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Knowledge management in a rapidly growing business environment

Master's thesis

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Abstract for Master's thesis

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Abstract:
This qualitative research discusses knowledge management in a rapidly growing Finnish company from the perspective of its sales team. The aim of this research was to improve internal knowledge sharing as well as to gain an understanding of the usage of the company's knowledge management system. Recent extraordinary growth shown by the case company can be categorized as hyper-growth, which has created a unique set of challenges.

Omerzel's (2010) dimensions of knowledge management framework are utilized to break down the results of the interview data into six categories: 1) use of knowledge, 2) knowledge acquisition of individuals, 3) knowledge transfer, 4) motivation, 5) knowledge storage, and 6) measurement of knowledge management implementation. These dimensions are compared to the common challenges of rapid growth companies identified by Hambrick & Crozier (1985): 1) instant size, 2) sense of infallibility, 3) internal turmoil, and 4) extraordinary resource needs. The data for the study were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the sales representatives of the company's two sales teams. The gathered data were structured based on the theoretical framework.

The findings of this thesis confirm the importance of knowledge management in a rapidly growing environment: the sales team employees of the case company felt a need for internal and external knowledge sharing. The sales team utilized knowledge in customer relations and both tacit and explicit knowledge showed to increase the confidence of the sales representatives. The rapid growth creates challenges through the increased headcount to the company's culture and the requirement of changing processes. The results showed that knowledge management within a rapidly changing team and the company is important so that the full benefit of the increased knowledge can be utilized, and that the appropriate circumstances for knowledge sharing and use of knowledge can be created.

Keywords: knowledge management, hyper-growth, start-up, knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer

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1. Introduction

The amount of knowledge has increased rapidly since the dawn of the internet in the 1990s and this has sparked the interest of researchers, with knowledge management becoming a widely researched topic that has grown constantly for the past 30 years (Dalkir, 2011). Most of the research in knowledge management has concentrated on large companies; start-ups and SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) have not been researched as extensively (Centobelli et al., 2017), even though they play a key role in the economy, with over 60% of the work age citizens employed by them in Finland ("OECD SME Entrep. Outlook 2019," 2019).

This research concentrates on a minority of start-ups that have achieved hypergrowth, i.e., an extreme growth in the size of the company. Several ways of defining hypergrowth were mentioned in literature, but the common measurements have been either the revenue growth or the growth in employee count (Markman & Gartner, 2002b). This paper defines hypergrowth company as it has been defined by the World Economic Forum (2011) by a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of over 40%. Hypergrowth companies have been a challenging environment to study as they are usually progressive and fast-changing environments, and the research community might lack access to these companies. With the rapidly changing environment, it can also be difficult to predict what constitutes a hypergrowth company, as the change can be measured only after the growth has occurred. The research concentrates on a single hypergrowth company that has recognized the need to improve knowledge management within the sales and marketing functions.

Additionally, this paper uses Ikonen's (2017) findings that knowledge management plays a key role, especially for international growth organizations, because of the challenges that hyper-growth creates for sharing tacit knowledge. This research drills down to knowledge management aspects of four challenges of rapid growth recognized by Hambrick & Crozier (1985): Disaffection caused by the rapid growth of headcount, infallibility created by rapid success, potential internal turmoil, and increased resource needs. As the interview data was gathered during the midst of the Covid-19, the researcher takes into consideration potential new

challenges caused by the crisis that have not been researched thoroughly regarding growth companies (Papadopoulos et al., 2020).

Centobelli et al.'s (2017) four gaps of knowledge management research that this thesis tries to cover are social factors within start-ups, lack of clear taxonomy of knowledge management systems, alignment of strategies and technologies, and impact of knowledge management on the overall performance of start-ups. The sales team's experiences of knowledge management within the company are observed through Omerzel's (2010) dimensions of knowledge management that originate from research of start-ups. The framework takes into consideration the internal and external sources of knowledge as well as the explicit and tacit nature of knowledge. To include the human aspects of knowledge management, Omerzel had incorporated motivation of knowledge acquisition into the framework as a dimension.

1.1 Motivation

I joined the case company as a master's thesis worker, to research how the rapid growth of a company influences cross-team knowledge sharing. I have a background in marketing and sales, and have worked in both areas for the last 10 years within different organizations. I have specialized in business-to-business companies and helped sales and marketing teams to improve their use of modern technologies, including Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. My professional background might skew my research in this thesis by influencing the discussions in the interviews and by how references were chosen.

I have noticed throughout my career that knowledge sharing between sales and marketing can be challenging even though the full benefit could be retrieved by functioning cooperation between the two departments. Marketing produces leads for sales and increases the publicity of the company, which can help in closing deals. Sales aim to sell to these produced leads as well as produce their leads. Sales provide marketing with feedback on lead quality as well as content in the form of customer cases and guidance on content focal points.

The rapidly changing business environment brings challenges to the cooperation within the teams and between the teams. While the headcount of the company increases it becomes more difficult to communicate and the teams can become siloed from each other. Digitalization has produced ways for marketing to directly sell to customers through eCommerce. Marketing aims to tie sales cases to their marketing activities to show their impact and increase marketing budgets. This can cause friction between the teams as the internal teams can end up competing on the cases that they are both influencing. Sales are traditionally compensated based on closed deals. Thus, when marketing starts to directly influence sales cases it can show as a way of cutting the income of sales representatives. Instead of competing, the two teams should support each other, and the relationship should be more symbiotic to produce the best results.

I have witnessed similar conflicts in my previous employment and my personal goal has been to find a way for the teams to operate better together. This thesis allowed me to research how team members see and experience knowledge management and information exchange within sales team and between sales and marketing. Most of the organizations that I have worked in have been Small to Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and I have witnessed the challenges that growth causes to the cooperation within an organization, so the possibility to combine hyper-growth and knowledge management within the case company seemed intriguing for me. Technology is only one part of this cooperation and I agree with Ruggles (1998) that "If technology solves your problem, yours was not a knowledge problem." For this reason, my study concentrates on qualitative research to explore the "people factor" within the process.

The aims of the case company were twofold: to identify how knowledge is currently shared and managed within the sales team, as well as to learn how the knowledge management systems are currently utilized. The company aimed also to improve their internal communication and find ways to support knowledge sharing and knowledge creation within the company. As the company is experiencing changes and actively recruiting new employees, it is in the case company's interest to explore current practices and the influence of rapid growth on the company's knowledge-sharing culture. This includes not only the sales teams' ways of acquiring knowledge but also possible ways of improving cooperation between teams.

This research aims to contribute to the field of knowledge management by evaluating how a hypergrowth business environment influences knowledge management.

1.2 Research scope

Hypergrowth companies create management challenges for companies (Hambrick & Crozier, 1985; Cassia et al., 2011) that require new kinds of management practices. To gain a better understanding of the current knowledge management practices within a hyper-growth company, the first research question was as follows:

How does the sales team manage knowledge in a hypergrowth company?

To acquire a better understanding of what kind of influence does the rapidly changing environment of a hyper-growth business environment has on the knowledge management of the company the first investigative question is formulated as follows:

How does a rapidly changing business environment influence knowledge management?

As the alignment of different business functions is crucial for the success of the company so that the resources can be pointed to correct activities, the second investigative question is:

How does cross-functional communication affect knowledge management?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter (2) discusses the study's theoretical framework by exploring basic concepts of start-ups and hyper-growth companies, progressing to

theories of knowledge management and information sharing, and concluding by investigating knowledge management systems.

The next chapter (3) introduces the methodologies of the study by investigating concepts of qualitative research and interviews, including data collection methodologies of semi-structured interviews, as well as data collection and handling.

