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Relationship Marketing – A Tool for Supporting the Company's Innovation Process

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Abstract

The paper presents the correlation between a specific method for acquiring knowledge from external sources by companies i.e. partnership marketing and corporate innovation processes. The authors make the assumption that the use of customer relationships in the innovation process contributes to the implementation of this process. CRM systems are effective tools for acquiring information for innovation processes both at the stage of creating innovations and the stage of the diffusion of innovation. The effectiveness of individualised marketing is conditioned by such factors as close relationships with customers, continuous oversight, analyses, information technologies and databases.

Customers' participation in innovation creation is significant for another reason: customers who use products and services acquire knowledge that represents a great value for companies.

The results of empirical research confirm the above hypothesis. The results of research presented in the paper indicate that Małopolska's companies do not make use of CRM methods in an effective way. It results from the deficiencies of IT infrastructure, the absence of knowledge management systems, cooperation traditions, difficulties in identifying customer needs in large target groups.

Relationship marketing can be used as a tool for supporting corporate innovation processes with particular regard to tourism enterprises in order to more fully understand the tourists and visitors of a destination point of view.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the 2nd International Conference on Strategic Innovative Marketing.

Keywords: Innovation process; CRM systems; corporate innovation processes;

1. Introduction

Innovation, among a number of other corporate development factors, has become a fundamental determinant of companies' competitiveness. The significance of innovation has increased as a result of globalization processes, the changeability of the business environment as well as the development of a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, most researchers representing various fields of science perceive innovation as a significant

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criterion for assessing economic efficiency and a prerequisite for building a strong market position. However, it is necessary to adopt a new and broader approach to this area and consider such issues as the innovation potential, i.e. invention for innovation, as well as the implementation and diffusion of innovation. This approach is more difficult in the context of measuring innovation, but it facilitates a better understanding of the phenomenon.

By principle, innovation is any positive change, which occurs in an organization's various areas of activity and which alters the existing conditions; it occurs inside or outside of an organization in response to the identified or hidden needs. It is an evolutionary process of improving the current situation, and it is assessed in a positive way in the context of an organization's criteria. It should be noted that a company's ability to develop and implement innovation is conditioned by its knowledge resources including inventions, industrial designs, licences, copy rights, hidden knowledge (know-how), recipes, etc. It can be stated, therefore, that knowledge and learning are the "heart" of innovation.

Researchers believe that the service sector, especially tourism, is not capable of creating innovations without participation of external entities. The sources of innovation may include other companies and institutions or, less frequently, a company's own research, e.g. R&D programmes (Hjalager A. M. 2002). Therefore, innovation in tourism is based on external activities rather than internal research (conducted in industrial plants) (Tether B., Miles I., Blind K., Hipp C., Liso N., et.al. 2002).

Extensive research in this area indicates that innovation in tourism is mainly driven by the following factors (Hjalager A. M. 2002, Hall C.M., Williams A.M. 2008, Wyrwicz J. 2009, Kavoura, A. 2013):

- relational activities, especially cooperation between service providers and consumers,
- development of information (IT) systems;
- quality of the human capital, especially knowledge based on employees' experience,
- organizational factors - benchmarking, bundling, CRM and knowledge management.

Relational activity is of key significance to the development of innovation. Schumpeter (1960, p.104) stressed that innovation is not only based on creativity but also on individual and institutionalised activities. Relational activities include relations between entities, entities and technologies, companies, research agencies and state organizations (Hall C.M., Williams A.M. 2008, p. 24) which are the components of the innovation system.

Research in the field of innovation, especially implementation processes, requires a multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional approach and the description of cause-effect relations between the activities of various organizations and the development of innovation.

It is necessary to identify the determinants of an organization's innovation potential: employees' and executive' personal development, IT systems, creation of innovation-oriented organizational culture, knowledge management systems and CRM. Also, it is of key significance to describe the impact of the particular factors on the diffusion of innovations.

The areas discussed in this paper are not so broad and they focus on presenting the relations between the company's method for acquiring knowledge from external sources (partnership marketing) and the innovation implementation process. The modern approach to clients' participation in the company's innovation process differs considerably from the traditional approach. The concept of relationship marketing and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is based on building long-term relationships with the business environment (especially clients) aimed to increase profitability and reduce costs. It is assumed that customer relationships have a positive impact on the innovation process. CRM is an effective tool for acquiring information for the innovation process both at the stage of inventing innovation (increasing the innovation potential) and at the stage of the diffusion of innovations (innovation activities). The effectiveness of individualised marketing is conditioned by close relationships with customers, continuous and close monitoring of the process as well as IT systems and databases.

The modern approach to innovation, according to the concept of open innovation (Chesbrough, H. 2003), is based on the ideas and solutions proposed by customers. Also, companies can engage in activities aimed to identify customer needs. It should be noted that the proper identification of the needs of demanding and not fully

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