where for strong cultures we mean those emphasizing a high degree of values' sharing. This issue finds support in the study conducted by Krefting and Frost (1985) who suggested that the way in which corporate culture may create competitive advantage is by defining the boundaries of the organization in a manner which facilitates individuals' interaction and sharing activities. Furthermore, culture may not only

be strong (widely shared), but it must also have unique qualities which cannot be imitated (Ogbonna and Harris, 2000). According to this, a culture is ideal for the specific environment in which it is properly shaped and embedded, but if the objective is to intensify and achieve a required level of knowledge sharing, it becomes important to generate a cultural context oriented towards a subcomponent of solidarity: trust (Buckman, 1999). Trust, as explained soon in the chapter, is perceived as a key player to foster and motivate workers towards the sharing behaviors within their organizations. Ribière (2001) argued that trust and solidarity are the main pre-conditions to encourage the knowledge sharing process. By matching the two variables, Ribière realized a matrix of four cultures that appear similar to the previous ones for their names, but they are concretely different. In fact, the model proposed by Goffee and Jones (2009) is a re-elaborated and integrated version of the Ribière's one that is illustrated in Figure 3 and described here following:

- 1) **networked** (high trust, low solidarity). Despite the little commitment to shared business objectives and low degree of cooperation, there is high possibility of rapid information exchange. People tend to share relevant insights with no immediate expectation of return;
- 2) **communal** (high trust, high solidarity). Communication occurs in every channel and across various organizational levels, the sharing of relevant information allows to work in team and to exploit synergies and opportunities for learning and for creativity. The commitment is also high and the turnover low;
- 3) **fragmented** (low trust, low solidarity). Members selectively exchange information and are reluctant in sharing ideas with other different units, talk is very limited and the dependence on others is also minimized. As a consequence just few learning opportunities will come. Probably when this type of culture exists, members do not identify with their organizations, thus a high turnover is likely to occur;

- 4) **mercenary** (low trust, high solidarity). Communication is swift, direct and work focused; the degree of commitment is high for a common purpose; there is lack of synergy; and cooperation is less likely.

Figure 3. Organizational culture matrix



Source: adapted from Ribière (2001)

In this analytical context, it is reasonable to think that the study of Ribière before (2001), and after that of Goffee and Jones (2009), find justification in a further theory that was proposed by Ogbonna and Harris (2000). In their view, the extraction of four factors is able to explain the influence that corporate culture exercises on individuals' behavior within business entities. The factors are: innovation, competition, bureaucracy, and trust. An **innovative culture** is always ready to meet new challenges, and it is appropriate for a dynamic company where people are willing to take risks, where there is high commitment to development and where there is an emphasis on being the first. A **competitive culture**, instead, is more likely to satisfy the needs of a production oriented company really focused on setting, achieving and measuring goals. Here the

major concern is getting job done, but people are not very personally involved. In the case of a **bureaucratic culture**, rules and policies are important to keep a smooth running company. Formalization and stability are aimed at governing what people do to achieve more efficiency. The fourth factor is the one characterizing a **trust culture**. Trust shapes a context in which commitment, loyalty and tradition occupy the first positions for their importance. A company of this type is personal, it is like a big family where cohesion and morale govern individuals' behaviors.

2.2 Trust as facilitator of knowledge sharing

2.2.1 What is trust?

Before going into the details on why a trust oriented culture is vital for the knowledge sharing process, for the strategic decisions undertaken, and for the consequent performance of companies, it would be better to understand the real essence and meaning of it. Rousseau et al. (1998:395) defined trust as a "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability and based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of others". Similarly other researchers argued that trust consists in the belief that another individual makes efforts to fulfill commitments, is honest, and does not seek to take unfair advantage of opportunities (e.g. Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Zucker, 1987).

Trust can assume multiple aspects and can manifest in numerous manners, but it mainly presents three facets that are considered among its principal antecedents (Colquitt, Scott, and LePine, 2007): capability, benevolence, and integrity.

Capability is the combination of skills and competencies owned by the giving party (trustee) and necessary for demonstrating the ability to obtain results expected by the receiver (trustor); **benevolence** is the extent to which the trustee is believed to want to do good for the trustor; and **integrity** deals with the perception that the giving party adheres to a set of common and acceptable principles.

Even if these dimensions are not related or dependent on each other, they cannot be separated (Mayer et al., 1995). As an example, if a worker needs information, then he will seek and trust only those that he/she thinks have the competence and the benevolence of giving what is required; certainly the information will be useful if it is consistent and compatible with the need of the trustor. This means that trust should come to play regardless of the roles assumed by people. In fact, if the level of trust is linked to the working position, the risk is that the sharing of knowledge could realize just from the top to the bottom. Vice versa, if the business role becomes irrelevant in building trusting relationships, then the result will be a more natural sharing of insights that will involve all the individuals and will flow from any direction. Thus, if trust is not deriving from the working role, it means that it mainly relies on the human relations or better, as stated above, on persons' capacity, benevolence and integrity. This issue finds support in Ling's study (2011), who suggested that trust should be established between employee-to-employee interactions, this would allow to foster a culture that is very likely to share and to move ahead into a "knowledge oriented culture". Certainly building a culture and climate based on trust requires time and devotion. This is why trust (as proved in chapter 3) is a starting point but also an objective to reach. Only under this perspective, it becomes possible to state that trust constitutes the means through which useful knowledge flows, and thus it becomes necessary for supporting the knowledge sharing practice.

2.2.2 Culture and trust: the right support to knowledge sharing

In today's knowledge economy, trust is believed to be the main facilitator in a knowledge sharing culture (Ling, San and Hock, 2009). This finding is broadly supported by employees, who commonly express their need for fidelity in order to openly provide, share, and acquire useful insights (Bakker et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2005; Gruenfeld et al., 1996). In fact, trust tends to increase the degree of

openness in knowledge exchange by reducing the associated costs and by augmenting the likelihood that knowledge acquired from employees will be sufficiently understood and absorbed (McEvily et al., 2003; Abrams et al., 2003). Similarly Naphiet and Goshal (1998) stated that trust affects knowledge sharing through creating and enhancing the necessary conditions for the process to take place. The conditions they talk about mainly concern with the ability of collaboration and cooperation within the organizational setting. Moreover, it is important to notice that trust between employees, as well as trust within an organization is equally important (Ling et al., 2009). That is, when employees trust both each other and their company, they are more willing to listen and absorb the shared insights. In other words, with no trust the exchange process may not reveal accurate, comprehensive, or timely occurred. This is due to the unwillingness to take the risks with sharing more valuable knowledge (Ling et al., 2009; Inkpen, A.C., and Pien, 2006).

The traditional literature has been dominated for long time by the perspective that the effects of trust are transmitted in a relatively straightforward and direct manner on workplace attitudes, behaviors, and performance (e.g. Golembiewski and McConkie, 1975; Jones and George, 1998; Mayer et al. 1995). Nevertheless, this view does not represent the only way trust generates positive consequences; in fact, a handful of studies suggests that trust is beneficial because it facilitates the effects of other determinants on the desired outcomes. Hence, we are going to propose a “double model” that puts in evidence also the conditions under which certain effects are likely to occur in a not direct manner on the final process (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). In our opinion this model could be viewed as a re-elaboration and integration of the studies made by the authors specified above (e.g. Golembiewski and McConkie, 1975; Jones and George, 1998; Mayer et al. 1995).

Main effect and Moderating effect

In this section we are going to study the main effect, or direct effect, that trust exercises on a variety of workplace behaviors and perceptions; but also the

indirect effect on the final organizational performance. In the latter case, trust acts as a moderator mainly towards the primary organizational aspects such as roles, rules, structure, culture and norms.

We decided to debate together the two effects, because we observed that they are strongly related each other. In particular they appear in a sort of complementary relationship so that one intervenes to better explain insights there where the other cannot.

In accordance with the traditional literature, a higher level of trust is expected to reflect in more positive attitudes, more cooperation, and superior levels of performance.

For what the effect on attitudes is concerned, most of the studies that have been conducted mainly focused on the impact that trust has on satisfaction and on organizational commitment (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001), without going into details of the knowledge sharing process. Conversely, talking about the effect on behaviors, most studies revealed that if an individual trusts another one, then his belief tends to affect how he behaves in interactions with the referent. According to Mayer et al. (1995), individuals' beliefs about another's capability, benevolence and integrity (trust) lead to a willingness to risk, which in turn leads to risk taking in a relationship (e.g. by cooperating, by sharing information, etc.). Risk taking behavior, as a consequence, is expected not only to lead to positive outcomes (e.g. individual performance, Larson and LaFasto, 1989; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001); but also to engage in social behaviors such as in work groups, cooperation, information sharing etc.. It will be through these behaviors that we are expected to observe higher performance (Larson and LaFasto, 1989).

Researchers have used this basic idea to examine the main effects of trust on a variety of behavioral and performance outcomes, among which communication and knowledge sharing are the most important ones.

In this regard, the empirical evidence is coming from the study conducted by Dirks and Ferrin (2001), who found that trust produces an indirect influence on the final company's performance, through producing a direct impact on the

behaviors that, in turn, will lead to the firm's desired benefits. Hence, when we refer to the direct effect, we mean that under high trust, better beliefs are likely to generate more cooperative behaviors that will cause and will be reflected in a major engagement in the knowledge sharing process. Furthermore, on the basis of what originally found by Read (1962), it has been stated also that an individual who has reason to think that he/she could be promoted, has less motivation to share negative insights. Read (1962) suggested that the tendency to withhold bad information would be particularly acute when the subordinate did not trust the boss; thus we can argue that this relationship is moderated by trust: the higher the degree of trust, the less the sharing process will be negatively influenced. Under this perspective it is enough evident that the impact of trust on the sharing process seems absolutely positive. However, there have been some other studies that did not notice a significant effect in this respect (e.g. De Dreu et al., 1998; Kimmel et al., 1980; Dirks, 1999). This does not mean that they found a negative relation between the two variables, rather they simply showed that there is not an overwhelming proof of positivity.

As a matter of fact, it can be sustained that the direct effect of trust on various workplace behaviors and the moderating effect on the final performance are weak and not always consistent. Nevertheless, if on one side we cannot make any certain conclusion about the direct benefits, on the other we can affirm that lower levels of trust are certainly associated with suspiciousness of the information, suspiciousness of the goal and decision acceptance, and suspiciousness of any other organizational behavior (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001), as well as uncertainty in the final performance. If Dirks and Ferrin (2001) gave evidence about the direct and the moderating role of trust, they did not provide further explanation of how this pattern practically occurs.

In the next paragraph we try to provide useful insights about how trust, together with other interplaying factors, could intervene in the knowledge sharing process by focusing major attention on the figures of the sender and of the receiver.

2.2.3 The sender and the receiver: the main theories and the role of trust

In their attempts to develop a clearer understanding of knowledge sharing, researchers have always used concepts related to the critical role of motivational factors, especially trust (e.g Argote and Ingram, 2000; Alavi and Leidner, 2001; Hansen, 1999; Goodman and Darr, 1998; Spender and Grant, 1996; Szulanski, 1996). Many times they have suggested that the motivation of providers is important for engaging in the giving behavior and for overcoming concerns about ownership of information; furthermore the motivation of the recipient is fundamental too. In fact it is this motivation that influences the extent to which the recipient seeks out, accepts, and utilizes what has been given (Hayes and Clark, 1985; Katz and Allen, 1982; Levin and Cross, 2004; Mayer et al., 1995; Szulanski, 1996). Considering this perspective, it is noticed that such motivational factors are innumerable, and countless are also the theories associated with them (Quigley et al., 2007). Given this, no single theoretical perspective is able to provide a complete explanation to fully understand knowledge sharing. This means that even if different motivation theories are considered to be good predictors for comprehending why providers engage in the exchange process, and/or the extent to which recipients are motivated to apply the new knowledge to improve performance, no single perspective is sufficient for achieving the completeness of the study (Quigley et al., 2007). Therefore, the integration of existing theoretical perspectives is required in order to provide greater clarification of the phenomenon.

More specifically, the theories we are going to consider are the incentive, the goal-setting-social cognitive, and the social motivation theories.

The **incentive theory** is useful to assess the extent to which providers share their knowledge with recipients. As argued in the first chapter, the positive impact of rewards depends upon their nature; however researchers suggest that incentives alone fail to explain knowledge sharing behaviors adequately, and thus also the interaction between the involved parties (Quigley et al., 2007).

The **social motivation theory** broadly sustain the existence of some tools, such as norms , that result from interpersonal interactions and are likely to have an indirect influence on individuals' motivation by intensifying other existing motivational effects (Geen, 1991).

Last, but not the least, the **goal-setting** and **social-cognitive theories** are particularly useful in predicting the effects on performance. In this regard the focus will be on how trust dominates in the provider-recipient relationship, and specifically on the motivational role trust may play in influencing the degree to which recipients' self efficacy translates into performance goals.

Integration of incentive and social motivation theories

A critical challenge in the knowledge exchange argument is in motivating a potential sender to share what he/she knows with a potential recipient. Available researches suggest that incentives for cooperation are important for encouraging one party to transfer to recipients what they actually know. Nevertheless, even if incentives may play a dominant role, knowledge sharing remains a social process. As a matter of consequence, structural means (such as incentives) need to be supported and reinforced by cultural elements able to emphasize a more open exchange. These elements will confer to individuals the perception "that one's choice to cooperate will be reciprocated, permitting cooperation to be realized" (Quigley et al., 2007). In this regard, existing studies and theories state that specific norms developed within communities may favor members' communication and knowledge sharing; this becomes possible because strong norms can help providers to overcome the perceived costs and risks incurred in taking time and spending efforts to share insights with other colleagues (Quigley et.al, 2007; Bartol and Srivastava, 2002; Jarvenpaa et al., 1998).