The methodology is followed by results (4) from the collected data based on the chosen methodologies. This chapter is split into sections based on the theoretical framework chosen for the research.

The last chapter is the discussion and conclusion (5), which reflects the findings of the theoretical framework and suggests areas for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Start-ups and hypergrowth

Start-up is a term used for a company that has not found a successful business model. Kujala (2016) defined start-up based on the age, and size of the company. He also took into consideration the funding of the company and a start-up not having found a product-market fit.

For start-ups external investment by private investors and possibly governmental investment funds is typical (Cassia et al., 2011). This external capital is invested based on the evaluated business potential of the company and the planned business model. Investments allow the company to grow aggressively, as the company can invest excess capital into growth to test the business model in a larger market. Start-ups typically aim directly for international markets,

which potentially can offer faster growth than smaller local markets. When a company reaches exceptional growth it is specified as a hypergrowth company, but the research on such companies has been difficult because the researchers have not settled on a specific definition of a hypergrowth company (Cassia et al., 2011).

Google, Facebook, Amazon… Hypergrowth companies are a tempting subject for research as the most successful ones become world-known. Yet they are also an important subject of research as they create a large number of jobs (Cassia et al., 2011). In addition, they have the potential to create immense profits for their investors.

Growth can be measured in multiple ways: based on the change in headcount, revenue, market share, or invested capital. To gain a perspective of the company's growth, this change should be measured during a span of a few years. According to the World Economic Forum (2011), a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of over 40% is considered hypergrowth.

According to Cassia et al, a hypergrowth company shows extraordinary turnover growth and year to year increase in sales of 20% during five years. Their research took into consideration companies that were small enterprises in the beginning with a turnover of less than 10 million euro and during the five years the turnover of the company should have grown to over 50 million euro, and the companies were defined as a large enterprise.

The case company chosen for this study fills these criteria by stacking a CAGR of 146% between 2017 and 2020.

In their research, Cassia et al. (2011) find the following similarities among hypergrowth companies: they are young, small, raise high depts with low solvency, hypergrowth companies tend to be involved in mergers and acquisitions and they invest in fixed assets. Other characteristics of hypergrowth companies are flexibility, creativity, adaptability, a high level of research and development as well as innovation (Cassia et al., 2011). Even though according to Markman & Gartner (2002), there is no correlation between growth and profitability in hypergrowth companies.

The Covid-19 crisis has created unexpected challenges for SMEs around the world and as Papadopoulos et al. (2020) highlighted that research on the effects of crises on the SMEs has been limited.

2.1.1 Challenges of hypergrowth

While many companies aim to achieve such rapid growth, it causes challenges for the company and its management. In the 1980s, Hambrick & Crozier (1985) recognized four common challenges for rapid growth firms:

- Instant size: the rapid increase of headcount can cause disaffection, inadequate skills, and inadequate processes
- A sense of infallibility: increased knowledge and rapid success can cause the company to underestimate the complexity of the market as well as threats that competitors bring
- Internal turmoil: The growth brings large amounts of recruits to the company, which can cause conflicts among the employees, make decision making even more difficult as well as put employees under immense pressure
- Extraordinary resource needs: The unsure business model cause rapid growth companies to be cash-starved making decisions on investments riskier

The organizations are usually entrepreneur-driven and the relationship between the founding members and employees influences the company culture. Some entrepreneurs decide to involve the employees in decision-making and can increase the involvement of the companies by giving options or selling stocks for the employees. As the company grows, the importance of a single hire decreases and the company can change the ways it entices new employees to stay motivated.

This can create inequality within the company as some of the founding members might have equity in the company.

Flat organizations are common in start-ups, but as the company grows it is typical to increase the hierarchy of the organization. This can cause challenges between the new and existing members of the organization as the decision-making changes. Change overall is the typical cause of challenges in hypergrowth companies as the growth will require the organization to change. This is typically unavoidable as every new employee brings new culture to the mix. The headcount growth requires more processes and development of human resource management. The goal to expand to international markets can encourage growth companies to open offices in new locations in other countries. This can bring new cultures to the organization that the management must take into consideration. This knowledge-rich and constantly changing environment requires an open environment that demands the organization to be especially adaptive to constant change (Stein & Smith, 2009).

All of these aforementioned changes will influence the way knowledge is managed within the organization. Most of these changes are potentially unpredictable and require agility from the management of the company. Every new employee brings new knowledge to the organization and creates new resources that can be utilized to gain a competitive advantage.

2.2 Knowledge management

2.2.1 Knowledge management

It has proven difficult to define knowledge management, and there is no universal definition for it (Omerzel, 2010). For example, Dalkir (2011) was able to identify over 70 different fitting definitions for knowledge management and mentions that the complexity of the term knowledge management originates from its multidisciplinary nature, as every field utilizes knowledge and

tries in one way or another to organize this knowledge to be more beneficial. One way of describing the process of knowledge management is that an organization aims to reshape knowledge as part of the organization's capital by managing individuals with knowledge (Omerzel, 2010). Another definition simplifies knowledge management to information technologies that gather knowledge (Dalkir, 2011). Both of the aforementioned definitions are only partial answers to the question of what is knowledge management.

Part of the complexity of knowledge management is the intangible nature of knowledge. To clarify knowledge as a term, it is important to identify the differences between data, information, and knowledge (Dalkir, 2011). *Data* are a raw format of information that can be difficult to interpret, such as listings of potential customers and their contact details. *Information is an* interpretation of the data: for example, I can identify Finnish companies from the data to be relevant for me based on my location. Finally, *knowledge* is conclusions drawn from previous experiences and the information available. Concerning customer data, this could mean that "I should not call this potential customer, because I know that my colleague is close friends with the organization's CEO. I instead should share my experiences from working with the organization with my colleague as they used to be my customer in the past and I know a few things that might interest them as an organization. I will book a time to discuss the case with my colleague because I can see from the knowledge management system that they are meeting again next week."

An aspect noticeable in the example above is that part of the knowledge is available in the knowledge management system and part of it is "just known" by the individual interpreting the information. The tangible knowledge that can be stored in knowledge management systems is called *explicit* knowledge and the intangible knowledge for example knowing how to do something is called *tacit* knowledge (Dalkir, 2011). Dalkir estimated that 80 to 85 per cent of knowledge in a company is tacit knowledge. The intangible nature of tacit knowledge creates a risk for the organizations e.g., when individuals leave the organization and take their tacit knowledge with them.

This potential loss of knowledge encourages organizations to support employees in turning tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Takeuchi & Nonaka (1995) introduced a knowledge creation

cycle, where knowledge moves from individual to individual and evolves throughout the cycle. In the knowledge creation cycle, knowledge transfers from tacit to tacit, from tacit to explicit, from explicit to explicit, and from explicit back to tacit.

The tacit-to-tacit knowledge transfer, also called *socialization*, is becoming more challenging in modern organizations as water-cooler chats become rarer and as the organization grows (Dalkir, 2011). The influence of the predominant distant work since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic has been difficult to measure. At the same time, according to Dalkir (2011), the complex knowledge management systems have caused the recreation of existing knowledge to increase because the knowledge is difficult to find.

While the study of knowledge management has grown throughout the 20th century, the benefits of knowledge management for smaller enterprises have not been thoroughly researched. (Centobelli et al., 2017)

2.2.2 Knowledge management and growth companies

While knowledge management has been shown to contribute to the growth and profitability of an SME (Omerzel, 2010), the topic has not been thoroughly researched as Centobelli et al. (2017) recognized. They were able to identify only thirty-two articles that have concentrated on knowledge management and start-ups from 1990 to 2016. In their study, Centobelli et al. (2017) recommended further research on the influence of knowledge management systems on knowledge management in start-ups as well as the alignment between the bought system and processes within the start-ups. These recommendations were compiled to four gaps regarding previous research on knowledge management in start-ups:

1. How does knowledge management impact the environmental and socio-political aspects of the start-up?

2. The lack of an exhaustive classification of knowledge management systems that could support knowledge management in a start-up environment
3. How to align the strategies with technologies regarding knowledge management, so that full potential could be achieved from them
4. How does knowledge management impact the performance of the start-up?

