
Editorial

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Giovanni Schiuma is a Professor of Innovation Management at the University of Basilicata (Italy). He is widely recognised as one of the world's leading experts in the arts in business and strategic knowledge management. He is an inspiring speaker and facilitator, with extensive research management expertise and excellent ability to coordinate complex projects and lead research teams. He is creative and innovative, with international mind-set and openness to address and solve key strategic research and organisational challenges. He is a leading international expert on knowledge management and intellectual capital strategy and widely renowned for his work on the use of the arts for business, as well as his work on assessing and managing knowledge assets. He Chairs the International Forum on Knowledge Assets Dynamics.

1 Introduction

The globalisation of markets, the internationalisation of companies, the emergence of new competitors, the changing nature of the market more and more customer oriented, the competitive shift from cost differentials to attractiveness factors, massification and

customisation needs, the rapid evolution of information and communication technology, the fast pace of innovation, the reinforcing trend towards services, the emergence of forms of organisation based on processes and projects, the increase of business networks, the strategic importance of business and social networks, are forcing organisations, and in particular business ones, to rethink and revise the strategic approaches and management models (Schiuma, 2011).

They understood the need to adopt management models able to increasingly leverage on the development and use of intangible factors to create uniqueness for their products and services and consequently competitiveness and value for all the stakeholders orbiting inside and outside the company.

Accordingly, intellectual capital (IC) as bundle of knowledge assets (Schiuma et al., 2008) is widely recognised as a crucial source for the organisational competitiveness. Different scholars highlight how knowledge assets contribute to improve innovative capacity of an organisation (Schiuma et al., 2008; Subramaniam and Youndt, 2005; Teece, 2000, 2007), support the competitive differentiation in many sectors (Teece, 1998), stimulate the process of organisational learning (Kang et al., 2007; Kang and Snell, 2009), enhance individual and organisational performance and particularly innovative behaviour (Carmeli and Tishler, 2004; Damanpour, 1991; Youndt and Snell, 2004).

Despite the many benefits touted by scholars, consultants, and managers, the accumulated evidence indicates that the effectiveness of the IC management on organisational performance and the return on investment on IC-related dimensions are difficult to achieve and assess.

Established firms confront severe obstacles when engaging in the development and exploitation of knowledge assets. In fact, the actual relationships between businesses and IC management appears still emergent in nature, i.e. they do not respond to a planned strategy, but rather they are often the result of singular and sporadic links. This means that often these relationships are not part of a specific innovation management strategy. Moreover, it is possible to say that even most companies involved in IC management do not identify, assess and measure properly the results and the impacts achieved through the IC management projects and initiatives. This is a further indicator of the lack of recognition among companies of the role that the IC can play to foster the development, transformation and value creation of an organisation.

On the other side, small and medium enterprises are strongly involved to assure efficiency in daily operations, and face serious obstacles in rallying human talents and knowledge resources for developing innovations, and assembling the complementary assets necessary for exploiting them. Accordingly, the research on this topic is still open and requires further investigation.

This special issue of *International Journal of Learning and Intellectual Capital* is dedicated to identify and analyse specific IC value drivers and to share some relevant theories and practices about the ongoing debate on the relationships between IC value drivers, innovation dynamics, performance improvement and organisational competitiveness. Specifically, the focus will be about the role of the IC-related moderating and enhancing factors in supporting innovation dynamics, resulting in organisational competitiveness.

In this introduction to the special issue, we first provide a brief rationale how IC dimensions may support innovation paths, performance improvement and competitive

advantage and then we present an overview of the main contents of each of the included papers of the special issue.

This special issue is an outcome of the *IFKAD 2014* Conference held in Matera, Italy. At this conference, leading experts shared ideas and practices and promoted a scientific debate on the role of the knowledge assets as value drivers for business performance and economic growth.

2 Identifying and managing the links between intellectual capital and organisational competitiveness

In the last decades, the complexity and the turbulence of the economic and socio-cultural scenario has highlighted that the competitiveness of the firms, systems of firms and, in general, of any organisational system is based not only on the traditional tangible assets and financial capital, but great relevance is played by the intangible resources, in the form of knowledge assets, able to create sustained competitive advantages (Delios and Beamish, 2001; Itami and Roehl, 1987; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Teece, 2000).

New theories of strategic management such as the resource-based view (Barney, 1991; Drucker, 1959; Penrose, 1959; Peteraf, 1993; Rumelt, 1984; Wernerfelt, 1984), the competence-based view (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990) and the knowledge-based view (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), during the time, have introduced in the economic and managerial literature new theoretical planning, frameworks, techniques and tools finalised to examine, in direct or indirect way, the increasing importance of the knowledge resources for organisational performance improvements. It emerges that competitive advantage is achieved more and more through the bundling and revitalising of multiple, distinctive firm-specific resources and competencies in order to create valued outputs (Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984; Rumelt, 1984).

Teece (1998), in particular, highlights that “the competitive advantage of companies in today’s economy stems not from market position, but from difficult to replicate knowledge assets and the manner in which they are deployed”. The essence of a firm resides than in its ability to create, transfer, assemble, integrate and exploit knowledge assets (Teece, 1998, 2000).

Coherently with the wide acknowledgement of knowledge as a strategic resource for organisations competitiveness, the concept of IC has been introduced and developed as new interpretative category of such resources. It can be considered a conceptualisation of the cognitive and intangible resources that answers in a better way to the managerial needs to have interpretative and operative tools for their identification and evaluation (Marr et al., 2004a, 2004b).