In sum, these issues lead to confirm the idea that incentives alone have a rather weak influence on knowledge sharing, but those effects are strengthened when mutual norms for exchange are developed between the sender and the

recipient. In other words strong norms that encourage the transfer of knowledge will correspond to equally strong positive relationships between incentives and knowledge sharing (Quigley et al., 2007).

Integration of social cognitive and goal setting theories

When assessing the performance of an organization, it would be useful to assess if and how this organization has encouraged the application of the acquired knowledge (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). In order to clarify this aspect, once again researchers have pointed out the importance of motivational factors (Hayes and Clark, 1985; Katz and Allen, 1982; Levin and Cross, 2004; Mayer et al., 1995).

In particular, the performance goals of the recipient have been identified as important in influencing the recipient's motivation to use available new knowledge (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000; Szulanski, 1996). The social cognitive and goal setting theories offer useful contribution to explain this argument (Bandura, 1997; Locke and Latham, 1990). Both of them suggest that employees with higher levels of self efficacy are more likely to perform well and to set higher performance goals (Bandura, 1997; Locke and Latham, 1990). The latter will ultimately impact on knowledge utilization. More in details it is sustained that, in contexts where individuals must necessarily rely on knowledge exchange for achieving successful task accomplishment, the degree to which interpersonal relationships are based on trust may influence how self efficacy translates into goal setting (Quigley et al., 2007).

It is commonly recognized that the extent to which recipients trust their providers is important in predicting a proper exchange process; but what we want to better investigate is the motivational role trust may play in influencing the degree to which recipients' self efficacy effectively translates into performance goals. (Quigley et al., 2007). In this respect, it has emerged that recipients who are more confident in their own ability to perform well their task, feel also to have greater security to reach higher goals for their own performance. This is likely to verify when they trust their partner. Conversely,

even if a recipient is highly confident in his/her own capabilities, but he/she does not believe that critical knowledge and credible information will be shared (e.g. lack of trust for sharing knowledge), he/she is not in the position of taking more risk through setting major objectives. This situation may offset the strong linkage existing between self efficacy and high personal performance goals setting.

The final result deriving from studying the interaction between the social cognitive and goal setting theories is also consistent with the social motivational theory perspective (Geen, 1991) in suggesting that trust influences how people interpret and/or evaluate insights provided by others (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Jarvenpaa et al., 2004). Furthermore, these findings, together with the outcome showing that norms for sharing knowledge reinforce incentives, highlight the theoretical importance of **integrating organizational and social factors** when analyzing the exchange process (Quigley et al., 2007).

A practical implication of these arguments is that companies should take care in developing and keeping under control the self efficacy of potential knowledge recipients (Bandura, 1997), but also in helping to establish bonds of trust between interdependent employees. Even if there is no enough literature available on how to build trust, it is reasonable to believe that a manner for facilitating it stays in promoting and engaging in trustworthy actions such as being honest, being open, and following through on commitments (Jassawalla and Sashittal, 1999).

Integration of goal setting and incentive theories

Encouraging knowledge sharing is not synonymous of fully applying the new available insights. In fact organizations should have clearly in mind that favoring potential senders to transfer knowledge may be not enough to completely use what has been exchanged. Since a full utilization would be important for achieving satisfying performance, it is not enough to favor only the potential sources to engage in such behavior, but it would be necessary to act also on the willingness of the potential recipient. That is to say what is really needed is a way

through which employees are induced in putting in practice what they have effectively received and learned. This is why we are going to take into account the goal setting theory and its interaction with the incentive one.

As previously mentioned, the goal setting theory has highlighted that goals motivate individuals to achieve higher levels of performance; more in details, especially when individuals work on complex tasks, goal setting represents an important means of providing the necessary motivation to actively seek out and use the relevant insights (Quigley et al., 2007).

The adoption of the goal setting approach, for motivating employees to apply what they know and exchange among them, has been under the analysis of many authors (e.g. Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). They argued that improvements in performance should be more likely when knowledge recipients both set high goals for their own performance and have access to new forms of knowledge from others within the organization.

Despite of that, Quigley et al. (2007) went a step further. According to their study, successful knowledge transfer ultimately requires heightened levels of motivation on both parties: providers and recipients. The former should actively and openly share what they know, while recipients should set goals so that they are required to seek out and integrate the new insights coming from providers.

As we can notice the three interactions we have proposed appear to be strictly related to each other by underlining the importance of motivational mechanisms associated with both the knowledge provider and recipient. In particular, the arguments mentioned above, and the integration of existing theories, constitute a contribution toward the development of a middle range motivation based theory (Landy and Becker, 1987; Pinder, 1984) aimed at explaining the desirable cultural conditions under which knowledge sharing and its implementation are more likely to occur.

3. A real case: Altana. Assessing knowledge sharing, trust, and internationalization

3.1 Bringing an overview

After having focused our attention on the main theoretical aspects dealing with knowledge sharing, organizational culture and trust in the first two chapters, we are going to present a real case study in this section.

In particular we will discuss the results of an analysis conducted on a Venetian company: Altana. The choice is attributable to the leading position occupied by this firm in the kids wear market sector, but also to the dynamism, efficacy and professionalism for which the business entity stands out. Thanks to the collaboration with Altana, we tried to give a contribution to the knowledge sharing topic by building a better understanding of it. More in details, our intent is to underline that the knowledge sharing process represents an essential practice for the efficient exploitation of knowledge. Thus, we want to know how the knowledge sharing process configures within our target company through the presence of the main enablers that allow the process to take place.

In conclusion, we also tried to give evidence about how the interplay between employees' knowledge sharing behavior and the trust-oriented culture can intervene in the choice and development of the internationalization strategies. This could be particularly interesting since it does not find many insights in the literature; hence, it may represent the starting point for potential future researches.

In order to do so, it has been necessary to collect useful data that revealed determinant to prove the crucial role knowledge sharing and business culture play in the company.

The collection of data and the gathering of relevant information mainly relied on two methods: the submission of a survey to a sample of employees working in Altana, and the realization of personal interviews to some company's representatives. An additional source of information is represented by a published book focused on the importance of the Italian SMEs in the context of the international landscape.

The original text of the interviews can be found in Appendix I .

3.2 Research methodology

The development of the research is articulated in three fundamental phases: the submission of the survey; the use of a statistical software (STATA) for elaborating the questionnaire's outcomes; and the realization of three interviews to some company's representatives.

By making an analytical description we tried to build a clearer understanding of how individuals perceive the environment where they work and thus the conditions under which the knowledge sharing process takes place.

The interviews' contribution has revealed of special importance because it has given rise to some elements that could not come out just with the previous methods.

A comparison between the insights from the interviews and those from the descriptive analysis has been performed in order to give more consistency and reliability to the final outcomes.

The survey

As stated above, a survey was submitted to 14 employees of Altana. People who have lent themselves to this first phase of investigation occupy different working positions within the company, in addition they could decide whether to declare or not their identity. In this way, not only it has been possible to have different perspectives, but even individuals felt completely free in providing the most accurate and truthful answers.

The questionnaire contains 14 sections of interest; each section deals with a specific topic; each topic develops through detailed questions aimed at pointing out precise aspects of the argument; and for each question it is possible to find different items for which the individual was asked to express his/her preference by using degrees of judgment from 1 to 7. In particular, the answers are organized on the basis of 7 point Likert scale, which is one of the most popular and reliable tools aimed at measuring individuals' attitudes and behaviors.

Through this approach, respondents have the possibility to chose among different sets of response options going from an extreme to another (e.g. from “not at all likely” to “extremely likely”, or from “strongly disagree” to “completely agree” and so on).

The mentioned sections deal with different areas of interest, such as integration mechanisms; organizational and individual factors; business innovation; and corporate culture.

It could be easily deduced that the survey has the purpose of taking into consideration the many factors (enablers) that influence the knowledge sharing process. More in details, it aimed at understanding, from the perspectives of the employees, how these elements configure within Altana company.

Nevertheless, in this section, we are going to select and examine just few areas of interest, more precisely we will be more focused on the factors relative to knowledge sharing and corporate culture. Moreover we will consider also some other aspects that could intervene and impact the field of our study.

The descriptive analysis

The information collected with the survey were elaborated and classified into a dataset. This approach has allowed to build a first and clear understanding of how Altana is organized, the characteristics of the personnel and, most importantly, the perceptions of employees with respect to the subject of our research. The elaboration of the available data has also allowed focusing not only on each single variable, but also on the relationships that characterize the different enablers we consider as source of influence for the knowledge sharing process.

The analysis was also enriched by reporting graphical representations of some aspects that revealed useful for the purpose of the work.

The interviews

The realization of the interviews represents the third phase of the research. This approach not only permitted to acquire knowledge of some specific aspects that

may not emerge with the previous methods; but it also allowed to make important considerations concerning the linkage between the knowledge sharing process, a trust oriented culture and the internationalization activities and strategies undertaken by the target company. The latter has not been sufficiently deepened by the existing literature. The interviews were made at Altana's headquarter and they were given by the HR manager, the CED (Centro Elaborazione Dati - Data Processing Center) manager and by the Managing Director or CEO. In this manner we gained the possibility to have a direct contact with the reality under examination and we could also make a comparison with the outcomes emerged from the descriptive analysis. Thus, we had the chance to confirm and/or clarify some aspects that seemed to be almost ambiguous.

Moreover, by posing the same questions to the interviewees, we could gather different perspectives relative to the same argument. The interviews were made in Italian and were accurately transcribed without changing the words pronounced by the individuals. However an elaboration of the content has been necessary to give contribution to our field of exploration.

3.3 Why Altana?

The current Italian business landscape faces a number of difficulties, including unfavorable bureaucratic, fiscal, financial, and labor conditions, which make the processes of growth a real mix of constraints and opportunities. This scenario is further emphasized by the increasing level of competitive pressure arising from the international markets and from the globalization phenomenon. In particular, in an environment of this type, the adoption of classical approaches, mainly based on the cost reduction strategies, is no longer successful; rather the implementation of qualitative strategies aimed at undertaking processes of differentiations, are considered the only way through which small and medium enterprises can compete with the bigger companies in the international context

(Varaldo et al, 2009: 171). These are the main reasons for which nowadays companies try to better exploit and deploy their abilities and competences.

It is in this context that Altana situates. The Venetian company, in fact, is one of the most interesting examples of enterprise that boosted growth by leveraging its own set of acquired skills.

Altana is the Italian leading company in the management of brand licensing agreements; it operates in the kids wear market sector and serves the medium-high target level. It occupies an intermediate position in the sense that it is relatively small compared to the competitive context of the clothing sector, but, at the same time, it is relatively large with respect to its direct competitors: firms focused on the brand licensing of the kids target.

Other than being a leader in the Italian market, Altana has established its presence also in the international context where it holds the 70% of its production and where it realizes about 20% of its turnover.

Through our study aimed at understanding which is the role played by the corporate culture embodied in Altana and how it affects the intra-organizational knowledge sharing process, as well as the adopted internationalization strategies.

3.3.1 The company profile

As previously pointed out, Altana is the leading company in the kids wear sector. It is located in a small town near Treviso (Padernello di Paese). In 2008 it employed 140 workers and, in 2007, it accounted for a turnover of about € 52 million. The historical evolution of the business entity can be summarized in three main steps:

- 1982: birth of the company under the Benetton Group
- 1992: independence from the Benetton Group
- 2001: turning-point. From entrepreneurial to managerial business and beginning of continuous growth

During the years in which Altana was operating under the Benetton Group, it was possible to gain the know-how and to build relationships with the market. The company's activity was mainly focused on the production of shirts for the women sector. After having become an independent entity, Altana developed also its own brand, namely "Amore Donna" that was subsequently transformed in "Amore Bambina". It was the latter to sign an important change for the company. In fact, while the volumes of production were significantly growing, the market and the competitive context were undergoing a crucial transformation. In particular, most of the famous brands operating in the adult target were starting to focus in the kids one. This represented the critical point for Altana and the beginning of a prosperous adventure, mainly from 2001 until today. The ability of the firm stayed in immediately recognizing that the kids segment could reveal a substantial source of profit, but also in the awareness that a more solid and structured organization would be needed. This was not enough. Altana understood very soon that it was not possible to focus on this specific market segment by simply relying on its own brand, rather it would be more appropriate to face the new challenge by collaborating with the "experts" of the adult sector that intended to diversify in the kids one. It was in this scenario that Altana began several collaborations with the most influential brands through licensing agreements. Today the company works with 8 famous brands, and it seems ready to further increase its portfolio.

The path of growth experienced by Altana from 2001 to 2008 is illustrated in Table 1 here. Particularly, the evolution of the turnover and of the number of employees is considered as the appropriate benchmarking.

Table 1. Evolution of turnover and employees

YEAR	TURNOVER (MILLION EURO)	EMPLOYEES
2001	19.5	74
2002	18.8	82
2003	20.4	106
2004	18.4	105
2005	19.7	117
2006	36.2	121
2007	52	132
2008	56	140

Source: Varaldo et al., 2009

The elements that mainly characterize the growth of the Venetian company are essentially the great focus on the brands licensing and the kids sector.