Ikonen (2017) discovered in his study, that knowledge management plays a key role especially for international growth organizations, because of the challenges that rapid growth brings to sharing of tacit knowledge. Gharakhani & Mousakhani (2012) found a positive influence of knowledge management on organizational performance. From knowledge processes (acquisition, creation, application) point of view, only knowledge application was directly linked to organizational performance. Centobelli et al. (2017) were able to compile from literature seven different aspects that knowledge management can have a positive impact on financial, environmental, human, market, organizational, relational, and technological performance. Though, Omerzel (2010) identified three key challenges in evaluating the relationship between knowledge management and the performance of the company: firstly, it is challenging to design a framework that considers all essential dimensions. Secondly, how to justify the relationship between performance and knowledge management. And finally, the wide ray of activities that contribute to knowledge management within the organization. Achieving competitive advantage from knowledge is in the end a game of luck that requires long-term efforts (Zack, 1999).

Even though the influence of knowledge management on start-ups' performance can be manyfold and sometimes difficult to estimate, the size and structure of the company also influence the organization's way of managing knowledge (Hislop, 2018). Companies must utilize the knowledge that they have to identify the best opportunities from the markets (Zack, 1999), which is crucial for start-ups that have not found a product-market fit yet. Knowing what you do not know should guide a company's strategy as well as knowledge acquisition. To achieve this, Zack suggests mapping the current knowledge of a company. As the company's headcount grows, also the knowledge within the organization increases, but at the same time it becomes

unlikelier that the existence of the knowledge is known or that it would be found (Davenport & Prusak, 1998).

Small enterprises can make knowledge sharing easier as there are fewer employees with whom to share knowledge. At the same time knowledge storage in a small organization can be unorganized and inefficient. While the low cost and easy to use knowledge management tools has made it easier for all sizes of companies to adopt knowledge management tools, it is crucial for start-ups to align the knowledge management systems to the knowledge that is stored in them, as failure in this can cause inefficiencies (Centobelli et al., 2017). These are shown by for example that companies and especially start-ups are not always aware that they are implementing knowledge management practices (Dalmarco et al., 2017). Commonly the implementation of knowledge management practices starts with technology first, only to be followed by the realization of how important of a role the people factor plays in knowledge management (Ruggles, 1998). The research (Zack, 1999) has shown that the organization's strategy is the most important way of guiding the knowledge management of an organization and even small companies should consider this.

2.3 Knowledge management dimensions

Omerzel (2010) identified six dimensions of knowledge management:

1) Use of knowledge
2) Knowledge acquisition of individuals
3) Knowledge transfer
4) Motivation
5) Knowledge storage
6) Measurement of knowledge management implementation

Similar steps of knowledge management cycles are repeated with slight variations throughout the literature. Omerzel's (2010) network was chosen for this thesis because of its basis on small and medium-sized enterprises so that the nature of small enterprises would be taken into consideration. The framework aims in defining the dimensions of knowledge management so that the influence of knowledge management could be evaluated in a company. She compiled the initial framework based on the literature review and then further developed it based on her quantitative analysis. This thesis aims to discover how the framework reflects employees experiences through qualitative research.

Six dimensions were identified in the framework. The way knowledge management is implemented within an organization should be evaluated regularly, as this helps determine how well the implemented solutions serve their purpose and how it impacts the business's key performance indicators (Resatsch, 2009), which is the sixth dimension. This aims to measure and evaluate the knowledge management implementation from the company perspective and all the interviewees were chosen from users of the knowledge management platforms it can be even considered that this thesis itself evaluates the sixth dimension by gathering experiences from the users in qualitative analysis. Thus, this dimension was omitted of the analysis.

2.3.1 Use of knowledge

Omerzel (2010) describes the use of knowledge through the practical application of knowledge in different activities and decision-making. She further implies that the use of knowledge is the actual value generator of knowledge management. When individuals apply the knowledge that they have they are, according to Omerzel (2010), creating knowledge and thus increasing the overall knowledge repository of the company.

Even though tacit knowledge can be difficult to replicate and contributes to the uniqueness of an organization, the acquisition, and storage of knowledge do not provide a competitive advantage

but instead the actual application of knowledge embedded in organizational routines. (Zack, 1999)

To illustrate how knowledge can be used, information science speaks of information use, which is closely related to the use of knowledge. The use of information is in literature divided into three different ways: instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic use of information. When an individual applies the information directly to decision-making, it is considered instrumental use of information (Diamantopoulos & Souchon, 1999). Whereas the indirect application of information through theories, assumptions, and assumptions is considered conceptual use of information. The symbolic use of information happens when information is manipulated to the benefit of the user or when a previously made decision is excused with information.

Wiig (1995, p.59) divided the use of knowledge between the task that the knowledge is applied on, as an expert approaches a familiar task differently if they have the knowledge and they might perform the task automatically. Whereas difficult decisions demand a different approach, which Wiig breaks down to identification of the problem, creation of alternative solutions, evaluation of alternatives, and then implementation of the solution. The value of knowledge utilization shows inefficiency to perform tasks, adaptation to change as well as the development of new solutions (Omerzel, 2010). Omerzel states that the prerequisite of the use of knowledge is varying sources of knowledge and interactions between employees.

One way to improve the utilization of the knowledge is to remove aspects that block the accessibility of knowledge and to take into consideration the individual knowledge retrieval aspects of the knowledge worker (Dalkir, 2011 p. 188). Making knowledge available for the users might seem easy, but the influence of the knowledge workers' attitude towards the knowledge is crucial for the application of knowledge (Dalkir, 2011 p. 198). Commonly, the reason why the knowledge is not used is that the knowledge worker does not trust that the use of knowledge would improve their performance.

As with most topics that involve the human aspect, the circumstances influence the utilization of knowledge. To give an example from a rapid growth environment, Korhonen-Sande & Sande (2014) discovered that when companies are experiencing internal structural changes, the cross-

functional cooperation has a positive influence on the use of customer information, which would imply that the use of knowledge would increase in rapidly changing environments.

2.3.2 Knowledge acquisition of individuals

Knowledge acquisition means the retrieval of new knowledge for the organization through individual efforts or organizational efforts. One of the findings of Omerzel's article was that her model worked best without separating the organizational acquisition as its dimension which indicates that organizational knowledge acquisition does not have a direct role in a firm's performance. (Omerzel, 2010)

Knowledge acquisition happens when an individual acquires new knowledge regarding the way tasks can be done. The acquisition efforts can be done through various activities (Omerzel, 2010, Dalkir, 2011) for example courses, literature, conferences, research, and cooperation with other organizations. The purely technology focused perspective to knowledge acquisition is, even though individuals tend to ask their acquaintances when searching for information (Dalkir, 2011).

The difference in Omerzel's (2010) model between knowledge transfer and knowledge acquisition is that with the acquisition the source of the knowledge is typically external to the organization, whereas knowledge transfer is considered as internal knowledge sharing.

It is typical for knowledge management to concentrate on the utilization and storage of existing knowledge within an organization and knowledge acquisition is less focused on, even though it is imperative for the success of the firm (Coulson-Thomas, 2003).

