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KNOWMAN

# Knowledge sources identification and activation: fuelling competitiveness

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The issue of identification and access knowledge sources is here examined, which is crucial to preserve the competitive capacity of the KIBS company.

The pill intends to underline the importance of locating and accessing sources of valuable knowledge and to provide some suggestion on how external and internal sources of knowledge can be identified, selected and accessed to get content needed to fill the cognitive gaps of the company.

# Knowledge sources identification and access



Source: Photo by Nattaphat Phau on [Pixabay](#)



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For KIBS companies, knowledge is both the good they offer and their main production factor

Knowledge sourcing entails:

- identification: locating useful knowledge sources
- selection: evaluating the different sources and choosing the “best” one
- access: assimilating the new knowledge inside the possessed one

In KIBS companies, knowledge sourcing is usually in charge to all employees

We refer here to the identification, selection and access of sources where a company can find the knowledge that allows it to preserve the competitive position.

For KIBS companies, knowledge is not only the good they offer but also their main production factor. Therefore, during their usual business life, KIBS companies continuously need new knowledge to produce and deliver clients valuable services.

Knowledge sourcing means to source a very particular and precious good, and implies several activities, as follows:

- identification of the different available sources, that is locating the sources where the knowledge the company needs can be found. The Internet has become the source of knowledge that companies draw on most frequently;
- selection of the source to which to resort. This means to evaluate the different sources on the basis of criteria as relevance and updating of the cognitive content, quickness and cost access, content transferability, and then select the one deemed the most appropriate;
- access the needed knowledge. Accessing doesn't limit to transferring the knowledge from the source to the recipient company, but it implies that the recipient company is able to integrate the new knowledge with the possessed one. This process is defined as knowledge absorption, and in general is rather complex.

In KIBS companies knowledge sourcing is a widespread activity, since it involves all employees, of all departments.

# Internal vs. external sourcing



Source: Photo by Nine Koepfer on Unsplash

KIBS resort to two different kinds of sources:

- Internal:
  - individual employees
  - R&D department
  - project teams
- External:
  - online
  - partners / competitors /customers
  - consultants
  - universities
  - events (conferences, trade fairs,...)
  - tech providers
  - journals/books
  - industry reports
  - institutional
  - ....

KIBS companies usually resort to various sources to find the knowledge needed to fill their cognitive gap. In particular, we can distinguish among internal and external sources.

Internal sources include individual employees, the R&D department, project teams, and are especially used when searching for local knowledge, that is knowledge that does not differ much from the already possessed one.

External sources are much more numerous and include online resources, partners, competitors, customers, universities, business consultants, technology providers, training services providers, events, academic and professional journal, industry reports, institutional sources, data banks, etc.

External sources are mainly used to acquire distant knowledge, that is, knowledge that falls outside the company's cognitive neighborhood.

Since external sourcing is more challenging and requires more efforts to be done, we will focus on it.

## Problems raised by a poor knowledge sourcing



Source: Photo by Icons8 Team on [Unsplash](#)

An ineffective and inefficient knowledge sourcing implies:

- getting no knowledge
- getting needed knowledge too late
- getting useless knowledge
- getting dangerous knowledge

And from a business perspective:

- dissatisfying the client
- losing the client
- running into a lawsuit
- worsening the company's image

An ineffective and inefficient knowledge sourcing may lead:

- to get no knowledge, which leaves unanswered questions;
- to get the needed knowledge too late, as occurs when it cannot be applied to solve the client's problem in due time;
- to get useless knowledge, as occurs when the company is not able to correctly apply the sourced knowledge;
- to get dangerous knowledge, as occurs when unreliable sources are accessed and that fake knowledge is obtained.

The above can have different impact on the relationships with the clients. Clients may be dissatisfied, or abandon the provider, or even file a lawsuit. In any case, the final effect is that the company's image gets worse.

# Factors leading to a poor knowledge sourcing (1)



Source: Photo by Andrea Piacquadio on [Pexels](#)

People related:

- lack of time
- lack of motivation
- close-minded
- comfort with old knowledge
- young people inexperience and propensity towards technological solutions

The experience of companies shows that a poor knowledge sourcing be due to various factors. It must be noted that some factors reside on the seeker side, and hence pertain to the human factor, while some others reside on the sources and knowledge side.

The different factors call for different countermeasures, and a company can especially act of the human-related factors.