The kids sector, as mentioned above, has been a successful intuition taken into consideration at the right time, both from the perspective of the market and from the one of the developmental state of the company. In fact, the market was giving importance to the kids target just when Altana decided to reorganize its business activities from different standpoints (production, structure etc.).

The management of the brands is the other cornerstone to which Altana owes great part of its success. First of all, the collaboration with the brands' owners allowed to build a consistent social network, to learn more about foreign markets, to improve the management of the production and of the logistic, and to increase the level of flexibility. The latter derives from the fact that Altana has

to adapt to the different needs, requests and characteristics of its licensors. Despite these difficulties, the company was greatly able to overcome them so that the licensing agreements with famous brands has constituted its core competence.

3.3.2 The turning point and the qualitative growth

If Table 1 could give us evidence about a dimensional growth that characterized the company during the years reported, it is not able to provide useful insights about the qualitative growth. It is this kind of growth on which we want to focus our attention, because it is pursued by leveraging new impulses. Certainly the great motivation is linked to the transition (in 2001) from an entrepreneurial to a managerial setting. If on one side the entrepreneurial identity was able to give to Altana a high reputation, on the other the managerial mark has contributed to make the company a growing and competitive entity at national and international level. The main changes that were introduced concerned:

- a flatter organizational structure (higher flexibility);
- a higher degree of autonomy was conferred to the heads of departments;
- the implementation of coordinating and integrating mechanisms aimed at actively involve all the parties;
- introduction of formal and informal mechanisms to favor the sharing processes; and
- greater openness was left to innovation deriving from cooperation with already licensed brands but also with new ones.

The new corporate structure, following the path of the preceding years, was particularly aimed at:

- acquiring greater skills to face the new opportunities that were looming in the market;
- developing an IT (and not only IT) system able to allow a proper dialogue between the different areas of the company; and

- flowing all business areas in one single space in order to facilitate every kind of business activity (the different areas were previously situated in the distinct places) .

Alchimia holding

Alchimia SpA is a leading holding company 100% owned by the president of Altana and to which Altana belongs. It has been classified among the top 220 Italian holding companies; it includes numerous companies employed in different sectors that offer many types of services (e.g. Doxa; Connexia; Duepuntozero Research; Eos Gallup Europa; Doxa Marketing Advice; Doxa Metrics; Grid Sh.P.K.; Coffee Grinder; The Internet of Things; Doxa Pharma; The Visual Agency). Other than having a dominant position in the business and financial sector, Alchimia plays an important role also in the social context by participating to many voluntary initiatives. An important connotative feature that characterizes Alchimia is given by the fact that all the companies in it communicate each other their current activities and their achieved results. This means that they are always in contact and they try to cooperate for achieving the common objectives set by the holding. Usually Altana, that is a productive entity, enjoys the support of other partners that instead offer different kinds of services. As an example the Venetian company benefited many times from the communication activities and from the managerial training courses promoted by Connexia and Doxia. This way of “working together” could represent a good sharing method that is reflected also in the way knowledge is shared within each company individually.

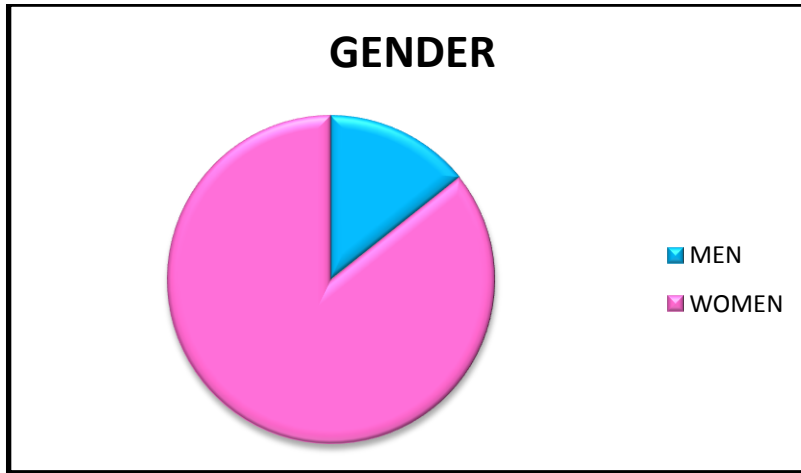
3.4 Data analysis: from the numbers to the facts – evidence on knowledge sharing

The dataset analyzed includes 14 observations, corresponding to the number of employees who lent themselves to the survey submission. The focus will be on the variables that tend to exercise any kind of influence on the knowledge sharing process. In particular, the underlined behavior can occur in two forms: one is more spontaneous and voluntary, the other instead enters into action only when it is explicitly requested. In the first situation we refer to the knowledge donating process, while in the second one we deal with knowledge collecting.

Certainly, there exist many factors that impact on the knowledge sharing practice, but here major attention is devoted to the role of organizational culture. Having this purpose, we identified four main types of cultures that lead us back to the analysis performed by Ogbonna and Harris (2000): innovative, bureaucratic, competitive and trust oriented cultures. Moreover, other variables will be selected because they are considered direct and/or indirect enablers of the sharing process.

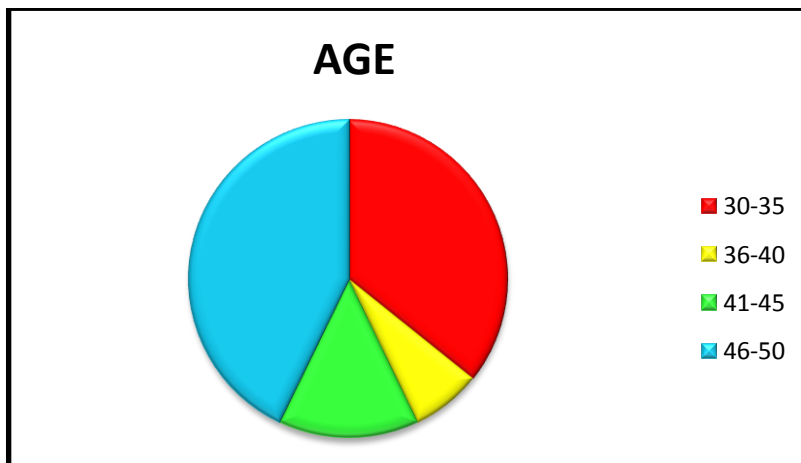
As illustrated in Figure 4, our sample is composed by 14% of respondents who are men and 86% who are women. This evidence could raise curiosity among readers. Probably this issue depends on the nature of the analyzed sector. Maybe women are more sensible to the dynamics, characteristics and needs of the child wear segment.

Figure 4. Percentage of men and women



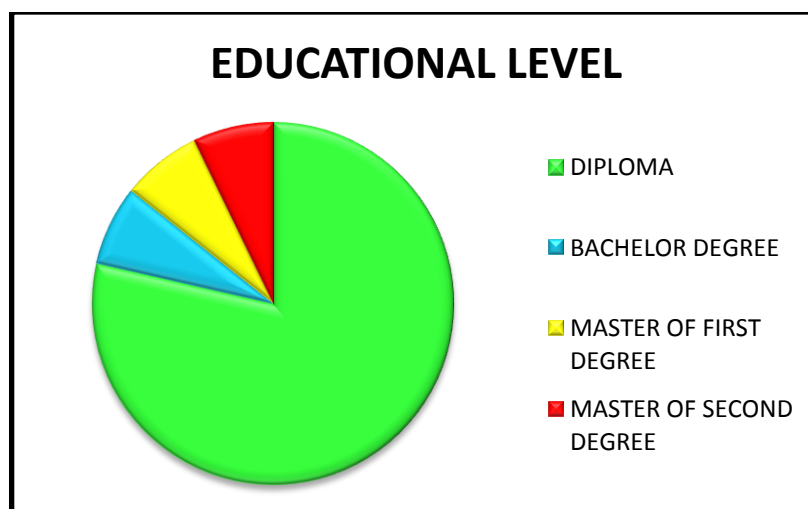
As illustrated in Figure 5 below, the average age of the interviews is 40 years old; the lowest age is 30, the highest is 55.

Figure 5. Age



Further we focused on the educational level of the employees, since we retain that it can be influential in the way an answer is provided. More in details it has emerged that the majority of them (79%) have the so called “Diploma” which corresponds to 13 years of study in total. 7% declared to have a bachelor degree (16 years of study), 7% the master of first degree (18 years of study) and another 7% also a master of second degree (20 years of study). This result is particularly useful to understand the different perspectives towards some questions, meaning that the point of view of a simple worker could be not the same of the one of a manager, thus answers referred to the same question may reveal different. These kinds of discrepancies, that emerged from the dataset (that is from the answers in the survey), came out also from the interviewing three managers of different departments. This means that the belief towards a certain argument is greatly influenced by the educational level and consequently by the position occupied within the company.

Figure 6. Educational level



Given that the main focus of the research is on knowledge sharing, major attention is given to the two related dependent variables: knowledge donating and knowledge collecting.

On the basis of the answers provided by the respondents, it seems enough natural for employees to spontaneously share knowledge with their peers. Support to this concern is provided by the mean value, as it can be easily seen from Table 2. On average individuals perceive that when new ideas, information and any other kind of knowledge is acquired, it is commonly and normally shared among them. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that there are some workers who provided a very low judgment in this respect, and others who instead have the maximum perception of the issue. More in details only 7% of people believe that the donation of knowledge is not a developed behavior among colleagues, while the remaining ones expressed a more positive feeling. In fact we can observe a mean of 5,38 that can be considered a medium-high value, in reference to the scale on which the questionnaire has been built.

Table 2. Knowledge donating summary

VARIABLE	OBS. ¹	MEAN	ST. DEV. ²	MIN	MAX
Knowledge Donating	14	5,38	1,47	2	7

Table 3. Knowledge collecting summary

VARIABLE	OBS.	MEAN	ST. DEV.	MIN	MAX
Knowledge Collecting	14	6,20	0,98	4,57	7

¹ OBS stays for Observations

² ST. DEV. stays for Standard Deviation

Table 3 provides a summary of the other dependent variable that is taken for analysis: knowledge collecting. As already stated, this practice refers to the sharing of knowledge, and other abilities, only when it is clearly required. The perception of this behavior appears to be higher with respect to the previous case. Not only the mean value is higher (6,20), but also the minimum is bigger (4,75). As it can be thought the minimum value is largely greater than the medium score (3,5) that people could express in the questionnaire. That is to say employees perceive that their co workers are more likely to share what they know when they ask to do that, and less likely when nothing is explicitly asked. These findings may suggest that within the company of interest, from an employees' perspective, it appears that knowledge sharing practice sometimes occurs naturally and spontaneously, but in some other cases it does not. This distinction could depend upon many factors, thus an investigation on the influence exercised by the organizational culture is going to be conducted. The four dependent variables that will be first placed under analysis are inherent to the culture of the organization. As stated above, four types of culture will be under attention and the following table is going to summarize the main features:

Table 4. Innovative, bureaucratic, competitive and trust culture summary

VARIABLE	OBS.	MEAN	ST. DEV.	MIN	MAX
Innovative culture	14	5,38	1,47	2,75	7
Bureaucratic culture	14	4,86	1,91	2,75	6,75
Competitive culture	14	5,27	1,25	3	6,75
Trust culture	14	4,77	1,64	1,25	6,75

The first variable that appears in Table 4 refers to if and how employees perceive their organizational culture oriented towards innovation. On average it appears that the company is likely to emphasize a strong commitment to the deployment and exploitation of new resources, and thus to innovation and development. Innovation represents one of the major factors for Altana's success. It is interpreted slightly differently by the firm's employees, and these differences derive once again from the professional bias linked to the different roles and educational backgrounds of the representatives (as an example, the CED representative talked about innovation in terms of technology, the HR defined it as an open state of mind aimed at increasing flexibility and dynamism, while for the CEO it is an instrument that becomes powerful only if completely accepted by the persons' minds). In this context, only 7% of respondents expressed a completely different perception by providing a very low score; but since this is a single case it could be defined as an outlier. The remaining 93% agree that a high level of innovation is a dominant feature of their culture.

The second variable instead is going to measure the extent to which the culture of the business entity is bureaucratic. Bureaucracy does not necessarily refer to something negative or twisted. Rather, it refers to the existence of political and formal rules aimed at guaranteeing a correct functioning of a system. Mainly it wants to provide a guide for the employees' actions. Of course a too bureaucratic organization will lead to a slowdown of the action and decision making process. The latter scenarios are exactly those situations that Altana would prevent from happening. In this respect there is an interesting fact that emerges and that needs to be discussed. If we refer to Table 4, we can see that the mean value of 4,86 shows that the level of bureaucratization is medium-high. In this case the perception of the individuals appears to be more concentrated around this value, meaning that there is only 7% of them who gave a lowest score of 2,75 and the remaining respondents who gave results being more or less near to the average. If on the basis of the survey one can argue that Altana is

characterized by a consistent level of bureaucratization, on the other he/she has to take into account also the different point of views of the individuals. In fact, during the interviews it has emerged that Altana wants to be different from all the other competitors that give high value to formal rules; more in details Altana has the primary need of taking quick and formal less decisions to face the continuously changes of the market in which it operates. Formality and bureaucracy enter into account only when people respect each other roles, without renouncing to remain informal in their relationships.

The third variable is an indicator of the degree of competitiveness that characterizes the company as a whole. It represents the extent to which the firm, through its employees, is able to achieve and measure the set objectives. This capability requires high individuals' commitment and involvement (and thus also the motivation should be high) in order to pursue the organizational success. This ability needs to be matched with a high level of competition, but competition should not exist among workers, rather it should involve the firm as a unique entity in all the undertaken actions and decisions. As it appears from Table 4, employees perceive the degree of competition in the company almost high, as it can be observed from the relative mean value equals 5,27. Also in this case there is a minimum of 3 that tends to lower the final results; all other observations are around the average.