Organizational level learning is a broadly researched topic and field of science, which concentrates on how can the company acquire knowledge, whereas individual learning falls under the cognitive sciences (Jashapara, 2004). Organizational learning also considers the

internal learning of the company and the external sources of information, whereas knowledge acquisition is part of the model.

2.3.3 Knowledge transfer

As mentioned earlier, Omerzel (2010) differentiated knowledge transfer from knowledge acquisition based on if the source of the knowledge is internal or external to the organization. Knowledge transfer is thus the internal transfer of knowledge within the company from an employee to employee or through a knowledge management system. Communication between employees plays a significant role in knowledge transfer within organizations (Omerzel, 2010). This knowledge transfer within an organization contributes to the creation of knowledge and happens with tacit and explicit knowledge. One of the key models of the extensively researched knowledge transfer is the Takeuchi & Nonaka (1995) spiral model (Image 1), which demonstrates the conversion of knowledge between tacit and explicit knowledge. Gharakhani & Mousakhani (2012) also discovered that knowledge sharing can create new knowledge or new ways of utilizing existing knowledge can be created while sharing as knowledge is combined while it is shared.

One way of defining how knowledge transfer happens within an organization is the pull and push strategy. Using the push strategy the organization actively supplies employees with information through knowledge management systems and communication channels, whereas the pull strategy involves employees actively seeking knowledge through official and unofficial channels (Hislop, 2018).

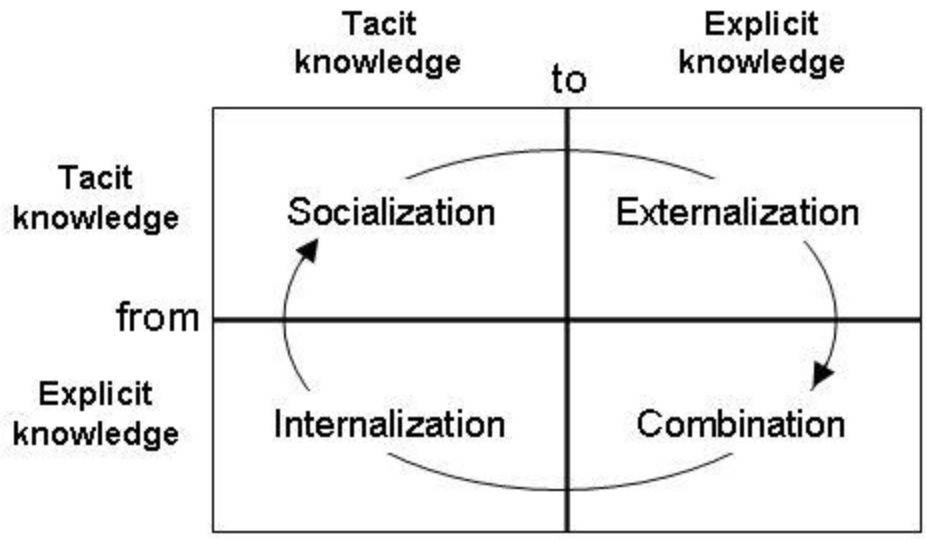

Figure 1 (Takeuchi & Nonaka, 1995) Image source: (Kumar, 2016)

The process of knowledge transfer is not easy to manage though, as it typically happens outside of the knowledge management system as individuals tend to ask directly from the individual instead of looking from the system. (Dalkir, 2011) Knowledge transfer's importance to the organization is undeniable and it requires efforts from the management. But often it is not given enough attention and is expected to happen without management's efforts (Widén, 2017). Especially the participation and communication between employees influence knowledge sharing within an organization (Huhtakangas, 2020). Other individuals are often chosen as the preferred source of information because, the trustworthiness of the source can be counted, the person can contribute to the query as well as it is usually much quicker than querying the system. (Dalkir, 2011) Also, Huhtakangas (2020) and Bengoa & Kaufmann (2016) emphasized the importance of trust and local culture in knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing within and between organizations. Constant and situation-dependent communication is crucial for successful knowledge transfer and the local culture of the company bears an influence on knowledge transfer and can increase the importance of face-to-face interactions.

Davenport & Prusak (1998 p. 88) emphasized the importance of human interaction regarding knowledge transfer and that in all its simplicity knowledge transfer should happen by just letting intelligent individuals interact with each other. They also stated that knowledge transfer happens

in a company regardless of the managerial efforts as employees interact naturally and that humans tend to lean towards convenience instead of quality when choosing an individual as a source of knowledge.

The fact that knowledge can be seen as property might act as an obstacle to knowledge sharing in an organization, as individuals might see that they lose credit for the knowledge if they share it with others. (Dalkir, 2011) This can be avoided by setting up practices that connect the knowledge with the author of the knowledge in the knowledge management system. Creating a culture that encourages knowledge sharing, instead of knowledge hoarding, creates opportunities for knowledge creation through sharing of knowledge.

Geographically distributed companies should invest in developing a knowledge-sharing culture that would encourage communication within the company as well as with companies from a similar industry external to the company. This includes lubricating knowledge sharing with a proper infrastructure that would enable communication among the employees. Companies operating in many locations should create more opportunities for knowledge sharing within the company than companies working in industry clusters. (Allen et al., 2016)

2.3.4 Motivation

Most of the traditional knowledge management theories do not separate the motivation factor but instead concentrate on the systems and activities. One of the key findings of Omerzel's (2010) research was to distinguish employee motivation as a separate factor in the knowledge management framework. The research grouped all employee motivation under the factor but considered it mostly regarding individuals' knowledge acquisition.

Separating motivation as one of the dimensions of knowledge management acknowledges the human aspect of knowledge management mentioned in the literature (Widén, 2017). Knowledge management is not solely a management issue but the human aspects of businesses, like social,

cultural, and contextual aspects should be considered, as they play a key role in how knowledge is perceived and utilized on an organizational level.

Widén (2017) highlighted the importance of information culture and that it has an influence on the motivation of knowledge use in an organization. The traditions and practices of the company affect how information is shared and do the employees feel motivated to share knowledge and adopt new technologies.

When considering the motivation aspect of knowledge management, we have to consider the individual's role in the organization and the social context as these play a major role in knowledge sharing (Widén, 2017) and the human-to-human interaction should not be underestimated. Laitinen & Senoo (2017) discovered that in a start-up context the relationship between the founder and employees influences motivation to share knowledge. In some cases, the start-up can resemble a family in the way that the motivation to share knowledge stems from within the organization and no extra incentives are needed.

2.3.5 Knowledge storage

As knowledge creation can be a cumbersome, expensive, and time-consuming task, it is imperative to store the created knowledge and make it accessible within the organization (Omerzel, 2010; Davenport & Prusak, 1998). However, the activity of knowledge storage goes by many names as Davenport & Prusak called the process knowledge codification, and in Takeuchi & Nonaka (1995) model a term externalization is used of the process where the knowledge is transferred from tacit to explicit format. This is an important step in the knowledge creation cycle. Despite documentation of knowledge efforts by an organization, some of the knowledge within the organization will stay with the employees, usually as tacit knowledge (Omerzel, 2010) and this is why organizations should actively evaluate which knowledge should be stored and which transferred (Davenport & Prusak, 1998).

Even though most of the knowledge within the organization is stored in a tacit format, it is instrumental that the organization aims to codify and store the most important parts of it as this allows knowledge to be found by other parties and not be dependent on human interactions. The thorough mapping and storing of knowledge makes it more accessible as well and can help an organization prioritize its knowledge acquisition efforts better in the future (Zack, 1999).

