Review of the Doctoral Dissertation (Ph.D.)

Ph.D. Candidate: Thi Hai Hang Nguyen, BSc. MBA.

Thesis Title: Knowledge Management in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Developing Countries (Case study: Vietnam)

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Ing. Vladimír Bureš, Ph.D.

General introduction

This Ph.D. thesis pertains to the field of Knowledge Management and focuses on particular issues relative to Knowledge Management in Vietnam. It contains 126 pages, an additional 53 pages with 10 appendices, 31 figures and 18 tables. The thesis consists of nine chapters. The subject of the thesis is topical.

Structure

The doctoral candidate develops and applies a strong methodological framework in the thesis and realises the sequence of the essential steps required to acquire the necessary research results thus rendering the thesis very systematic. This framework influences the structure of the thesis, which is appropriate and meaningful. Nevertheless, due to the partial resemblance between chapters 4 and 5, sections of text are redundant. The repetitive text is one of the problems described in this review.

Conducted Research and Achieved Results

There is an apparent inconsistency in several parts of the research:

- Two sets of the research questions as stated on pages 20 and 53 are not identical;
- There are six (6) KM-related activities identified on page 54 and in table 4.2 on page 55, there are six (6) KM-related activities on page 62, however, the activity "staff turnover" is missing and the activity "knowledge sharing" is added. Finally, from page 77, subsection 7.2.1 the author analyses and works with seven (7) activities (all previously mentioned);
- There should be five (5) hypotheses in the research, but only four (4) are described in section 4.4. (Hypothesis H4 is missing). Furthermore, the author claims that she works with six hypotheses, with the number 5 in brackets (p.79). It is probably for this reason that she mentions 42 conducted tests (p.93) instead of correct number 35 as on p. 95;
- The candidate states that the interviewees had to meet three criteria in the first stage of the research (p. 58). However, there are five criteria mentioned in Appendix 02 (p.135);
- Some summaries for specific segments of text do not correspond to the text itself. For instance, the author summarises that "*we can see that application level of advanced management tool was most sensitive as it related with all characteristics of firms*" (p.96). In fact, the results reveal that it has not a relation to the company's age (table 7.1.a, p.81); or "*knowledge sharing does not relate to any characteristics of firms*" (p.97). According to results, it does relate to age.

There are inappropriate implications of the achieved results. The author states that *"...in order to expand the size of firms, IT application and training is crucial"* (p.96) and *"training seems to actively contribute to the stable development of firms"* (p.97). The problem is that this is a belief of the author that is not substantiated through conclusions derived from the statistical results. The author does not investigate how the levels of IT application and training in companies evolve while companies grow in size. She can only state that *"if a company is big, it will have, to some extent, developed IT application or training effectiveness"*. Following this method, the author could improperly conclude that companies should apply management tools to appear in different business sectors or to manage knowledge sharing in order to become older. This would be feasible given the relationships between these factors and the companies' characteristics. Similarly, the author concludes that *"knowledge sharing is not affected by...the support of IT systems"* (p. 96). It is not clear how the author arrives at this conclusion; since she did not test the relationships between the particular KM-related activities. The candidate tests only the relation between the selected characteristics to the KM-related activities.

One research question is "how to implement KM", however, the final chapter consists only of relatively general statements. These are rather critical factors or issues which Vietnamese companies should take into consideration while contemplating KM, rather than answers to the questions "how".

Work with Information Resources

This part of the evaluation requires a separate section for this review. Although the list of the information resources used consists of very relevant and high-quality items that are due appropriate consultation, the author's use of referencing citations does not respect any standard method. The candidate deploys both the square brackets with numbers that appear in the list of used information resources as well as round brackets with name and year. In addition, the entire thesis lacks consistency wherein round brackets, square brackets, and both types of brackets appear.

Furthermore, the author omits the names of the co-authors when their work is cited (e.g., p. 28 – *"Nonaka and Konno (2000) have suggested..."* while in the list of literature Nonaka, Toyama and Konno are cited; *"Davenport (1998) mentioned..."* whereas the list of literature comprises Davenport and Prusak; or *"Moffett (2006)...found"* and in reality it is Moffett and McAdam. Additionally, the reviewer did not find information resources related to GSO – pages 39, 40 or 46 – in the final list of used information resources.

Some statements should have been supported using a citation such as, the survey conducted in 2009 by the VCCI-ACI mentioned on page 46, or the statement on people's opinions on KM appearing on page 51.

Format

There are not any significant problems with the thesis format. There are only different formats of the particular paragraphs in the Content section (page 8 uses a different line spacing), or subsections 5.3 and 5.4 on page 65.

There are typographical errors mainly connected with missing blank spaces between a word and subsequent bracket, and mistyped characters (e.g. page 24, 29, 30, 35, 51, figure on page 32, items [97] and [106] on page 125, link to the figure 4.2 instead of 4.3 on page 57,

the author describes hypothesis 3 in the paragraph which is devoted to hypothesis 2, there is not the service sector indicated in Figure 7.1, etc.).

Language

There are several language difficulties caused by both the extent of the Ph.D. thesis and the fact that the author is not a native-speaker. However, these problems occur sporadically (e.g. pages 22, 53, or 55-56, 109, etc.).

Further Remarks

The author makes use of abbreviations that are not previously established ('spelt-out') in the text (e.g., in the English version of the abstract – KM and SME, on page 29 – KS, ITS on page 98). On the other hand, some abbreviations are established several times (e.g. OJT, p. 70 and 95)

As mentioned previously, some text segments are repetitive. It is not necessary to re-emphasise that there is lack of research on KM in developing countries; the stages of the conducted research; the purpose of the orientation study, or that the author perceives the settings of her Ph.D. studies as limited by which creating constraints to the research. Avoidance of this type of statement significantly increases the readability of the document.

Although the author realises that the research could have been more representative wherein SMEs from other parts of Vietnam are included (p. 116), this issue requires emphasis as it negatively influences the research results. Despite the fact that 70 % of SMEs are located in one particular city (p. 100), one third are located elsewhere in the country. The latter represents a significant part of the whole.

Conclusions

The thesis has several strong points. For instance, the author supports the necessity of a systems approach to KM. She also stresses the context-based nature of KM, and differentiates between knowledge sharing and information sharing, which are considered synonymic. Furthermore, the semi-structured orientation survey was well-prepared (e.g., the necessity to avoid any remark on KM during the introduction). Also, the author did not underestimate the need for pilot testing of the questionnaires.

There are also weak points which unfortunately, at times surpass the stronger attributes of the dissertation. The number of drawbacks mentioned in this review indicates that the last proofreading of the thesis was insufficient. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the author is cognisant of the value of research and how it is conducted. This statement is supported by the list of published scholarly articles that however could have been more extensive.

In summary, the Ph.D. candidate **Thi Hai Hang Nguyen, BSc. MBA.,** clearly demonstrates her capability to independent, substantive scientific work and brings original results, which enrich both theory and practice. Therefore, **I recommend** her **thesis to the final defence, and** consequently, if successful, **propose the award of the academic title, Ph.D.**

Discussion Question

1. You state at the beginning of your thesis, that "businesses from developing countries have no better option than taking a shortcut and leaping directly to the application of the most advanced tools to keep pace with the competition". Did you consider another alternative such as focusing the attention to the indigenous knowledge as a starting point for KM practice in developing countries (as shown, for instance, in the case of Pakistan)?

2. What are your suggestions for further research in the subject of your dissertation?

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Vladimír Bureš