The fourth variable is an indicator of many aspects that contribute to make the organization a sort of "community". In fact it includes: the level of commitment towards the company, the degree of loyalty, the presence of traditions, the extent to which individuals perceive the company as a second big family, the level of cohesion and morality, and other similar issues. These are the reasons for which we commonly refer to this variable as organizational trust, or simply trust.

According to the view of the respondents, on average the perception of the culture as oriented to trust is 4,77. Compared to the previous variables, this mean value seems low, but anyhow it is above the average of the survey's 7

point Likert scale. Nevertheless, it cannot be neglected that the minimum value equals to 1,25 is the lowest score seen so far. This number has had a great impact on the variable's mean, in the sense that all the other judgments provided by employees occupied a high positions in the scale (indicatively from 4,75 to the maximum of 6,75). Probably this may be the case of an outlier. The interpretation relative to the trust oriented culture variable, cannot be limited just to the useful numbers that appear in Table 4. We need to go a step further in order to really have a precise understanding of which is the role played by trust and how it configures within the company. This assessment materializes through the approach of the interview, as it appears in the following section.

In the next step a study of the correlations among the independent variables (that is the enablers of the sharing process) has been conducted. The aim is to identify and understand whether and how the presence of one variable is going to influence the others, and in turn what is the final effect produced on the dependent variables. First, we want to provide an evidence of the relationships existing among the four independent variables considered for the research (the four cultures). The higher the correlation coefficient, the greater the relationship among the variables; the lower the correlation coefficient, the stronger the relationship among the variables. In order to simplify the way of reasoning and the way of explaining what has emerged from the analysis, another table of summary is provided (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlations matrix – the four cultures

	Innovative culture	Bureaucratic culture	Competitive culture	Trust culture
Innovative culture	1,00			
Bureaucratic culture	0,32	1,00		
Competitive culture	0,64	0,37	1,00	
Trust culture	0,32	0,71	0,42	1,00

By having a general look at Table 5, the first impression is that there are some variables who show a high correlation degree. For simplicity, let's start from two cases that show on the contrary a high degree of correlation.

The first evidence regards the relationship between *Innovative culture* and *Competitive culture*. According to the results, when a company's culture is considered to be innovative, there is the tendency of being also competitive in the 63% of the cases. This evidence finds confirmation also in the third phase of research, in which it has come out that innovation and competitiveness consist in the headlights that have always driven the qualitative growth of Altana. However, it has to be taken into account that the level of correlation is not excessively high (0,6374). In general the threshold for assessing a too high degree of correlation is equal to 0,7/0,8. Given that, we can argue that in an eventual computation of linear regression, it would have sense to include both variables in order to see how they affect knowledge donating and knowledge collecting processes.

If in the case just described it has been possible to avoid any potential alteration of the final result, in the second situation the same reasoning cannot be made. In

fact, if we look at the relationship between a bureaucratic and trust oriented culture it can be noticed that the correlation coefficient is high and equal to 0,7064. The general idea is that when an organization relies on formal structures aimed at guaranteeing the proper functioning of the activities, it is also likely that employees feel to be involved in a context organized in a way that contributes to create a cohesive and familiar environment. Specifically, if a bureaucratic culture exists, then there is a chance of 70% of having also a trust culture. It is true that such number is big, but it is equally true that there is the remaining 30% of the cases in which this scenario does not occur. In this regard, we can find an explanation in the fact that Altana, as argued before, is able to achieve a good balance between these two factors, by trying to respect bureaucracy when required by the formal roles played within the business context, and by maintaining confidential and informal relationships with people. This issue reflects the good level of solidarity and sociability existing among them. On the basis of that, we cannot say that bureaucracy does not exist, but we can give support to the fact that it is expertly calibrated by the interpersonal relations.

This is the motivation for which we cannot exclude this variable from our analysis and instead it is appropriate to study what happens to knowledge sharing when both types of cultures coexist.

Apart from these two particular cases, the variables under examination are not highly related each other. This means that the presence of one does not influence the presence of the others, thus all of them could give a useful contribution in understanding how they affect the dependent variables.

Even if we focused our attention on the four types of cultures, there is also the presence of another important related variable: the *knowledge sharing culture*. This variable measures the extent to which the corporate culture of Altana is oriented towards the analyzed process, so it tells us how each employee perceives his/her company likely to share information, ideas and abilities with peers. Table 6 summarizes the main information relative to the variable.

Table 6. The Knowledge sharing culture

VARIABLE	OBS.	MEAN	ST. DEV.	MIN	MAX
KS ³ culture	14	5,27	1,42	2,43	7

As it can be observed, the average belief of having a culture that promotes and encourages the exchange of knowledge is high enough. The only exception is represented by the minimum values of 2,43, all the other employees' judgments appear to be medium-high. Certainly, this variable could be really interesting for the research since it measures the extent to which the donation and/or collection of new ideas, abilities and new knowledge occur/s naturally among co-workers. This is why I wish to investigate how the climate and the environment of a company contributes to the analyzed practice. First, it is necessary to be sure that this variable does not show a high correlation with the other independent ones. Another matrix of correlations has been realized as a proof of that.

Table 7. Correlations matrix with knowledge sharing culture

	KS culture	Innovative culture	Bureaucratic culture	Competitive culture	Trust culture
KS culture	1,00				
Innovative culture	0,32	1,00			
Bureaucratic culture	0,33	0,32	1,00		
Competitive culture	0,0027	0,64	0,37	1,00	
Trust culture	0,63	0,32	0,71	0,42	1,00

³ KS stays for Knowledge Sharing

As expected, an evident relationship exists between a knowledge sharing and a trust oriented culture. This finding is enough logic and intuitive. The trust component within a company acts as a facilitator of knowledge exchange, this is probably due to the fact that employees have many occasions to talk directly (face-to-face) or indirectly (using ICT tools) with each other; this contributes to increase the level of confidentiality among them and, as a matter of consequence, they tend to be more inclined in sharing their ideas (formally and informally), opinions and other aspects of interest. Despite this natural relationship between these two indicators, it can be noticed that the correlation coefficient is not excessively high, meaning that it would be meaningful to make a study on knowledge donating and collecting by keeping both of them in the analysis. In this context it would be better to underline what is meant for knowledge sharing culture. When a culture is oriented towards knowledge sharing, it means that it supports the natural flow of information among employees. In this situation the core values on which the culture was built are really embodied in the way of doing of workers, more in details if such values encourage the sharing of ideas, then people engage in this behavior because it derives from the core values and because it is in the essence of the organization. This usually happens through many different practices such as helping others, educating colleagues, teaching junior staff members etc. If in this context there is someone who is reluctant in the sharing, then this way of doing tends to be seen as a direct violation of the main values on which the company is rooted.

The critical enablers

As underlined in chapter 1, there exist some control variables that contribute to favor the knowledge sharing process. In general we can consider them as enablers that belong to the corporate culture and climate and to interpersonal, team and individual characteristics (the theoretical classification is provided in chapter 1).

Talking about culture and particularly about a trust oriented culture, we make reference to a variable available into the dataset that measures the extent to

which Altana's organization favors the sharing activity: *knowledge sharing organizational structure*. As one could imagine, this variable is found to be highly correlated with the knowledge sharing oriented culture (Table 7). It can be thought that, since the organizational structure of a company depends upon and reflects its culture, these two variables are closed each other, thus we would not include the one referred to organizational structure in a potential regression that could be realized in this context. Equivalently, we will include just one of the two in the next correlations matrices.

Table 7. Correlations matrix with organizational structure

	KS culture	KS organizational structure
KS culture	1,00	
KS organizational structure	0,90	1,00

The same is not true for the other control variables we include in our analysis: hierarchical structure, job rotation, degree of autonomy, propensity to help others, and degree of self efficacy. Table 8 will help us to better analyze the main descriptive features that characterize these enablers, while in Table 9 we make reference to the existing relationships among them, by taking into account also the four types of cultures we considered before.

Table 8. Control variables summary

VARIABLE	OBS	MEAN	ST. DEV.	MIN	MAX
Job rotation	14	2,71	1,65	1	7
Autonomy	14	5,32	1,68	2	7
KS organizational structure	14	4,72	1,16	2,83	6,17
Reward	14	4,45	1,18	3	7
Help others	14	6,73	0,54	5,5	7
Self efficacy	14	5,89	0,66	5	6,75

Table 9. Correlations matrix control variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Job Rotation	1,00									
Degree of Autonomy	0,06	1,00								
KS Organizational Structure	0,23	0,12	1,00							
Reward	0,07	- 0,40	- 0,12	1,00						
Help Others	0,18	0,40	0,33	- 0,45	1,00					
Self efficacy	0,44	0,23	0,26	0,26	0,13	1,00				
Innovative Culture	-0,51	- 0,04	0,44	0,23	0,17	0,20	1,00			
Bureaucratic Culture	-0,09	0,19	0,37	0,34	- 0,12	- 0,17	0,32	1,00		
Competitive Culture	-0,31	- 0,21	0,08	0,58	- 0,35	0,19	0,64	0,37	1,00	
Trust Culture	0,05	0,28	0,56	0,16	- 0,32	0,12	0,32	0,71	0,42	1,00

The *job rotation* variable refers to the processes of rotations across business sectors and/or business units to which employees are subject. The perception towards this variable is quite low (mean equals to 2,71 as observed in Table 8), meaning that individuals occupy for longer their usual working positions. Nevertheless this finding is in contrast with respect to what has emerged during the interview. In particular, people who released their depositions clearly explained that every individual is used to work across different functions within Altana; obviously this rotation takes into account the abilities required in the units (it is logic that a practical worker cannot experience the job performed by a manager). This practice is aimed at helping the sharing process by making people perfectly aware of what it is going in every moment and in every department. In this manner everyone will know which are the aspects that need more attention in being shared, and which are instead the other ones that could be given more for granted. Despite of that, we need to take into account that, as we could expect, this variable is negatively correlated with cultures oriented towards competition, innovation and bureaucracy; but it is positively related to trust.

The *degree of autonomy*, instead, refers to the possibility an employee has to feel free about taking a decision. This element is fundamental when taking fast decisions is decisive for the success of the business activities . This is exactly what the managers of Altana want to transmit to their workers. In fact the average value corresponding to the measure of this perception is 5,32, a quite high number.

For what the reward variable is concerned, we remember from the theory the existence of certain kinds of rewards, the monetary ones, which do not exercise a positive impact on knowledge sharing. Even if the correlation coefficient is very small, not surprisingly, we can observe from Table 9 a negative relation between this enabler and the one regarding a knowledge sharing organizational culture.

The *helping others* variable deals with the propensity in sharing everything that can contribute to help co-workers in performing their jobs. Even if it could seem really strange, this variable is negatively related with the trust oriented culture

(correlation coefficient equals -0,3188). On the other hand, the *self efficacy* indicates the perception about the ability and awareness of doing well a job from the beginning to the end perceived (the latter is the distinctive feature that make self efficacy different from degree of autonomy). That is to say the extent to which individuals fell free to take initiative and also judgment in its job realization. This aspect allows workers to feel in control of their role. It is important to notice that, for the reasons just explained, autonomy and self efficacy have not the same meaning, as a matter of fact Table 9 clearly show that the correlation coefficient relative to them is very low (0,2315).

3.5 The proof: the interview. “Trust is that for which I fight every day”

As stated in the first part of the chapter, three members lent themselves to the interview: the HR manager, the CED manager (Centro Elaborazione Dati – Data Processing Center) and the CEO. The first two preferred to be interviewed together, while the CEO answered in a second moment to all the questions previously proposed to her colleagues. In this manner it has been possible to have a more accurate interpretation of the outcomes by comparing the different way of explaining the same argument.

3.5.1 Configuration of knowledge sharing

Many times we emphasized the importance of knowledge and particularly we focused our attention on the sharing process as the main means through which knowledge can be effectively leveraged and exploited for the benefits of the business entity. Under this view it comes easy for us to imagine that knowledge is usually exchanged within the sole Altana. Nevertheless, this is not completely true in our specific case. By operating through licensing agreements with the

major brands in the market, Altana is able to manage the sharing process with its clients (brands and intermediaries) but also with the other companies in Alchimia holding to which it belongs. This is why the success of the sharing process in the Venetian company could be particularly determinant for the success of the business activities.

More in details communicating and sharing useful insights with clients is of extreme importance, especially in the difficult climate that characterizes the current market. Moreover, the kids wear target is a complex one, specific guidelines exist and they are commonly set by the parent brands for which Altana works. Each brand has its own characteristics and the Venetian company has to be able to adapt to each of them continuously and rapidly. This issue requires a high ability of flexibility but also an efficient method of communication aimed at ensuring an ad hoc knowledge sharing process. In addition, there exist brands with different logics of production: some of them more flexible, some others more rigid. A practical example could be given by the use of Skype as one of the main tools for realizing communication. Altana is being developing a sophisticated communication system based on the popular software in order to share knowledge with its parent brands. This initiative has been welcomed by the majority of them, but not from some others. In particular some brands expressed the will to use their own software for the sharing activities. If on one side Altana needs to put a lot of efforts to adapt every time to many different requests, on the other it has the possibility to acquire a lot of knowledge (know how etc.) that mark, and has marked across the years, its professionalism and competitiveness.