A good example of knowledge storage is the Customer Relationship Management system, which is often a core of the knowledge management in an organization (Stein & Smith, 2009b). Stein and Smith state that like most knowledge management systems, the integration of CRM to the company's strategic functions improves its productivity and profitability. CRM works as an important example of a knowledge management system as it crosses organizational functions for it to be beneficial for the organization (Wilson et al., 2002). However, like all knowledge management systems, it is not the design which causes challenges in the implementation of a system, instead the way the employees utilize the system (Omerzel, 2010) as knowledge management systems are only as good as the knowledge stored in them.

Davenport & Prusak (1998) state that it is important to find the balance between structure and freedom with knowledge management systems, as imbalance deflates the knowledge as just another piece of data or information. They further discuss the relevance of the knowledge stored, which should be actively evaluated. However, at the same time, relevance is always subjective and can be debated.

3. Methodology

The following chapter covers the methodologies that were chosen to evaluate Omerzel's (2010) framework within the case company and to distinguish the challenges based on common challenges caused by the rapid growth of the organization researched by Hambrick & Crozier (1985). To compare the theories in practice, data were collected from the case company by conducting qualitative interviews with the representatives of the company's sales team.

3.1 Research design

The research aimed to explore how knowledge management happens in an organization and especially how is knowledge transferred between the sales and marketing teams. Originally, the researcher was recruited to study the common knowledge management system between the teams, which at the time was seen as a technical challenge. While gathering background information on the current situation within the organization, it became apparent that the human aspect of knowledge management and team collaboration was causing most of the challenges within the organization. The sales team was chosen as the interviewees as they were the users of the information produced by the marketing team. As the sales team consisted of less than 20 individuals, qualitative analysis was chosen to gather personal experiences of how knowledge management is organized in the company.

In the early stages of the research, the researcher considered whether the interview data should be gathered from a larger group of companies experiencing similar growth to the case company. The researcher and the case company together decided to concentrate only on the experiences of the case company. This way deeper company-specific experiences could be gathered, and interviews were easier to organize with employees of a single company.

The company had grown exceptionally rapidly in recent years. Based on background research, it seemed that this would potentially create unique challenges for the company, so the study concentrates on the company's hypergrowth. To take into consideration the rapid growth and constant recruitment of new personnel, the chosen interviewees were from various career stages within the company.

Omerzel's (2010) knowledge management dimensions model was chosen in the data analysis phase based on its background in knowledge management research in start-ups. The model reflected all dimensions of knowledge management and showed similarities to many other knowledge management models. Her model succeeds in encompassing both external knowledge acquisition as well as the motivation of employees, which seemed important based on the initial results and background research of the case company.

3.2 Data collection

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with five sales representatives of the case company. The questions were separated into five themes. The first theme covered basic interviewee information and their role in the company. The second theme is related to the general practicalities of knowledge sharing within the company. This was followed by a deeper dive into knowledge sharing between the sales and marketing departments. The fourth theme covered the role of information technology in knowledge sharing. Lastly, the influence of a rapidly changing environment on knowledge sharing within the company was discussed. The interviews did not strictly follow the prepared set of questions, rather the questions were used as a guideline of the topics to be covered during the interview. This allowed spontaneity during the interviews and allowed the researcher to take into consideration the interviewee's impressions of knowledge management within the organization.

The interviews were conducted by video calls as the Covid-19 restrictions did not allow face-to-face interviews. Additionally, interviewees were geographically outspread so organizing face-to-

face interviews would have been costly. To improve the concentration of the interviewer and to ease data analysis, the interviews were recorded using video call software. Permission for recording the interviews was requested from each interviewee. Interviewees were assured that their identities would not be revealed at any stage of the research or thesis publication to create trust and a safe medium where they could share experiences freely. The interviewees were promised that the recordings of the interviews would be deleted after the data analysis. The interviewer recognized the fact that as these are expert interviews, the identity of the interviewee could be recognized based on the knowledge that the interviewee could only have (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). To avoid this, the analysis of the interviewee material was aimed to be kept on a high level and direct quotations were avoided.

The thesis coordinator from the company was able to instruct that company practices vary between different sales teams. The company's sales function is divided into two teams, and interviewees were chosen from both sales teams to achieve an overall view of different practices. The sales teams have been separated based on the offering that they provide to the customers. The so-called "sales team A" had been organized as the company had been created a few years prior, and it had grown organically to sell original services offered by the case company with a tested business model. The "sales team B" originated approximately a year before the interviews, and its function is to develop services and sell them to industries new to the company. Three of the chosen interviewees were members of sales team A and two were members of sales team B. The interviewees were chosen based on their background, seniority, and responsibility with the help of the thesis coordinator. Interviewee selection aimed to achieve a wide perspective to different sales practices within the company, therefore individuals with varying roles were chosen for the interviews. Out of the six chosen interviewees, five accepted the request for an interview. English was the native language of three out of five of the interviewees and was not the native language of the interviewer, this might have caused misunderstandings and language barriers during the interviews. The interviews did not reveal any issues related to gender, so to protect the anonymity of interviewees, their genders are not disclosed.

As Ruusuvuori et al., (2010) suggest, background research of the company was done before starting the interviews. This was done as part of the researcher's daily work within the case company and daily cooperation with the interviewees. The thesis coordinator was consulted

regarding the background and specialization of the interviewees before the interviews. The interview questions were influenced by the background research as well as each interviewee's personal experiences.

3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis began during the interview process by comparing the interview material to background information and theoretical framework. The data also influenced the choice of framework for the analysis, because theoretical background research was ongoing during the interview process and continued after the interviews were conducted. The researcher reflected on the topics uncovered during the interviews and aimed to find recurring themes. The choice of the framework also took into consideration the company's rapid growth as well as potential conflicts that arose in the interviews.

The interview data was transcribed with the help of the transcription software Descript. As the research did not concentrate on discourse analysis, repetitive words and filler words were removed from the transcription with the help of the transcription software.

Based on the theoretical framework, the transcriptions were categorized into five dimensions:

- Use of knowledge
- Knowledge acquisition
- Knowledge storage
- Motivation
- Knowledge transfer

Two additional relevant themes were distinguished from the material: the influence of rapid growth and the influence of Covid-19. The interview material was organized into a matrix for analysis and comparison, aiding the identification of potential conflicts and synergies. The seven themes were also scored based on their frequency in the interview material.

4. Results

4.1 Knowledge Management

4.1.1 Use of knowledge

The use of knowledge is described by Omerzel (2010) as the process of transforming knowledge into practicalities and the efficiency of performing tasks.

The marketing team produces information for the sales teams in leads and the behavioural data of the prospects. Interviews with the members of sales team A showed that they did not see the value in utilizing behavioural information: they were aware of it but did not make judgments based on this knowledge. This confirms previous research results that there is no direct positive impact of CRM systems on customer information usage (Rollins et al., 2012), but that usage stems from other factors within a company. However, the use of information technology can help sales representatives to increase their knowledge as well as sharpen their targeting and productivity (Ahearne et al., 2007).

Based on the interviews, employees focused on technical and industry knowledge utilization rather than soft skills. Especially with interviewees from sales team A, a long career in the industry and technical background helps the sales representatives to educate the customers on the benefits of the technology. These sales representatives tended to trust their knowledge and ability to evaluate situations, which confirms Wiig's (1995) theory of usage of knowledge by experts. One interviewee felt that the rapid growth of the company in a highly technical industry caused employees to lack the necessary confidence in applying industry knowledge. This, in turn, caused deceleration of decision-making and avoidance of responsibility. While an interviewee that felt they did not yet have industry knowledge was shown to value a long career and actively sought to learn more about the industry.

Interviewees with long careers in the industry expected their colleagues to have high industry knowledge that would show through fast decision making. Omerzel (2010) highlights the speed of doing tasks that come from the process of usage of knowledge. The rapid growth and active recruitment meant that there were constantly employees without the same level of knowledge that were not always given the time necessary for them to make the decisions.