People related factors concern:

- Lack of time. Employees are so busy with their daily activities, that they have little time to devote to knowledge sourcing
- Lack of motivation. Employees are not sufficiently motivated to search for new knowledge
- Resistance to think beyond your area of responsibility, which is a sign of a lack of mental openness
- Overconfidence with the old knowledge, which results in remaining stuck in the past
- The attitude of young people to prefer technological solutions
- The inexperience of young people, for whom it is difficult to be aware and assess relevant knowledge

## Factors leading to a poor knowledge sourcing (2)



Source: Photo by Gulfer Ergin on Unsplash

Source related:

- fast obsolescence
- overload
- costs

Growing and changing knowledge needs exert an amplifying effect

Sources and knowledge related factors concern:

- Fast obsolescence of knowledge, which implies that continuous search is needed
- Information overload. There is a lot of knowledge source containing a lot of knowledge that is even more difficult to locate and select the most suitable piece of knowledge. In addition, it must be recalled that not all sources are reliable: they can contain dated or false (counter) knowledge.
- Sourcing costs, both in monetary terms (if the contents have to be paid for) and in terms of the time necessary to absorb what has been acquired.

The effects of the above factors are magnified by the fact that companies have growing and constantly changing knowledge needs.

## Tips for improving knowledge sourcing



Source: Photo by Justin Heap [Unsplash](#)

Encourage employees to seek new knowledge:

- promote curiosity
- support inclinations
- involve people in emerging problems
- tolerate mistakes



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KIBS companies are adopting several practices to improve their knowledge sourcing activity, since they are aware of its importance.

Some managerial tips which are derived by their experience are illustrated here.

Firstly, it is important to encourage employees to seek new knowledge. This can be done by:

- promoting their curiosity, making them free to surf different knowledge sources;
- supporting their working inclinations, allowing them to work on the themes they prefer;
- stimulating their interest in emerging problems and in solving them. This entails involving employees in the company problems, empowering them, stimulating their intrapreneurship;
- tolerating mistakes that employees may do when proposing innovative solutions.

## Tips for improving knowledge sourcing



Source: Photo by Nattanan23 on [Pixabay](#)

Give employees time and capability for knowledge sourcing:

- Include sourcing in timesheets
- include sourcing in training programs
- organise sourcing activity
- share information about ongoing sourcing



Secondly, it is essential to give employees the time and the capability needed to surfing knowledge sources. This involves:

- including knowledge sourcing in the employees' timesheet. This avoid to make sourcing a residual and extra-work activity;
- including knowledge sourcing in training programmes, in order to make improve employees' sourcing capability;
- organising sourcing activity, e.g., by creating teams of people who are devoted to deepening a specific issue. Subdividing sourcing by areas of expertise can make it more effective and efficient
- sharing information about ongoing sourcing activity so as not to duplicate efforts.

## Tips for improving knowledge sourcing



Source: Photo by OpenClipart Vectors on [Pixabay](#)

Don't get lost among the various sources:

- rely on tested sources
- adopt filtering
- train new hires to select sources
- use new technologies

A recently emerged issues concerns the enormous amount of available knowledge sources, and the difficulty of selecting what is really needed, quickly and at low cost. Below, some suggestions on how not to get lost among the different sources.

- Rely on tested sources, that is sources that in the past proved to be reliable. Be careful that this may raise the risk of neglecting new and potentially useful sources;
- Adopt a filtering strategy, that is a systematic attempt to focus on relevant information from chosen sources, by specifying criteria for immediately removing items from consideration, as e.g., the presence of a specific keyword
- Train new hires to recognize and select relevant sources;
- Use some new emerging technologies, as for example Intelligent Agents, that can be helpful to make an automatic pre-selection of valuable sources.

## Summing up



Source: Photo by Wonderlane on [Unsplash](#)

- Knowledge sourcing is a crucial activity for KIBS companies since it affects innovation and business performance
- New knowledge can come from both internal and external sources
- Approaches and methods are related to the kind of needed sources, but:
  - promote curiosity
  - give employees time and tools
  - embedding knowledge sourcing into daily work
  - train new hires to knowledge sourcing

### Summing up,

- Knowledge sourcing is a crucial activity for KIBS companies since it affects innovation and business performance
- New knowledge can come from both internal and external sources, where the latter ones are of primary importance in case of brand new knowledge
- Approaches and methods are related to the kind of needed knowledge, and hence used sources, but there are some common factors that can improve sourcing:
  - ✓ Promote employees' curiosity and their propensity to search for new solutions
  - ✓ Give employees time and tool to surf knowledge sources,
  - ✓ Make knowledge sourcing an integral part of daily work
  - ✓ Train new hires to identify and select relevant knowledge sources

## Sources and find out more!

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More about the project:  
[knowmanproject.eu](http://knowmanproject.eu)

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