If instead we think at Alchimia holding, we need to refer to the sharing process that involves all the companies present in it. The communication existing among these entities, mainly consisting in the exchange of e-mails, allows sharing insights and opinions about activities, the results of their work and thus every kind of possible knowledge. This way of sharing allows to exploit synergies that will benefit the final ends of the involved entities.

Last, but not the least, we want to focus on the sharing of knowledge that configures within Altana itself.

The main issue that has emerged from the research is a proper balance existing between having a face-to-face and an ICT based sharing process. Before going into these details, it is important to point out that for everyone in the firm knowledge sharing has a high strategic value, it is at basis of everyday work and it represents the basis for organizational success. In particular it never happens that the sharing process is given for granted. This does not mean that the process is not natural or that it is forced. Rather, this means that no one will stand back to provide any kind of knowledge to the other, especially when a new project is undertaken. In the moment in which knowledge acquisition is given for granted from everyone, a negative process will trigger. Sharing what is known is thus vital for the success of every business activity. On one side the personal communication is the way through which individuals are aware of what it is going on in the operative activities in all their aspects. Usually weekly meetings are organized and everyone is entitled to participate. According to the interviewed many times also people who apparently could not be interested in the topic of discussion are invited to participate. As an example, if the topic of discussion deals with the warehouse handling of raw materials and finished goods, it is not appropriate to involve only the commercial department, leaving away those responsible for the advancement of production. In this situation the latter could not have any idea of what it is really occurring when they will deposit into the warehouse. Thus this is the right way to make overall useful evaluations in order take better decisions.

Beyond the weekly meetings, that could assume a formal nature because they are repeatedly arranged at fixed intervals of time, the face-to-face communication transcends any kind of formalisms and takes place in any moment it is needed.

The personal contacts just discussed, are properly balanced with ICT based sharing system. The e-mail is certainly the most used tool to exchange any kind

of insights at any moment; but also other software are available for utilization. Among them there are the *web of life* (a sort of social network where everybody could introduce ideas, suggestions etc.), the PLN (a software directly managed by the modeling unit with the purpose of bringing together all the relevant insights within the company's central management software), and an internal messaging aimed at favoring the communication of minor issues (this last tool wants to avoid too much confusion that could instead be created by a too intensive use of the mailing system). An interesting element, emerged in this regard, has been the suggestion of potential mechanisms that could improve the knowledge sharing process. More in details the HR proposed more training in order to educate the minds of people at the vitality importance of the practice, the CED manager instead suggested solutions characterized by a higher degree of technicality (as expected), such as an improved intranet and the e-learning process or the progressive knowledge system that, on the basis of the nature of the subject, are able to directly involve the right persons.

3.5.2 The major enabling factors

Also in this third phase of research, the presence of some factors that are likely to exercise an influence on the knowledge sharing practice have come out. Among them, the ones that have showed major emphasis in the way they were explained by the interviewed people are: characteristics of the organizational structure, degree of competitiveness, turnover, and peculiar cultural aspects such as trust.

An unanimous perception concerning the organizational structure has emerged from this phase of research. In particular, the structure of Altana seems to reflect the ideal situation that the CEO has always proposed to her employees: lean and little bureaucratic. The latter sands back our minds to the analytical description in which a medium-high level of bureaucracy resulted (mean equals 4,85); but we tried to explain that this number does not show a negative feeling, rather it

just tries to give a set of formal rules aimed at facilitating some processes of activities. In fact, this is exactly what we can observe in the words of the three managers. They pointed out that Altana's organizational structure develops across three layers and includes the President on the top together with the CEO, then we have the sectors' managers (e.g. HR, Planning and Control), and finally the responsible of the offices follow (e.g production office, logistic office). Despite the existence of this well shaped hierarchy, there exist a strong collaboration among the different departments characterized by an intensive vertical and horizontal communication. This way of doing not only tends to leverage the sharing of every kind of knowledge in every direction, but gives also a lot of flexibility to the business entity. In this regard, we want to remark that flexibility is like a magic word for Altana: it is one of the cornerstones of the business and it allows to meet all the needs and wills of the many parent brands with which it works. Flexibility represents also the main instrument that permits to behave as an "always start-up". A proof of that is coming from the very last project undertaken with a new brand: Imperial. Imperial has a completely different logic with respect to other ones since it is a ready to wear product. It is characterized by its speedy of production given that the collections are renewed every three weeks. The nature of this brand requires that the production is completely realized in the home country. As we can notice the latter aspect is not in line with the usual activity of Altana that performs almost all of its production (70%) abroad.

It is this flexibility, together with the need to be competitive with the ever changing market's conditions that requires a proper functioning of the knowledge sharing process.

As mentioned above, an important element that plays a positive role in terms of sharing is represented by the low level of turnover. People who work in Altana stay in the company for a long time, every individual is trained with the objective of becoming an essential "puppet in an ongoing team game". In addition, the low level of turnover is associated with a high level of job rotation that allows to

become “perfect knowers” of all the mechanisms that regulate the business. These two issues tend to reinforce the existence of the so called communities of practice: everyone knows each other, and this knowledge extends also at the family level, thus to the extra-working environment. This leads to have both a high level of solidarity and sociability deriving also from a good level of trust among the employees.

3.5.3 Toward a trust-oriented culture: the right way to internationalization

When talking with Altana’s members about the corporate culture that shapes every single aspect of the company, it is impossible to not notice the influence that the historical events play on the employees. Since the very beginning the President of the firm tried to transmit the respect for the others as a core value. In the following years the CEO continued in the same direction by posing at the center of the business activities the human relationships. In this perspective it seems more logic to understand how all the enablers we described before interplay and contribute to improve the final performance of the company. Nevertheless, good human relationships are not enough; ambition, initiative and professionalism are the other attributes that, correctly combined with the other core values, are able to lead to satisfying results.

Moreover many times Altana’s CEO remarked that every day she fights to increase the level of trust among its collaborators. In her opinion trust represents both a starting point and an objective to pursue. It is a starting point because without trust it becomes more difficult to work, people become reluctant in communicating, and as a final result it becomes more difficult to make the right evaluations and take the right decisions. On the other side building trust is not easy, it requires times and dedication. This is why the Managing Director devotes much of her efforts in promoting the sense of trust by setting herself as an example: “Trust is what for which I fight every day. The important thing is that

employees trust each other. Probably for me it is easier, everyone trust me because I am their representative. Trust does not depend upon the role played within the firm, rather a person should trust another because he/she really believes that what the other is doing is the right thing". Under this logic, she also remarked that in order to embed trust into Altana's culture it has been necessary to work hard for having a great communication, a point of reference (herself) who first trust the others, respect and team game in every activity. The commitment involved by the CEO reflects also in the perceptions of her collaborators who consider the existing level of trust as good. They also recognize that their leader is a motivating force able to convey positivity, enthusiasm and trust. The orientation of the corporate culture contributed to bring out another fundamental element concerning the strategic value of knowledge and its relative sharing process. As declared many times, the sharing of any insights is vital for the organization, but the importance is that each person perfectly knows that sharing is important as well as having their own space. It is important to give space to employees and give them the possibility to demonstrate their skills; but this does not mean that they have to make a good impression at the Director' eyes. Having its own space means having the possibility to express its own ideas, opinions, perplexities and disagreements. It is in this manner that everyone will gain the chance of being rewarded.

If on one hand the corporate culture seems well shaped and embodied in the minds of the employees, on the other one there is another aspect on which there is still the need to work hard. This aspects relates the very low degree of diversity that distinguishes the culture of Altana. With diversity we refer to the presence of minority groups (in terms of religion, language, race etc.). Certainly this aspect has contributed to create cohesion within the business entity; but it is not completely in line with the requirements set by the current international markets.

3.5.4 Being more international: the new challenge

As we mentioned in the first part of this chapter, Altana has established its presence in the international markets by establishing the 70% of its production activities, but only the 20% of its turnover is coming from abroad. In order to build a better understanding of how these numbers effectively take place it is necessary to briefly describe which are the markets in which the company operates, which are the strategies that have been adopted and which is the relationship with the host countries. Furthermore we want to explain the effect that knowledge sharing and the trust culture exercise on this field of interest.

Today Altana does not have any own subsidiary in the foreign markets in which it locates the majority of its production activities. The main countries in which it operates are the European eastern ones (e.g. Romania, Bulgaria), Turkey, Morocco and China. The latter is the country in which the majority of the 70% of foreign production takes place; even if something is changing. In fact there are some notorious brands that asked to the Venetian company of reducing the quantity of goods coming from China. The reason behind this, as it could be easily imagined, is linked to the bad reputation that is being characterizing the country today, such motivation becomes even more convincing when we talk about the child as the subject of the business.

The production activity is of two types: the “commercialized” and “industrialized”. The first one refers to the finished goods, the second one to the purchase of raw materials that will be further processed in the laboratories; the latter are usually processed in Romania, Bulgaria and Italy.

The modes of entry in the foreign markets have been different according to the specific characteristics of them. In some cases the company could enter directly by directly managing their international clients, in some others it relied on intermediaries, like importers, agents, or also local partners. In the latter situations, the intermediaries were fundamental for understanding the local environment in all its facets.

Despite the different ways through which Altana entered the new markets, it tried, and tries, to adopt the same approach in keeping relationships with them. This approach mainly realizes on the philosophy of the firm, but tries to deviate and adapt when required by the circumstances of the international settings. Moreover in every situation Altana tried to implement its two main strategies of internationalization: the selection of the brands and the international mentality. The brands selected are always known, thus they are characterized by a high degree of awareness in all over the world. In this way the Venetian company not only can improve its reputation on a large scale, but it can also learn from the international experience of the parent brands. For what the mentality concerns, we will explain soon in the paragraph what do we mean for mentality and how it is influenced.

Today Altana's international activity is experiencing an important change: on one side it is reducing production in certain risky countries as just described, on the other it is trying to increase the level of export that in turn would increase the percentage of turnover coming from the foreign markets. The main target countries that Altana has identified are the USA, China and other eastern European ones. This new perspective, according to what has been emerged from the interview, has certainly impacted the way knowledge is shared, but it has also affected certain aspects of the corporate culture. In turn it has been also the corporate culture to drive the challenge toward major internationalization.

The immediate proof of the impact on the sharing process is coming from the establishment of a new department within the company. In particular, we are talking about the introduction of a Sales Manager who was in charge of reorganizing the sales business unit with the objective of making it more international from every perspective. Today all the international activities are deployed and managed by the international department. The choice of the Director has not been left to the case. He is an expert who worked many years in a more structured organization. The motivation behind that stays in the need of employing a person able to adapt and manage the sharing processes according

to the international view. This adaptation regards both the relations and communication with the foreign clients, and the internal reorganization of the company. In this regard the main proof comes from the introduction of the so called "T disk" (disco T): a communication tool containing all kinds of information referred to the international activity and available for all the employees of the company. It is thanks to this system that Altana has discovered a new source of success in Germany. In the specific, through this new system Altana discovered that a licensed brand was particularly loved by German consumers. The surprise derived from the fact that until that moment, the company was completely unaware about even a low preference towards it.

As we can notice, the internationalization process has been helped by the contribution of the experience of the new person, but also to all employees who are always ready to adapt to new situations and mechanisms.

The latter aspect is in fact considered a powerful element that impacts on the internationalization process and it is classified as a personal and cultural aspect. As pointed out by members, there is perfect awareness in the business context that there is the need to change, to increase the degree of openness, to look at external opportunities, but also to the problems of the international scenes; thus it is no more sufficient to look at the national ones. In this respect, the impression of the respondents is that the mentality of Altana (as we mentioned before talking about the internationalization strategies) is too closed from a cultural point of view. All the employees comes from this Italian region, they have the same vision, attitudes towards life and work (it is commonly known that the Venetian culture is extremely work-oriented). Nevertheless the CEO, but also the HR and the CED manager, recognize that Altana's employees are aware about that and are available to put all their efforts to adapt to the new challenge. A first step towards improvements are represented by the organization of English language courses and by the work performed by the international area that aims to make everything available to all the employees: activities, processes, and results together with the problems coming from the foreign markets.

As the CEO argued, “everything is connected; and the connection point is represented by people. If they have the mentality, they can easily adapt to everything”.

Under this perspective, Altana hopes to reinforce its presence abroad not only as a producer, but also as an exporter. This objective could be achieved by acting as a team, by relying on the corporate culture built across the years, and by continuously innovating the minds.

3.6 Discussion and limitations

In this section we have proposed the analysis of a case study that has helped to understand how knowledge configures within a business entity, and how a culture oriented towards trust could help the practice to take place. Of course trust is a fundamental component. It interplays with the other enablers (organizational structure, turnover, competitiveness, and so on) and, in this way, it exercises a dominant role in leveraging knowledge among employees through its sharing. Trust allows to exchange real useful knowledge that is beneficial for the ends of the business. This is possible because when the level of trust is perceived as high, then the sharing of knowledge becomes independent from the role played by the sender, as well as its utilization becomes independent from the role of the receiver. Knowledge is exchanged and used because there is a real feeling that it can reveal relevant for the final purposes of the entity. In other words trust is something related to human relations and to the will to pursue a common objective. As a matter of consequence this scenario is more likely to occur if also other factors enter into play, in particular we refer to the existence of communities of practice, to a high degree of cohesion or to the awareness of being considered important puppets of the game. If all these elements exist, then it will become easier to share what is known with peers. This process will have as primary purpose the one to bring home a satisfactory result for the company and, as a matter of consequence, also for the individual itself.