The knowledge that the company produces creates confidence for the sales representatives. All the assets and explicit knowledge that the company produces can be utilized in sales negotiations. One of the interviewees stated: “I don't wanna say just the creation of the [marketing assets] and the information like that. Those are super useful, both in terms of spreading the message, because I can pitch to one person and send that document, and then they'll pass it on to three other people. And it both spreads the message, but it also builds confidence that [...] [case company] say they can do this. And then that document backs it up and proves that we can do it.” In other words, a positive attitude toward knowledge has a positive influence on knowledge utilization Dalkir (2011).

The interviewed sales representatives felt that business-to-business sales are a lot about educating current and potential customers. Most interviewees highlighted education as part of knowledge utilization, especially in a technical field: “It's teaching them how can we do it, but it's [also] teaching them like why they need us to do it.”

All interviewees highlighted the use of both tacit and explicit knowledge. Sharing explicit knowledge externally was seen as a valuable tool to support the message that the sales representative tried to convey.

4.1.2 Knowledge acquisition of individuals

Individuals constantly acquire information from their surroundings. This might be difficult to recognize as knowledge acquisition might happen in various ways. Individuals might research a topic for a new work assignment or they might have a discussion regarding work-related topics

in their free time. Knowledge acquisition can also be encouraged by the company, e.g., by enabling participation in different external pieces of training, conferences, and discussions. For example, the case company provided employees access to a course platform where employees can increase their knowledge and certify their expertise, and employees are eligible for a training budget that can be used for personal development.

Sales personnel are expected to be constantly in touch with external parties, and knowledge acquisition through customers is an excellent way of acquiring new knowledge. This type of knowledge acquisition was evident in all interviews.

In the case company, knowledge was acquired through tools available to all company employees, allowing them to explore topics recommended by the management as well as other useful topics regarding business and technology. These training platforms help the employees to build their competencies and personal knowledge. Interviewees felt that knowledge transfer between employees encourages knowledge acquisition: common themes can be recognized, and colleagues encourage each other in learning new topics. Interviewees also mentioned that proactive research using internal and external tools helps them avoid asking too many questions.

New customer cases require new knowledge to be acquired. The interviewees felt that the more information they had, the better they can serve the customer. However, there were differences between the sales teams regarding the acquisition of prospect information. Sales team A felt that they needed to be proactive in researching new prospects and sales cases, whereas sales team B felt that they were provided with the necessary information – the research they did was considered extra.

Limited time was named as an evident blocker of knowledge acquisition by the interviewees. Existing customer cases generally took up the most time in their daily work. Supporting existing customers is a priority, and not enough time could be allocated to researching new customer cases. Interviewees mentioned that finding new sales cases and information about possible sales cases would need to be assigned to someone with less responsibility in their current tasks. The restrictions on external events caused by Covid-19 were also named by the sales representatives as a blocker of external knowledge acquisition. Especially sales team A emphasized the negative

influence that cancellation of external events had had on external knowledge sharing. The interviewees had found ways of compensating for this, but they had not been able to completely overrule the negative influence.

The sales teams differed in that the team A did not feel that there is enough sharing of tacit knowledge within the team, which could aid knowledge acquisition. One of the interviewees mentioned that they were unsure of what to research and felt that example cases from the other team members could help them to direct their knowledge acquisition efforts.

On the other hand, sales team B felt that knowledge acquisition performs well within their team, based on the team's proactive way of looking for information. The team shared many years of industry experience, and this experience they share helps everybody improve. Team B felt that knowledge acquisition occurred daily, working with different individuals internally and externally. Team B also mentioned a third knowledge acquisition method: the efficient and active use of digital sources, including newsletters, industry news, and social media channels. Constant activity within the market helped the interviewees acquire knowledge that they did not necessarily know in advance they should be acquiring. This acquired knowledge was then shared and discussed with the team. Overall, team B emphasized the functioning information-sharing culture within the team.

Regarding sales case and prospect information, one of sales team B members emphasized that they are provided with a plethora of information. The interviewee felt that on top of the information provided by marketing and internal knowledge management systems, extensive research regarding the prospects was necessary. This included the use of search tools and social media because there was usually a need for personal information, which could prove beneficial in discussions with the prospect.

Based on the interviews, knowledge acquisition can be separated into two themes: 1) knowledge acquisition that directly relates to the sales cases, and 2) indirectly influencing knowledge acquisition. Direct knowledge acquisition is the individuals' efforts in looking for information regarding leads, prospects, and sales cases. This is directly linked to individuals and companies being influenced by sales activities. The sources of information for direct knowledge acquisition

are usually internal knowledge systems or external public information available from companies and individuals on company websites, social media, and public databases. This knowledge could have a direct impact on conversations with the individual or the company, and it could be described as arming yourself with information before negotiations. This kind of action-oriented information has exhibited a positive effect on customer performance (Rollins et al., 2012).

Knowledge acquisition, which indirectly influences sales cases consists of activities that kept the salesperson up to date regarding the industry and best practices. Activities done to acquire indirectly influencing knowledge were motivated by the individual's interest in the industry or self-improvement. This included following industry media, participating in industry events as well as improving the professional knowledge by e.g., taking courses or reading relevant articles.

Interviews showed differences between the sales teams in terms of both types of knowledge acquisition. Whereas sales team A assessed that directly influencing knowledge acquisition took a lot of time and was not a priority, sales team B prioritized it high in their sales efforts. One of the interviewees from sales team A, even suggested that a separate employee could be dedicated to direct knowledge acquisition due to its time-consuming nature. An employee in sales team B saw the value of directly influencing knowledge acquisition as preparation for sales cases: they deemed it a useful task that they perform every time a new sales case is offered to them. Sales team B employees thus saw directly influencing knowledge acquisition as being part of the work instead of being extra work. The interview data showed that both teams value the activity, but the time available for such activities was seen as limited within sales team A.

Indirectly influencing knowledge acquisition differed in terms of culture and interactions within the team. Sales team B proactively shared experiences and, newly acquired knowledge and created a culture where knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing are encouraged. While in sales team A, interactions between sales team members were scarce and knowledge sharing was not actively encouraged. The members of sales team A wished for more internal knowledge sharing regarding the active sales cases so that they would be able to direct their knowledge acquisition efforts more accurately. Knowledge sharing within the team thus encourages individual knowledge acquisition.

4.1.3 Knowledge transfer

The most common mean of knowledge transfer based on the interview data was instant messaging within the organization. This was mentioned by all interviewees as a way of communicating and sharing knowledge. All the interviewees worked mainly from the home office so physical meetings and unofficial meetings at the coffee machine did not show in the interview results as a daily means of knowledge transfer and were mentioned only by one interviewee who could come to an office with other team members. Most of the interviewees still saw value in physical meetings with the team members but this was influenced at t

he time of interviews by travel restrictions because of the Covid-19.

Differences in the current state of knowledge transfer between the sales teams were identified. Whereas the members of sales team B emphasized the active knowledge transfer as one of the strengths of their team; one of the interviews described the knowledge transfer as “it's so normal and it's so natural. We don't realize we're doing it.“ Sales team A members felt that the knowledge transfer within the sales team needed improvement.

A common way of sharing information was the official meetings with team members and colleagues. Weekly meetings within the sales team were seen by sales team B as a valuable way of sharing experiences and best practices. The team members emphasized the unofficial nature of the weekly team meeting compared to the official meetings with strict agendas and that this encouraged to discussions regarding active sales cases. Interestingly weekly team meetings divided the opinions in sales team A, with some team members seeing the weekly meetings as not that useful because they did not feel that there were so many similarities between the regions that sharing experiences from local markets would be beneficial. Whereas one of the interviewees emphasized the lack of sharing best practices within sales team: "For example, I have no idea about my colleagues, about the customers of my colleagues in different regions, what they are doing with our data." The interviewee felt that the current structure of the team

meeting did not leave enough time to go to the details of customer cases, which could be useful for the team members.