Schiuma et al. (2008) define IC as “the group of knowledge assets that are attributed to an organization and most significantly drive organizational innovation and value creation mechanisms for targeted key stakeholders”, where the knowledge asset can be considered “any organization resource made of or incorporating knowledge which provides an ability to carry out a process or an activity aimed to create and/or deliver innovation and value”. Along the time, different studies have addressed the issue of the relevance of IC and how it can contribute to improve business performance and create value for organisations (Brooking, 1997; Carmeli and Tishler, 2004; Edvinsson and Malone, 1997; Marr and Schiuma, 2001; Schiuma et al., 2008; Sveiby, 1997).

However, the process of how IC management affects organisational performance remains unclear. Little guidance is provided, in fact, on how knowledge assets are identified, nurtured, enriched, revitalised, bundled, converted and integrated into strategic and distinctive core-competences and how these context-specific resources which are socially complex, causally ambiguous and path dependent are in turn used to generate superior performance and impact on business performance.

Indeed, the complexity of skills and processes needed in the development of today's products and services requires that managers attend to the processes of managing knowledge combination as the very basis of innovation (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998).

Although the basic relationship between knowledge-based factors, innovation dynamics and companies' performance is on the whole persuasive, different and relevant issues remains to be understood and require further investigation. In particular, the variety of ways of performing through knowledge and intangible resources exploitation raises the question of how this kind of resources can be coherently and successfully declined into companies' innovation processes and operations, what are the 'right', or appropriate approaches to manage knowledge and how these approaches can disentangle the mechanisms by which those resources contribute to improve companies' innovation dynamics and global organisational performance.

3 Overview on the contributions of the special issue

The contributions to this special issue deal with different aspects, which are important for a better understanding of the relationships between IC management, innovation dynamics and companies' competitiveness as well as of the approaches, tools, methods and techniques to better disentangle the mechanisms by which knowledge assets, separately or interdependently, contribute to improve companies' organisational performance.

The contribution written by *Ettore Bolisani, Enrico Scarso and Malgorzata Zięba* addresses the issue of approaching knowledge management (KM) in small companies. It actually supports the idea that small organisations can be very competitive, although with an emergent KM approach and planning.

The contribution written by *Franco Ernesto Rubino, Maurizio Rija, Giovanni Bronzetti, Graziella Sicoli and Paolo Tenuta* focuses on no-profit organisations (NPOs). They propose a set of economic, environmental, cognitive and social indicators able to monitor and check the capacity of impacting of a NPO into a community. They highlight the importance of the definition and setting of a value system made of indicators as fundamental pillar of the sustainability of a NPO.

Ivan Obradović, Ranka Stanković, Olivera Kitanović and Dalibor Vorkapić propose, in the third paper, an approach to support the learning continuum for enterprises' experts; leveraging on technology enhanced learning, they provide an approach to blending academic and entrepreneurial knowledge.

The contribution written by *Ramona Diana Leon* aims to develop a benchmarking tool capable of capturing company's competitive position and future evolution based on its IC efficiency. According to it, it is argued that a firm is competitive only when it manages its knowledge assets more efficiently than its competitors, so an image on what's happening in the environment is of strategic importance.

In the fifth paper, *Oliver Mauroner* analyses the influence of social media in knowledge management and creative collaboration. Specifically, it is underlined that, if

on one hand social media has the potential to increase and strengthen IC in organisations, on the other hand social media use at workplace may reduce productivity, reliability, and work performance. He also analyses how knowledge workers from research institutions use social media tools and how this attitude may enrich the practices of knowledge transfer, knowledge management and creativity.

The contribution written by *Isabella Bonacci* and *Oscar Tamburis* deals with the relational capital as key driver for innovation. In particular they consider the bio-pharmaceutical industry, highlighting the importance of this driver for companies' competitiveness, in all those sectors based on the open innovation paradigm.

The contribution written by *Mariia Molodchik*, *Aleksandra Krutova* and *Anatolij Molodchik* focuses on leadership, learning, organisational culture and innovative behaviour among employees in large and medium-sized manufacturing organisations. The three factors are considered as antecedents for innovative behaviour, and then underpin the capacity of organisation of renew and innovate.

Finally, the contribution written by *Valentina Lazzarotti*, *Raffaella Manzini*, *Anna Nosella* and *Luisa Pellegrini* deals with organisations' relational capital and in particular with the collaborations they create with different actors. The authors investigate how internal organisational settings, of practices and managerial mechanisms influence the innovation performance and therefore the organisational competitiveness.

4 Conclusions and research implications

It is widely recognised that the relevance of managing IC is strongly related to its impact on innovation dynamics and organisational competitiveness. Nowadays, to get gains, private and public organisations have to be able to transform their knowledge domains into profitable products and services as well as they have to dynamically renew their capabilities. For these purposes, they have to continuously and actively identify, acquire, organise, share, apply and assess their knowledge resources. In this perspective a critical issue for organisations is how to extract and generate the greatest value from these resources. The full potential of knowledge resources is realised when they are efficiently and effectively identified through easy-to use models and frameworks as well as managed through proper knowledge processes.

However, the impact of IC management on organisational business performance is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate using money as a unique measurement unit. Knowledge assets do have an impact on business performance and particularly on organisational financial figures, but this is fundamentally the indirect result of the effect of IC – as a bundle of knowledge assets – on the development of different organisational components.

Although the relevance of the knowledge resources and of the knowledge processes have been extensively analysed and discussed in the strategic, organisational and managerial literature, currently the debate on the role of the knowledge resources as well as of the knowledge management processes for the organisational competitiveness is still lively.

This special issue has intended to provide new insights about how through managing knowledge-based factors it is possible to enhance innovation dynamics and organisational performance. This discussion was largely focused on the importance of translating IC management within organisational components for achieving business excellence,

highlighting properly approaches and tools or application in different contexts of analysis.

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