Moreover we also noticed that this way of behaving could help to favor the development of the organization towards the international landscape. This issue finds its proof in the fact that the sharing process has needed to be reorganized, and the corporate culture needed to open to the “new world”. The solid bases built by the company across the years have given the right impetus to undertake new projects and to easily and quickly adapt to markets’ changes. In this context trust is even more important, since it represents the linking element between the past, the present and the future perspectives.

Nevertheless we need to take into account some limitations to the research. First, our quantitative analysis relies only on 14 observations, that correspond to about 35% of Altana’s employees. The reduced number of observations did not allow to make regressions in order to develop a model to study the effect of the independent variables on the dependent ones (knowledge donating and knowledge collecting). This is the reason for which we limited in developing an accurate descriptive analysis, at least to observe the most evident effects on the basis of the material available. The quantitative data have been compared with the qualitative ones gathered through the realization of the interviews; but also in this case we need to consider that people who lent themselves to the interviews were all managers. Even if they coordinate different departments (thus they have different views), they gave the only point of view as directors. Furthermore, the overall analysis refers to one single company of one sector. Probably a comparison with other competitors and also with other companies operating in other markets’ sectors could give a much more complete view about what we defined the knowledge sharing process in relation to one of its main enablers: the trust oriented culture.

Conclusion

The overall study is focused on how knowledge sharing and a trust oriented corporate culture are likely to interplay and affect the final performance of business organizations. Hence, we tried to provide useful considerations also on the impact that these two aspects have on the internationalization process and strategies.

In first place, we wanted to assess the strategic value of knowledge. Knowledge, in fact, is meant as a real strategic resource because it is a rare, valuable, non substitutable and difficult to imitate asset. Thus it is able to lead to the achievement and sustainability of business competitive advantage. However, in order to gain the expected benefits, it is not sufficient to just own the most desirable and useful knowledge, rather the right exploitation of it would be required. In particular, knowledge is properly exploited when employees are motivated in exploring and implementing new opportunities through the application of new ideas. In other words, the best exploitation of knowledge for pursuing a sustainable competitive advantage is dependent on an organization's ability to leverage it by motivating its employees in creating, sharing, and using it.

More in details, the sharing process is the means through which knowledge is transferred and disseminated from one person to another, allowing to pursue innovation, better performance, and ultimately a competitive advantage for the organization.

The sharing process among employees is characterized by some factors that contribute to foster and to ensure a proper functioning of it. These factors are commonly referred as enablers of knowledge sharing. More in details, such enablers include motivational factors, individual, interpersonal and team characteristics, as well as culture and climate. Corporate culture is certainly one of the most influential aspect that contribute to produce a certain effect on the underlined process. This is why we focused on it and, in particular on a trust oriented culture. With corporate culture we mean all the values, beliefs and

norms that exclusively characterize each business entity, thus also culture is something unique and difficult to imitate, and, in turn, a potential source of competitive advantage. Even if we cannot argue about the existence of a best culture for achieving the most desirable results, we can sustain that if the objective of a firm is the intensification and the improvement of knowledge sharing, then a trust oriented culture would be the most appropriate. Trust refers to the extent to which people believe in the others' high level of capability, benevolence and integrity; thus it is under these conditions that individuals will feel more confident in sharing what they know. However the games are not so simple as it appear from a linear description of the issue. In order to build a reasonable level of trust hard work and constant devotions are needed. Trust cannot be built through business training programs; rather there is the need to have a deep focus on human relations. In this scenario the presence of the so called communities of practice play a determinant role. If such communities exist, then individuals are likely to form a group, rather than just a team, characterized by working and extra working common interests. An organization of this type is personal, it is like a big family where cohesion and morale govern individuals' behaviors. A crucial role is also played by the leader of a company; a CEO who wants to emphasize the importance of trust in order to encourage certain behaviors, not only has the duty to motivate, disseminate positivity and enthusiasm among his/her collaborators, but he/she has to be the first person to trust the others. Moreover the efforts of the CEO, but also of other influential employees, is to inculcate in the minds of everyone that trust is not linked to the role occupied within the company, rather it is a feeling belonging to the human person. Nevertheless, human relations, community of practices and loyalty are not enough when the objective is doing business and being successful. Professionalism and valid skills are highly required. If trust and professionalism are properly balanced, then the impact on the knowledge sharing behavior could be powerful. When people trust co-workers they will be likely to share all they know regardless of the role and of its nature; and this is vital for the process to

take place appropriately. In fact, if such scenario occurs, it means that every individual within the organization is aware of what it is going on and will be able to better understand each situation in all its aspects. In this way it will become possible to make better evaluations, to find better solutions to potential problems and to take better decisions. In sum a trust oriented culture is likely to improve the knowledge sharing process, and in turn also the degree of efficiency. The potential results that could come from this pattern are many and different: more innovation, more flexibility (or adaptation ability), faster decision making process and so on. Furthermore there is another aspect that we wanted to take into consideration when talking about the sharing process and the underlined orientation of corporate culture: the internationalization process. The linkage of these topics is represented by the current markets situation that appear to be critical if there is a sort narrowness of mind, but also favorable for opportunities exploitation if there is awareness and willingness to continually running into play. Once again this tendency depends upon people and upon the corporate culture embedded into them. Today being capable and different from rivals is the only ingredient for pursuing a qualitative growth necessary for surviving in an international landscape where the competitive pressure is always present and hard to please. Given the existence of such condition, business organizations need to reinforce the knowledge sharing process because in this way people who directly operate for the international activities could make all the others gradually involved. As we observed in the analysis of our target company, once realized that being more international was the only way to stay in the market as the leader, Altana decided to introduce a new figure, that of the Sales Manager, who was coming from a more structured international context (so he has greater experience) and was responsible of the international area. The new formed field of competence was charged to develop all the international activities, from the market analysis to the final sale, other than sharing all kinds of operations to the other workers of the firm, including the results achieved. In this way Altana was allowed to carry a double activity: reinforce the presence worldwide and educate

its employees to a new way of doing business. The latter has certainly produced some effects on the company's corporate culture. First the Venetian workers became aware that adaptation to the new circumstances was necessary for the surviving of the entity, the rooted sentiment of trust gave them the awareness that this turning point would give benefits to everyone (there was no fear that these changes could be viewed as potential threats to their roles within the enterprise) and also the motivation to improve their skills and to be in step with the new reality was high.

Clearly, all this becomes possible under a corporate culture that, other than being built on trust, considers flexibility and need of adaptation as cornerstones. Thus, what we could observe is that the competitive pressure of the international markets has placed the hard conditions for an organization to succeed, and sometimes also to survive. Only a company with a strong corporate culture (widely shared) and a high level of professionalism is able to quickly and easily change to the new rules; in turn this new economical climate will impact and modify the corresponding values and norms that characterize the way of doing business.

Despite the link between a trust-oriented culture and the knowledge sharing process reveals to be interesting and beneficial for the final purposes of the company, there is not strong scientific evidence from this analysis. The main reason is coming from the limitations that could be taken into consideration for future potential researches. Among them the first issue is linked to the scarcity of quantitative data available. The second one is linked to the observation of a single business sector and mainly to a single organization. Thus, by expanding the horizon and by considering a greater number of entities could help to gain a more total a reliable vision of the phenomenon.

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Appendix I

Padernello di Paese (TV) 14/05/2013

Interview at Altana Spa

The three persons who lent themselves to the personal interview were: the HR manager, the CED manager and the CEO/ General Director. The HR and the CED representatives preferred to be interviewed together at the same time, while the CEO answered to the same questions separately from her collaborators.

1) Interview to the HR and CED managers

INTERNATIONALIZATION

QUESTION: Quali strategie di internazionalizzazione avete adottato? Quindi, come siete presenti nei mercati esteri? Perché avete adottato quelle modalità?

HR: A questa domanda dovrebbe risponderti meglio Barbara, per quello che posso dirti io è che di recente è stata inserita una nuova figura, quella del direttore commerciale, che ha un po' riorganizzato tutto il reparto commerciale vendite proprio per riuscire a rendere l'azienda un po' più internazionale al fine di esportare nei paesi dell'est Europeo, in quanto in Italia il mercato è saturo e quindi dobbiamo in qualche modo espanderci all'estero. Tale persona ha grande esperienza nell'ambito dei paesi esteri e ha un po' riorganizzato l'interno dell'azienda (gli uffici) creando un'area manager che include tutte le persone che si dedicano esclusivamente alle attività relative ai mercati esteri e un gruppo di

customer service che seguono i clienti dall'interno. Questo è quello che posso dirti io.

QUESTION: Secondo quelle che sono le sue percezioni, come possono aver influito le attività di internazionalizzazione nell'azienda? Ma soprattutto tali attività hanno impattato sulle modalità di condivisione di conoscenza?

HR: Assolutamente sì. Ciò è maggiormente dovuto all'ingresso del direttore commerciale, il quale, grazie alla sua grande esperienza, ha introdotto delle metodologie di comunicazione all'interno dell'azienda. In particolare mi riferisco a quello che noi comunemente chiamiamo "disco T": un disco riservato a tutti gli utenti dell'azienda ed in esso vengono messe magari le ricerche effettuate. In tale contesto un paio di stagioni fa abbiamo iniziato a vendere in "IUX", quindi vendita e-commerce, e tutti i risultati (anche quelli relative alle vendite) sono stati messi lì. In questo modo tutti gli utenti, non solo il commerciale, possono vedere quali sono stati i risultati e dove si spingerà per migliorare le vendite all'estero. Grazie a questo sistema, si è verificato che per certi marchi che non sembrassero internazionali, cioè che non ci fosse conoscenza e quindi interesse nei loro confronti nei paesi esteri, in realtà poi si è riscontrato il contrario. Un esempio è quello relativo alla Germania e al marchio Dondup da noi prodotto. Due stagioni fa si pensava che tale marchio non fosse conosciuto in Germania e invece è stato venduto molto bene per cui ora è proprio la parte commerciale che lavorerà per comprendere bene tale mercato (gusti, preferenze etc.) per aumentarvi le vendite.

QUESTION: In base al suo punto di vista, qual è il rapporto esistente tra l'home country e l'host country?

HR: Non abbiamo sedi nostre all'estero, si parla di fornitori. La produzione, in particolare, è fatta per il 70% nei paesi esteri. Avevamo una percentuale molto alta in Cina di commercializzato (specialmente giubbotteria Moncler).

La produzione si divide in industrializzato e commercializzato. Il commercializzato riguarda l'acquisto del capo finito, mentre l'industrializzato si riferisce all'acquisto della materia prima che poi si dà in lavorazione ai laboratori. Per quanto riguarda l'attività in Cina, dato che noi lavoriamo in licenza, la casa madre (moncler) ha fatto un passo dietro chiedendoci di incrementare la produzione europea e addirittura il made in Italy. A riguardo di questo motivo

abbiamo fatto una partnership di produzione con Gucci, con cui c'è una grande collaborazione. Loro vogliono esclusivamente il made in Italy poiché, essendo molto alti (in termini di mercato) cercano la qualità non solo nella produzione ma anche nella materia prima, puntano nella sicurezza relativa al tessuto e agli accessori, dato anche dal fatto che il mondo del bambino è più complesso e quindi bisogna prestare più attenzione. Relativamente a quest'ultimo aspetto, abbiamo istituito un ufficio sicurezza in modo tale che vengano fatte tutte le prove relative a tessuti, componenti (es cerniera).

QUESTION: Oltre alla Cina, quali sono gli altri paesi in cui il commercializzato viene prodotto?

HR: Cina e Portogallo maggiormente. Turchia, Marocco, Romania, Bulgaria e altri paesi dell'est Europa.

QUESTION: Per l'industrializzato vi è un mercato diverso oppure no?

HR: Italia e Romania, Bulgaria.

Tutto ciò è quello che riguarda i rapporti con gli host countries in termini di produzione. Per quanto concerne i clienti, noi esportiamo solo in qualche paese europeo, qualche paese arabo, molto poco in America (soprattutto Moncler) ma questo è un paese su cui puntiamo molto e su cui intendiamo espanderci

CED: Diciamo che un incremento si è avuto anche nelle esportazioni in Cina (soprattutto Moncler), ma per la maggior parte confermo che le esportazioni sono pressoché destinate a paesi europei ed ex Unione Sovietica.

HR: La commercializzazione dei prodotti all'estero avviene attraverso dei clienti/importatori che acquistano e rivendono nei mercati esteri. E questo è quello che so dirti per quel che riguarda il rapporto in termini di vendite.

QUESTION: Invece per quel che riguarda la logistica, la gestione dove avviene?

HR: Tutto esclusivamente in Italia, nell'home country.

CORPORATE CULTURE

QUESTION: Quali sono secondo lei gli elementi che caratterizzano la cultura aziendale?

HR: Attualmente stiamo un po' rivedendo la nostra cultura aziendale, in quanto è troppo legata al luogo, nel senso che le persone vengono quasi esclusivamente dal

Veneto. Proprio in virtù delle partnership e collaborazioni che abbiamo instaurato, secondo me c'è il bisogno di aprire un po' la mente; infatti, a tal proposito, abbiamo avviato dei corsi di inglese ed ora stiamo cercando di rivedere anche i processi aziendali, grazie all'aiuto di una società, anche per capire se servono delle competenze superiori proprio in virtù del fatto che vorremmo diventare un po' più internazionali. Nonostante abbiamo iniziato ad intraprendere attività internazionali, le partnership sono ancora tutte italiane. E' vero che esportiamo, ma siamo abituati a lavorare fundamentalmente in Italia, tranne il ramo commerciale. La mia sensazione è che la cultura sia troppo nazionale, abbiamo bisogno di aprirci.