It can be interpreted from the interview data that similarities in the ways of working and customer cases increase knowledge sharing within the team. Especially the differences in customers and regional differences were seen as negative aspects of knowledge transfer within the team if there were not seen enough similarities the knowledge sharing was not seen as valuable and the motivation to share knowledge is low.

The value of knowledge transfer came from sharing best practices and sales cases within the team: "We all sit in on weekly meetings, talking about each other's accounts. And that allows us to learn about what's going on, but also to, to throw our opinion and say, have you tried this, or this worked for me before."

Based on the interview data there was a difference between the sales teams in how they transfer knowledge and cooperate with the marketing team. Closer relationship between sales team B and the marketing team, than sales team A and the marketing team could be identified from the interviews. This showed in the experiences of the interviewees in cooperating with the marketing team, whereas the expectation from sales team B were that "We should be in constant communication of what's coming up." Sales team A saw that the relationship with the marketing team is increasing through common projects and regular meetings, but the overall impression was that knowledge sharing should be improved.

Within the researched organization, the marketing team had acted in a supporting role that showed cooperation and knowledge transfer for both sales teams and marketing. Almost all interviewees emphasized the importance of asset and marketing material creation requests as the main way of communicating with the marketing. The sales team members provided input and comments on the created materials before the material was finalized, but no feedback or experiences were shared afterward with the marketing team. This was partly because of the lack of requests for knowledge sharing. When asked about sharing experiences back to the marketing team, the interviewees were open to the idea of sharing knowledge but highlighted that it had not been requested from them.

The rapid growth of the organization had caused challenges and uncertainties to the sharing of knowledge, as one interviewee stated: “If you wait for best practice to be shared, then it's probably a bit too late by the time you get it.” This shows that the timeliness of knowledge sharing plays a key role and the rapidly changing environment encourages immediate knowledge transfer as the environment constantly evolves. Another interviewee stated that as the company keeps on growing, the processes are also in constant flux so the individuals making the decisions may change rapidly, and the new individual in charge might not have the same knowledge, which creates demand for active knowledge sharing.

4.1.4 Motivation

In her framework, Omerzel (2010) ties motivation to an individual’s motivation to acquire knowledge. Motivation as a theme was the most difficult to interpret from the material as the interviewees scarcely mentioned it. Additionally, different interviewees had different approaches to their motivation to acquire knowledge. However, two themes could be recognized in the interview material: firstly, motivation to acquire knowledge on the prospects and customers to understand them better, and secondly motivation to acquire more general industry knowledge from external sources.

Motivation to acquire new knowledge showed in personal interest in the topic and activities to request further information or ask questions. The motivation to acquire more information regarding prospects and customers stemmed from the need to serve the customers better and create rapport. Gaining knowledge of the individual sitting in front of them during the negotiations was seen as valuable for the success of the negotiations: “cause I want to make sure that I understand who they are and try to think like how they think, has there been a decision in the past that may have burned them?” This type of motivation to acquire knowledge appeared in most of the interviews. The interviewees showed a clear urge to acquire knowledge to succeed better in their job. As meetings and negotiations with customers and prospects are an integral part of a salesperson’s work, this motivation is salient.

Based on interviews, sales representatives showed motivation to acquire knowledge that is tied to the industry or field as well as technological knowledge. Interviewees were motivated to participate in internal training, follow industry media, as well as interact with colleagues and individuals external to the company. One of the interviewees felt that the company aims to create a culture encouraging knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing, which has a positive influence on motivation. The interviewee also stated that: "if you want to know more go and find people and ask them" – thus they felt that the open culture within the organization encouraged knowledge acquisition. The meaningfulness of the work was seen by the same interviewee to motivate knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing: "I'm half a step away from being a superhero every day. It's just, it's awesome. And I want to share that, and people want to listen to it and people want to share what they've done to be part of it." This shows that positive feedback from individuals that knowledge is shared encourages knowledge sharing.

Internal knowledge sharing has a positive influence on a individual's motivation to acquire knowledge, exemplified in the employee's motivation to study industry materials and improve oneself so that they could share their acquired knowledge with peers. The lack of knowledge sharing between colleagues also seemed to influence motivation negatively as one of the interviewees wished for more information from his peers, which would help in directing knowledge acquisition. Sharing tacit knowledge aids external knowledge acquisition, by way of targeting an individual's efforts appropriately.

4.1.5 Knowledge storage

Storing of knowledge showed in the interviews through documentation to different knowledge-sharing platforms. Knowledge sharing was included in the sales representatives' daily work as writing down the new customer information into a CRM or Marketing Automation system. Another common system used for this purpose was file-sharing platforms. These systems allowed the created materials to be shared in a premade format instead of documenting them in a

separate storage format. An interesting example that combined these two, mentioned by an interviewee, was the documentation on how to use the company's CRM system.

Storing knowledge was seen as a necessity or a compulsory task as the interviewees felt that the stored information would not be widely used. Interviewees said that documentation was done because it was compulsory, rather than because the knowledge would be used by other employees. Interviewees mentioned that salespersons stored their information, but the documentation practices were not discussed between workers, and the use of this knowledge was not comprehensive. Storing knowledge was seen as one-sided: interviewees stored information, but instructions on what to store were deemed unclear, and the stored information was not well utilized. That, in turn, negatively affected motivation to store information. Additionally, an interviewee had experienced the loss of information due to a recent change in the knowledge storage platform.

The short lifecycle of knowledge was seen as a blocker for knowledge storage. A salesperson mentioned that: "because it changes so often, at the minute there's no sort of formal best practice documentation." Documentation was seen as time-consuming, and interviewees expected the knowledge to become outdated by the time the documentation would be ready. This caused a lack of documentation within the company, and knowledge sharing was seen as better practice.

Another aspect that arose from the interviews dealt with requests for sales materials and documentation from other teams. Both sales teams saw the value in other teams creating materials and documentation for the sales teams to use. Thus, the sales teams requested active documentation and material creation from other teams but evaluated the documentation of their activities as cumbersome.

Sales team B mentioned process instructions and upkeep of these materials, but none of sales team A members mentioned any documentation in the interviews. In sales team B, the development of process instructions fell also onto the sales representatives themselves.

Overall negative connotation towards documentation as an activity could be recognized among the interviewees, while the value of documentation was recognized and even demanded from

other teams. This arose from scepticism towards the use of documented knowledge and from the rapid changes within the organization that caused the short lifecycle of knowledge.

Interestingly, the interviewee who had worked only a short while within the company was the only one that mentioned that they had written instructions for others on the company's intranet site. The intranet was mentioned only by a few of the interviewees as a source of knowledge, while CRM and marketing automation systems were mentioned by all. This ties in with the need for information instead of wanting to document the information.

4.2 Rapid growth

The revenue of the case company had grown rapidly during the four years prior to the interviews. During the time of the interviews being conducted, interviewees felt that the company was experiencing a lot of internal changes. However, as all interviewees had joined the company during the growth phase, growth felt like the norm of the organization. One interviewee stated: "I've been a part of that rapid growth, so I don't have a pre rapid growth basis. Thus, for me, everything that's happened has been in that rapid growth stage and it's all to me been well executed and well done."

Overall, interviewees mentioned mostly positive aspects of change. For example, during the growth more tools and help for information sharing had been introduced, these included learning platforms and documentation. The rapid growth of the organization was seen to enable the influence on the processes of the organization as they were in constant flux. This feeling of being able to contribute to the change was seen by the interviewees as positive and empowering. The feeling of contributing to change was common among the interviewees and was not dependent on the length of their career within the organization, as even the interviewee that had been in the organization only for a few months, felt that they can contribute and make changes.

Despite the potential opportunities that the rapid change in the organization created, interviewees were aware of the growth pains within the organization. Rapid recruitment had caused challenges

in communication within the organization. Whilst growth had brought more knowledge into the company in the form of new employees, and this had enabled new knowledge to be transferred and created within the organization, the interviewees felt that information flow had slowed down and the loops in the chain had increased. A few of the interviewees were worried that the information did not find the appropriate stakeholders, because of the increased number of employees.

Rapid growth had also caused more individuals to be involved in decision-making processes. Based on the interviewees' experiences, this had slowed decision-making, which has caused customer service to become difficult for the sales personnel. This is the challenge of "internal turmoil" (Hambrick & Crozier, 1985). The slowing of information flow had put the sales personnel in an especially difficult position, as response delays internally and toward the customer could harm the reputation of the company. An interviewee from sales team A also felt that the case company's growth had increased the levels of hierarchy and the growth of the chain of command during their career in the company. When the company had been smaller, the interviewee had direct access to higher management and the founders of the company.

The interviewees stated that the constantly changing processes within the organization also caused challenges. These changes had caused uncertainty, especially among sales team A, and increased the stress of the interviewees. The case company's rapid growth had caused uncomfortable situations for the employees, as they have ended up doing tasks, which they were not trained for. This could have been compensated with decent information transfer, but sometimes the company did not yet have the necessary knowledge. Hambrick & Crozier (1985) call this the challenge of "instant size": inadequate systems and inadequate skills causing major challenges in growth companies.

During its growth, the organization had also shifted the focus of its offering. Interviewees felt that this required the sales and support functions to change their ways. The shift in focus was happening because of expansion to new markets, causing challenges and requiring learning from the organization: "it's a complete[ly] different language," described one interviewee.

The potential of "sense infallibility" (Hambrick & Crozier, 1985) could be recognized in one of the interviews. The interviewee was scared that the company would end up sticking to traditional ways and would develop to be like the traditional companies in the industry, instead of revolutionizing or developing it.

The only challenge identified by Hambrick & Crozier (1985) which was not found in the interview data was the need for extraordinary resources. This challenge was most likely not apparent to the interviewees because they did not necessarily have visibility of the overall performance of the company.

4.3 Covid-19

During the time of the interviews (between May and June 2021), Covid-19 restrictions were dominant all over the world and the crisis had continued for over a year. The researcher felt that this topic cannot be ignored while researching the topic of knowledge management, which is dependent on human interactions.

Based on the interviews, there were mixed experiences of the change in customer behaviour during the Covid-19. One of the interviewees working with prospects that were earlier in the sales funnels felt that their work had become easier because the customers no longer expect face-to-face meetings but instead were willing to make decisions based on email conversations and video meetings. The further we proceeded in the sales pipeline, the more important the face-to-face meetings with customers seemed to be. One of the sales representatives felt that customers' decision-making had slowed down and the expectation for face-to-face meetings still existed, but it simply had decreased. This decrease had in turn increased the efficiency of sales work based on the interviews, as it was no longer needed to spend time travelling, and more customer contacts could be handled during the day.

All interviewees highlighted that cooperation within the sales team had not changed drastically as all the sales teams were geographically spread and most of them did not live close to an office

of the company. The interviewees felt that the Covid-19 crisis had sped up communication: cases could be escalated quickly to the team and response delays had decreased. One of the interviewees described: “Everything is very instantaneous now because we are connected. If I was in the office, maybe I'd wait for someone to be back in the office, or we'd set up a meeting with them or wait until they were done with the meeting.”

However, most of the interviewees stated the way meetings were organized had changed: when employees could travel, they travelled for longer times and the meetings could be more intensive. Some of the interviewees felt that the lack of interactions between team members did influence employees’ energy levels as individuals could draw energy from cooperation with others. One interviewee stated that interpreting humans had become more challenging as interactions occured through instant messaging and video meetings.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The sales team of a hypergrowth company manages knowledge through different dimensions of knowledge management. In a company that operates in a highly technical industry, sales utilize the knowledge to educate customers. Tacit and explicit knowledge help salespersons of the organization to improve their customer service and increase the confidence of the employees. As the sales representatives meet regularly with the customers and participate in external conferences actively, they use these events to acquire new knowledge of the organization.

The researcher identified two themes from knowledge acquisition activities based on the application of the knowledge: the knowledge that influences sales cases directly and indirectly. The team culture influences both types of knowledge acquisition and there were differences between knowledge acquisition between sales teams. Knowledge transfer had a positive influence on knowledge acquisition, as the interviewees felt that this encourages knowledge acquisition and helps in finding topics for research.

In a digital team, members used digital tools to transfer knowledge, and the interviews mentioned instant messaging and video as the main ways of transferring knowledge. The importance and lack thereof of face-to-face meetings were highlighted as pain points, and the interviewees valued meetings as opportunities to share experiences within the sales team, but there were differences in how meetings were held.

Knowledge storage was considered cumbersome and instructions on knowledge documentation were unclear. Interviewees showed an overall scepticism towards the usefulness of knowledge storage as an activity, and they doubted the usefulness of the knowledge they were requested to store. Simultaneously, the salespersons stated that they utilize stored knowledge produced by other teams in daily work, and they highlighted the usefulness of explicit knowledge.

As the research concentrated on knowledge management system users, the evaluation of knowledge management implementation was omitted from the research scope. The data showed

that this should be evaluated by the case company as a separate project, to gain better understanding of the benefits of systems for the users and the organization.

The research findings reflected Omerzel's (2010) dimensions of knowledge management almost in full. No major variations between interviewees' perceptions of the knowledge management dimensions were identified. The only dimension that was challenging to identify from the interview data was motivation, but it still appeared among the interviewees' perceptions of knowledge management activities.

The data showed that hypergrowth in an organization creates both opportunities and challenges. Rapid growth allows the employees to participate in changing the organization despite their seniority. The increasing headcount also brings new knowledge to the organization. Yet rapid growth can also slow down communication and create more hierarchy. Knowledge acquisition through recruitment has improved but the deceleration of knowledge transfer can cause future challenges. The interviewees felt that the rapid growth caused the processes of the organization to change, which has increased ambiguity, especially in knowledge storage. The interviews showed the two sales teams moving in different directions regarding knowledge storage and transfer, which may potentially cause challenges in the future.

The research suggests that organizations experiencing rapid growth should expect arising challenges regarding knowledge management. As the headcount increases, it is important to ensure most of the knowledge acquired through recruitment can be utilized, whilst encouraging individuals to continue acquiring knowledge for the organization. Hypergrowth companies can expect challenges in knowledge transfer, especially in a digital environment and it is important to create opportunities for the teams to discuss unofficially also through digital channels. Knowledge transfer should be encouraged within and between teams, and the company should aim to stay informed of the acquired knowledge. A rapid growth organization needs to assist employees in knowledge storage with clear instructions and processes and help utilize the knowledge management systems to their full potential. Organizations should guide knowledge management practices based on the company's strategy.

As for recommendations for future research, it would be beneficial to expand the interviews to other teams in the organization to gain information of the knowledge management practices. The research could be expanded to cover other organizations experiencing similar growth. To uncover the knowledge management dimension of evaluation of knowledge management implementation (Omerzel, 2010), a full mapping of knowledge management systems and user experiences could be gathered from the case company's employees.

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