QUESTION: Quali sono secondo lei gli elementi, i valori o le norme (se esistono) riguardanti la cultura che favoriscono il processo di condivisione?

HR: Allora, partiamo dagli albori. La nostra titolare e Presidente della società è Marina Salomon, ha aperto un sito (web of life) che consiste in una sorta di social network nel quale tutti possono inserire le proprie idee e opinioni; e questo contribuisce a condividere anche la mission aziendale. La Salomon è molto attenta al sociale, fa molto volontariato. Inoltre Altana fa parte di una holding (Alchimia) che include altre società come DOXA (indagini statistiche e si trova a Milano) ed altre che seguono web marketing e altri settori. Queste società sono tutte in comunicazione tra loro, questo ci consente di condividere le varie attività e i frutti del lavoro. In particolare, Altana, essendo una produttrice, si avvale della holding in cui vi sono società di servizi. In passato vi era anche una società che si occupava di formazione manageriale, anche noi abbiamo seguito dei corsi organizzati da loro. Tutto ciò a mio avviso contribuisce a condividere le varie conoscenze, ma anche l'utilizzo di e-mail, incontri (CONNEXIA è una società di comunicazione che li organizza e vengono spesso qui in azienda per condividere e confrontare metodologie) rappresentano buoni metodi di condivisione.

QUESTION: Possiamo dunque sostenere che il face-to-face si applichi in maniera marginale rispetto alle comunicazioni tramite sistemi informativi e quant'altro?

HR: Con le società del gruppo, specialmente con quelle di Milano, gli incontri sono rari e si fa maggiormente ricorso alle e-mail. All'interno dell'azienda ci sono riunioni settimanali nelle quali vengono discussi i vari avanzamenti di produzione.

Gli uffici partecipanti sono il prodotto, l'ufficio stile e tutti i vari uffici (programmazione, commerciale etc.) proprio per capire l'avanzamento dei lavori che partono dalla progettazione del campionario. Gli uffici prodotto e stile hanno anche degli incontri periodici con le case madri per confrontarsi sullo stile della collezione. Questo è importante in quanto, lavorando nel settore bambino dobbiamo seguire delle linee guida traducendo il mondo dell'adulto in quello del bambino. Tali linee guida sono dettate dalle case madri.

QUESTION: Qual è secondo lei il livello di fiducia esistente tra i dipendenti? Come questo può condizionare il reciproco scambio di informazioni?

HR: Secondo me c'è un buon livello di fiducia, nel senso che siamo abituati a discutere abbastanza apertamente sulle problematiche. Anche gli scontri sono costruttivi, inoltre ci conosciamo tutti molto bene, anche le nostre famiglie si conoscono. C'è un basso turnover, le persone sono qui da tanti anni. Questo è quel che riguarda le posizioni applicali, quindi i managers. Per quanto riguarda posizioni subalterne, cioè i manager con il proprio gruppo di lavoro, credo che il clima sia abbastanza positivo. Si dà la possibilità di esporre le proprie idee, problemi ed opinioni. In questo contesto Barbara Donadon, il nostro DG, è molto aperta e motiva le persone chiedendo che ci siano delle proposte provenienti da qualsiasi persona all'interno dell'azienda. Secondo me questo aspetto crea fiducia, positività ed entusiasmo.

QUESTION: Lei crede che la cultura aziendale possa aver dato un contributo/supporto al processo di internazionalizzazione?

HR: Non le so rispondere in questo senso. Quello che posso dire è che tutti ci siamo resi conto che c'è bisogno di cambiamento, anche in riferimento a quanto detto prima in termini di apertura, di dover andare all'estero per rendere l'azienda più internazionale. Non so se sia la cultura aziendale o il tipo di formazione, ma vedo che c'è la volontà da parte di tutti a mettersi in gioco e crescere verso l'esterno.

QUESTION: Si può dunque sostenere che la pressione derivante dalla competitività a livello internazionale eserciti un'influenza sulla cultura?

HR: sì. Assolutamente. Diciamo che si influenzano reciprocamente.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

QUESTION: Come vede la struttura organizzativa dell'azienda? Ovvero come la percepisce in termini di rigidità/flessibilità e apertura?

HR: Secondo me è una struttura molto flessibile. La struttura include: il Presidente e l'Amministratore delegato (o Direttore generale), in seguito ci sono i vari responsabili di settore (per esempio personale, CED, amministrazione finanza e controllo etc), poi ci sono i responsabili degli uffici: ufficio prodotto, un direttore che segue tutta la parte logistica e un responsabile della modelliera. Esiste una forte collaborazione tra i vari uffici e flessibilità. Ciò è dovuto anche al fatto che la nostra azienda lavora in licenza con altre aziende. E' come se ci fossero tante aziende (8-9 marchi) diverse tra loro, quindi nel tempo la struttura ha dovuto rendersi flessibile proprio perché eravamo in corsa e dovevamo inserire velocemente nuovi marchi e adattarci alle caratteristiche ed esigenze di ognuno. Siamo abituati a continui start-up e tutte le persone sono pronte a mettersi in gioco se serve. Proprio adesso siamo riusciti a partire con velocità in un nuovo progetto con una logica di produzione diversa rispetto a quella che facevamo prima. E' un marchio che si chiama Imperial ed è un pronto moda. In generale la produzione funziona così: facciamo i campionari per i vari marchi, quelli che stiamo facendo ora sono quelli per la PE 14 che usciranno a febbraio/marzo dell'anno prossimo . Per Imperial invece stiamo producendo la PE 13, quindi è una logica produttiva molto veloce. Per questo viene fatto in Italia, i tempi di uscita sono ogni 3-4 settimane (20-30 giorni). Quindi il fatto che siamo sempre stati abituati a cambiare brand, a conoscere realtà e dinamiche diverse ci rende molto flessibili anche nell'avviare nuovi progetti con logiche diverse. Secondo me c'è una buona flessibilità e le persone sono molto motivate a mettersi in gioco e a partire con progetti diversi.

QUESTION: In che modo la struttura facilita l'acquisizione e la condivisione di conoscenza? In particolare esistono meccanismi formali e/o informali che sono a supporto di tale processo?

HR: A parte le riunioni nelle quali tutte le persone vengono messe a conoscenza dei progetti che si intendono fare, credo che ci sia molta comunicazione non

formalizzata, però quando si parte con un nuovo progetto si fanno riunioni perché tutti devono sapere cose fare attraverso incontri e attraverso il CED.

CED: anche le case madri ci hanno “imposto” una comunicazione con loro.

HR: Nonostante ogni responsabile operi in autonomia, ognuno deve confrontarsi con gli altri. Ad Esempio il CED propone di fare in un certo modo e lo comunica all’ufficio programmazione e pianificazione e alla modelliera. In modelliera da un anno è arrivato un responsabile. Questo ci ha portato delle innovazioni derivanti dall’esperienza in un’azienda più strutturata della nostra, per cui ha inserito nuovi programmi che consentono a tutti di essere a conoscenza di determinate operazioni. Ad esempio prima l’ufficio bolle caricava i costi della modelliera, ora con l’inserimento di questo programma tutti sono a conoscenza che la procedura funziona in un nuovo modo. Per me comunicazione significa fare riunioni per informare sullo stato di avvio e di avanzamento dei lavori per confrontarsi e capire quale sia la migliore strategia per procedere.

QUESTION: Secondo lei esiste un meccanismo formale o informale che può consentire meglio la condivisione di conoscenza?

HR: Potrebbe essere una intranet.

CED: Diciamo che l’informatica può aiutare, ad esempio tramite l’e-mail. Condividere scelte decisionali con il responsabile vuol dire rendere partecipe le persone. Dall’altra parte, potrebbe essere utile costruire delle forme di autoapprendimento tramite l’ e-learning ed il knowledge progressivo che, in base alla tematica, consente di condividere delle informazioni con altre persone. Noi in questo momento in azienda non abbiamo questa seconda parte, perché nella realtà il fatto di essere flessibili (uno dei punti di forza dell’azienda) ha permesso che le persone, nel bene o nel male, hanno girato vari settori e sono sempre a conoscenza di ciò che sta capitando. La comunicazione nella realtà, a parte quella delle e-mail, è molto di interazione personale, non è solo l’informatica a dare un supporto, ma è il fatto che ci troviamo e discutiamo di come affrontare le cose. Nel momento in cui non lo facciamo, cioè nel momento in cui si dà per scontato che l’altro deve sapere, entriamo in crisi e automaticamente crolla il castello di carta dovuto alla mancanza di condivisione. Quindi la condivisione, attraverso la comunicazione

verbale ed attraverso il rendere le persone coscienti di ciò che si sta facendo rende l'azienda molto più flessibile di quello che sembra.

HR: e comunque nelle riunioni a volte si coinvolgo anche persone che apparentemente “non servono”, ad esempio in caso di riunione produzione, prodotto e commerciale si coinvolgono anche finanza e controllo poiché è giusto condividere con tutti le varie problematiche

CED: ad esempio nella gestione della movimentazione magazzino dei prodotti finiti e delle materie prime, se si coinvolge magari il commerciale ma non chi fa l'avanzamento di produzione, quest'ultimi non potranno avere la sensazione di ciò che realmente poi accade nel momento in cui si va a versare in magazzino. Ci sono degli aspetti che apparentemente sembrano scontati, ma che solo chi ci lavora direttamente può conoscere e spiegarti. Per questo è necessario coinvolgere tutti per aprire bene gli occhi al fine di vedere in maniera diversa ciò che sta accadendo e quindi di trovare la migliore soluzione.

QUESTION: Quali sono i meccanismi di gestione del personale che possono facilitare l'acquisizione e la condivisione di conoscenza?

HR: I meccanismi secondo me sono una comunicazione ancora più intensa ed efficace. Potrebbero esserci secondo me delle riunioni a livello di uffici e vertici, affinché lo scambio avvenga dal basso verso l'alto e non solo dall'alto verso il basso, e secondo me ci vorrebbe una formazione più sostanziale rispetto a quella che viene fatta.

INNOVATION

QUESTION: Quali sono altri supporti e infrastrutture tecnologiche di cui vi servite?

CED: In questo momento abbiamo tutta una serie di dischi condivisi in maniera generale per tutti, piuttosto che per aerea, per livello personale interno o per gruppo di lavoro. La condivisione di alcune informazioni sono a livello di ufficio, o gruppo di uffici o di tutta l'azienda.

L'e-mail appunto sono uno strumento fondamentale e poi sinceramente per la condivisione di informazione ci fermiamo a questo.

Altri software che utilizziamo come integrazione e interazione dell'informazione possono essere il programma PLN della modelliera piuttosto che i piazzamenti automatici per la raccolta degli agenti, sono tutti strumenti informatici che consentono di far convergere le informazioni all'interno del software gestionale dell'azienda. La comunicazione potrebbe essere estesa anche in altre forme, adesso per esempio stiamo ampliando tutta la parte di skype per quanto riguarda l'extranet con i fornitori, clienti o marchi, inoltre abbiamo creato un sistema di messaggistica interna in modo tale da non utilizzare l'e-mail anche solo per sapere se è stata fatta una piccola cosa o no; lo stesso lo si vorrebbe realizzare con skype nei confronti appunto dei fornitori, in questo modo questo genere di informazioni che non necessitano di essere "rintracciate" possono fluire in maniera più semplice. Ciò quindi eviterebbe di far confusione con troppe e-mail o con troppe persone messe in conoscenza (cc). Noi pensavamo di usare skype con tutti, ma ci sono delle case madri che invece vogliono adottare un sistema proprio di software per teleconferenza, noi vogliamo capire cosa comporta aprirsi a questo nuovo sistema e allo stesso tempo chiudersi, visto che se loro si sono chiusi a questo nuovo sistema, conseguentemente rischieremo anche noi di farlo. Bisogna mantenere la volontà di adeguarsi, adattarsi anche a questo tipo di richieste e in generali a marchi che sono più fiscali e rigidi. Loro sono flessibili nel loro interno, ma rigidi nei rapporti con noi.

QUESTION: Se potesse definirla, cos'è per Voi l'innovazione?

CED: Per me l'innovazione dovrebbe essere il miglioramento dello stile di lavoro. Nel senso che l'innovazione tecnologica non deve imporre le metodologie di lavoro, ma dovrebbe migliorare il lavoro. Questo porterebbe poi ad un'organizzazione migliore. L'imposizione, invece, potrebbe obbligare a ragionare in una certa maniera senza sapere il motivo e ciò renderebbe l'azienda più rigida. L'innovazione dovrebbe portare ad essere flessibili, propositivi e aperti al fatto che oggi ci troviamo a lavorare con un marchio e domani con un altro diverso. Dobbiamo essere flessibili nella nostra comunicazione.

QUESTION: Che ruolo ha secondo lei l'innovazione nei processi di condivisione?

CED: L'innovazione tecnologica nei processi di condivisione è importante nel momento in cui la comunicazione non pregiudica la fiducia delle persone. Quindi

il fatto che venga data una comunicazione via mail piuttosto che tramite altre forme di relazione non vuol dire “doversi coprir le spalle” con chi comunica l’informazione stessa. Se questo è quello che viene fatto, allora ha una forza dirompente; se invece l’innovazione tecnologica è fatta per “settorizzare” potrebbe invece chiudere la forza motrice dell’innovazione stessa. Quindi io potrei avere i migliori sistemi nell’azienda, ma se poi fisicamente chiudo la mente delle persone ho già fatto morire in partenza tutti gli eventuali benefici.

QUESTION: Cos’è per lei l’innovazione? (rivolta all’HR)

HR: Secondo me è una cosa esplosiva, nel senso che se le persone hanno una mente aperta ad innovarsi, porta sicuramente dei benefici all’azienda nel senso che la rende flessibile in tutti i campi, la porta ad essere internazionale e quindi nei momenti in cui vengono inseriti dei progetti di innovazione, anche tecnologica etc, l’azienda sarà resa più flessibile e dinamica. Chiaramente molto dipende anche dalla testa delle persone, se queste sono positive nei confronti delle novità, come nel nostro caso, il lavoro sarà velocizzato e più flessibile.

2) INTERVIEW TO THE CEO

INTERNAZIONALIZATION

QUESTION: Quali sono state le strategie di internazionalizzazione che avete adottato?

CEO: Le strategie partono sicuramente dalla notorietà dei brand, perché oggi per essere internazionale serve un brand che abbia una grande awareness e cioè un brand che sia conosciuto in tutto il mondo. Noi abbiamo selezionato i brand, nella maggior parte dei casi, in funzione della loro notorietà internazionale. L’Italia oggi rappresenta una piccola fetta della torta e se non si ha la predisposizione a guardare al mondo, sicuramente non se ne viene fuori; quindi primo occorre la notorietà del brand, secondo avere una testa molto internazionale, che significa vedere i problemi del mondo e non fermarsi solo a quelli dell’Italia e conoscere a fondo tutti i territori, non solo quello italiano, ed avere delle persone che abbiano le competenze per affrontare ogni mercato, dato che nei processi di internazionalizzazione le problematiche che potrebbero esserci in America non sono le stesse in Asia o in Europa, quindi bisogna conoscere a fondo ogni realtà, approfondirla e cercare di approcciarla al meglio.

QUESTION: Che modalità di entrata avete utilizzato nei paesi esteri?

CEO: Abbiamo utilizzato modalità diverse. A volte siamo entrati direttamente nei paesi attraverso dei clienti internazionali, quindi gestiti direttamente da noi. In altri casi abbiamo usato degli intermediari, quindi importatori o agenti e in altri casi ancora abbiamo usato dei partner locali che ci permettessero di conoscere meglio il territorio e di avvalerci della forza organizzativa.

QUESTION: Quali sono i rapporti che esistono, e in che modo si sviluppano, tra l'home country e l'host country?

CEO: La base dei rapporti dipendono dall'azienda stessa. Noi abbiamo un tipo di rapporto che sicuramente caratterizza la nostra azienda e quindi tendenzialmente il nostro approccio è sempre uguale indipendentemente da dove andiamo a vendere i nostri prodotti; è chiaro che poi la nostra bravura sta nel conoscere la territorialità, la mentalità e la cultura di ogni paese cercando di approcciare quest'ultimo al meglio. Ciò implica che di volta in volta bisogna anche adottare degli strumenti leggermente diversi in termini sicuramente strategici (come pricing, modelli distributivi, situazioni di partnership tra noi e aziende – aspetti contrattuali), però sempre con una stessa filosofia di base che è quella della nostra azienda.

QUESTION: Secondo lei l'entrata nei paesi esteri, e quindi l'attività di internazionalizzazione, ha condizionato i processi di condivisione di conoscenza all'interno della Vostra azienda?

CEO: Sicuramente l'ha condizionati. Bisogna adattare i processi e la gestione di condivisione in funzione della visione internazionale. Se uno si rapporta con un cliente italiano ha bisogno di alcuni strumenti, se si rapporta con un cliente asiatico servono strumenti diversi quali l'innovazione, tecnologia, conoscenza della lingua (inglese e non solo) e altre competenze produttive ma anche commerciali. C'è bisogno che al nostro interno abbiamo organizzazione e processo adattabile ad ogni paese.

CORPORATE CULTURE

QUESTION: Quali sono gli elementi che caratterizzano maggiormente la vostra azienda?

CEO: La nostra azienda è sempre stata caratterizzata da un grande senso di rispetto nei confronti del prossimo. E' un'azienda grande in termini di dimensioni (rispetto agli standard di aziende che producono abiti da bambini) , ma in cui le relazioni umane sono molto importanti e in cui le persone volenterose e dinamiche vengono premiate. I valori umani sono valori primari; ma allo stesso tempo una grande intraprendenza e professionalità ci caratterizza, anche perché oggi unicamente con le relazioni umane non si va da nessuna parte anche perché il nostro scopo è fare business. Noi abbiamo la fortuna di avere entrambe le caratteristiche: grande professionalità e un grande gioco di squadra.

QUESTION: Come percepisce il grado di fiducia esistente tra i dipendenti? Come questo può condizionare il reciproco scambio di informazioni?

CEO: Io lotto molto su questo aspetto perché secondo me il grado di fiducia è sottinteso. Magari a me viene più facile che tutte le persone abbiano fiducia in me perché magari io sono un punto di riferimento per loro; ma per me la cosa più importante è che ci sia fiducia tra di loro. La fiducia non deve mai derivare dalla figura e dal ruolo che uno svolge, ma una persona deve averne perché crede realmente che ciò che sta facendo l'altro sia giusto. Qui ci vuole una grande comunicazione tra le persone e grande gioco di squadra (facile a dirsi e un po' meno a farsi!), e ci vuole un punto di riferimento (in questo caso io) che dia un esempio. Se io non do fiducia alle persone, non si può pretendere che tra loro si instauri un rapporto di fiducia.

QUESTION: Quali sono secondo lei i valori e/o le norme che caratterizzano la Vostra cultura e che facilitano i comportamenti in virtù della condivisione di conoscenza?

CEO: Noi abbiamo una cultura veneta che per definizione è una cultura di grande senso del dovere ... siamo delle persone stacanoviste che hanno sempre lavorato e lottato quindi il concetto di lavoro è una cosa fondamentale. Però al di là del lavoro, è importante saperlo organizzare e viverlo in sintonia con tutte le persone. Sicuramente parliamo di una cultura non solo operativa, ma anche fortemente organizzativa e strategica. Oggi solo con il lavoro e forza di volontà non si va da nessuna parte, nel senso che bisogna essere ben organizzati e avere delle strategie precise.

QUESTION: Cosa pensano, secondo lei, i dipendenti del valore strategico della condivisione di conoscenza?

CEO: Per quanto mi riguarda, io penso che sia assolutamente indispensabile; e credo che lo pensino anche gli altri. Ripeto, per me magari è più facile perché devo essere un punto di riferimento, devo essere una persona che dimostri di avere una sua professionalità ed etica. Per gli altri è meno facile, l'importante è che ognuno sappia che fare una cosa in autonomia non significhi scavalcare l'altro e far più bella figura con me, è importante condividere ma è altrettanto importante che ognuno abbia il proprio spazio. Per me è importante che ci sia spazio per tutti e per tutte le persone che vogliono mostrare le proprie capacità. In questo momento di mercato difficile, le capacità che si avevano 10 anni fa non sono sufficienti e non sono quelle richieste oggi; bisogna evolvere nel corso della vita lavorativa, soprattutto in questo momento però la nostra cultura è ancora una volta una cultura di un'azienda abituata a giocare in squadra e quindi tutte le pedine sono indispensabili.

QUESTION: Crede che la cultura aziendale possa aver dato un contributo, un supporto all'attività di internazionalizzazione?

CEO: Diciamo di sì. Per internazionalizzarci abbiamo anche dovuto prendere know how e culture esterne, noi siamo partiti comunque come un'azienda molto nazionale, con dei marchi del territorio e con una bassa quota di internazionalizzazione, e quindi nel corso del tempo abbiamo dovuto inserire in azienda delle figure più professionali e internazionali, magari persone che lavoravano in aziende che esportavano molto di più di quello che esportiamo da qui noi oggi; e comunque utilizzare anche programmi e software e farli operare insieme alle mentalità è altrettanto importante. In sostanza abbiamo voluto sempre far crescere all'interno le persone disposte ad internazionalizzarsi e allo stesso tempo inserire delle persone dall'esterno con esperienza pregressa per renderla immediatamente utilizzabile per tutti. Un altro grande aiuto è dato dal fatto che, siccome noi lavoriamo in licenza, abbiamo molti partners che ci hanno insegnato tanto sull'estero in quanto, facendo il bambino, noi viviamo in ricaduta dell'adulto, cioè tutto ciò che accade per l'adulto noi lo trasformiamo nel

bambino, ciò ci è insegnato dalle case madri. Quindi lavorando con loro abbiamo avuto l'opportunità di conoscere e imparare tante cose sull'estero.

QUESTION: Invece l'internazionalizzazione in che modo ha cambiato o influenzato la cultura dell'azienda?

CEO: Nel caso della nostra azienda, l'internazionalizzazione ha portato solo a cose positive, in quanto tutte le persone si sono adattate a questa nuova filosofia di azienda. E' chiaro che se uno è abituato a parlare solo l'italiano e fare il più grande viaggio da Treviso a Milano, nel momento in cui deve affrontare un'esperienza in Bangladesh, logicamente le cose cambiano. Quindi ci vuole flessibilità, organizzazione, strategia e adattamenti all'innovazione e ai cambiamenti. All'interno di questa azienda quasi tutte le persone hanno questo tipo di mentalità. Inoltre oggi chi lavora in questo campo e non capisce che l'internazionalizzazione è la base per il futuro, è meglio che faccia qualcos'altro.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

QUESTION: In che modo la struttura organizzativa facilita il processo di condivisione di conoscenza?

CEO: Le strutture organizzative devono essere molto snelle e poco burocratiche. Noi abbiamo sempre avuto la fortuna di avere un'azienda snella in cui le decisioni si prendono velocemente, dato che il mercato cambia rapidamente. Ci sono delle aziende che a causa della burocrazia, o a causa di troppi livelli negli organigrammi, fanno passare dei mesi per prendere una decisione e nel corso di un mese le condizioni cambiano. Noi abbiamo la fortuna di avere un organigramma abbastanza piatto. Abbiamo dei capi settore e abbiamo delle persone che rispondono a loro. Le decisioni si prendono immediate, non c'è burocrazia, siamo molto veloci e poco formali. Siamo formali solo quando si tratta di rispettare i ruoli degli altri, ma anche molto informali tra di noi. Tutto sempre molto flessibile e veloce per permettere alle persone di agire immediatamente ed adattarsi al nuovo contesto.

INNOVATION

QUESTION: Cos'è per lei l'innovazione?

CEO: L'innovazione è uno strumento molto importante che però va utilizzato di pari passo con l'innovazione alla testa (mentale), nel senso che se uno fa innovazione solo attraverso gli strumenti e le persone non si adattano a quel tipo di innovazione, allora l'innovazione non serve a niente. Quindi per prima cosa bisogna avere la testa innovata, e quindi una testa che si adatta assolutamente a tutti i contesti e ai nuovi tipi di tecnologia, e quindi una grande predisposizione, una grande curiosità, persone molto smart che, ancora una volta, si adattano velocemente ai cambiamenti e che considerano l'innovazione una positività e non una negatività. Non credo neanche che l'innovazione sia a scapito della gente, c'è spazio per far lavorare le persone con l'innovazione, anzi l'innovazione le agevola e penso dunque che sia indispensabile per far funzionare l'azienda in un modo più dinamico e in un contesto più internazionale.

QUESTION: Che tipo di innovazioni sono state introdotte recentemente?

CEO: Innovazione è una parola molto ampia, quindi all'interno di innovazione si possono intendere sicuramente innovazioni di IT, di hardware, software, ma anche un nuovo modo di fare organizzazione, di approcciare i mercati, di creare collezioni e quindi un nuovo modo di know how, di approcciare i tessuti (nuovi tessuti più pratici e interessante per i bambini). L'innovazione quindi si può applicare a tutti i settori dell'azienda.

QUESTION: Che ruolo ha l'innovazione nella condivisione di conoscenza, e d'altro canto la condivisione di conoscenza che ruolo ha nell'innovazione?

CEO: E' sempre tutto legato. L'innovazione c'è se le persone hanno voglia di crescere e voglia di parlare la stessa lingua. L'innovazione può rendere le cose più facili o più complesse, ma in entrambi i casi ci deve essere gioco di squadra, fiducia e capacità di interpretare i nuovi modelli organizzativi, i nuovi strumenti e tutte le cose che un'azienda mette a punto per cercare di essere sempre moderna, dinamica e innovativa.

QUESTION: Che ruolo hanno i clienti, fornitori o altri agenti esterni nei processi di acquisizione e condivisione di conoscenza? In che modo questi trasmettono il valore della conoscenza?

CEO: Il cliente è fondamentale. Bisogna avere molte attenzioni nei confronti dei clienti perché è attraverso quest'ultimo che riusciamo a portare a casa dei fatturati. Un'azienda deve quindi riuscire a raccontare la sua storia e farla capire ai clienti; deve dare un servizio e farlo capire ai clienti, deve essere trasparente e fare ancora una volta un gioco di squadra. Deve pensare che se si riesce a fare un gioco in cui ognuno porta a casa un risultato si può andare da qualche parte. In questo momento bisogna essere ancora più presenti nel mercato e ancora più vicini ai clienti e a tutte le persone che lavorano con noi. In un mercato così impegnativo bisogna fare la differenza, i più bravi fanno la differenza, e per essere più bravi bisogna conoscere di più il mercato rispetto ad una volta.