

Foreword

In this book, Dorothée Zerwas highlights the need for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to build-up certain skills – their “absorptive capacity” – in order to be able to integrate strategically relevant knowledge that can only be found outside the organization. From the perspective of transfer, knowledge as a strategic resource also requires special treatment.

The organizational culture is a significant factor for successful transfer-related knowledge management and the consequent need to build up absorptive capacity in SMEs. The author has clearly indicated that there is, at this point, a great need for research in this area.

Many studies have focused on absorptive capacity. Zerwas has successfully managed to work out the manifold aspect- and theory-driven facets of the construct of absorptive capacity, in the context of SMEs. It is also clear that organizational culture has not yet played a significant role in the context of absorptive capacity.

A separate and important line of discussion has established the theme of organizational culture in the organization and management literature. In particular, Zerwas provides an excellent overview of the articles in the literature that have dealt with the importance of organizational culture for knowledge transfer and knowledge management. However, it is clear that a systematic, differentiated and comprehensive consideration of the effect ratio of organizational culture has not been made for absorptive capacity.

In connection with this, Zerwas has identified a multiple-founded research gap. First, SMEs are generally under-researched, but especially in the context of absorptive capacity, although the publication density on this issue is generally very high. Second, the particularly limited resources available to SMEs means that their absorptive capacity is generally weaker than it is for large enterprises, which is to be considered as a special feature. Finally, there is

a thematic gap in the research literature in that the role of organizational culture for the absorptive capacity of SMEs has largely been neglected and has not been sufficiently differentiated.

As a result of the above-mentioned issue, the central research question in this book is as follows: How is organizational culture related to the acquisition capability, assimilation capability, transformation capability and exploitation capability of a SME and how should a knowledge-oriented organizational culture be designed to support the absorption of external knowledge? In order to answer this research question, the author describes in detail the two main concepts that are set in relation to each other: absorptive capacity and organizational culture. First, the foundations are laid for absorptive capacity, which can be mainly attributed to *Cohen & Levinthal* (1990) and *Zahra & George* (2002). In particular, the antecedent and components of absorptive capacity and the four special capabilities of the absorptive capacity (acquisition, assimilation, transformation and exploitation) are discussed in detail according to *Zahra & George* (2002). Second, the discussion of organizational culture stands in the foreground. The starting point is *Schein's* (1984) concept of organizational culture. However, the publication density on the subject makes it clear that a far more differentiated consideration must be made as the representation of the basic model. To meet this requirement, *Zerwas* describes the six dimensions of a knowledge-friendly culture that *Sollberger* (2006) identified: trust, collaboration, openness, autonomy, learning receptivity, and care.

The focus then shifts towards the theoretical framework. *Zerwas'* most remarkable scientific achievement in this area is the initial identification of several organizational and management theories in the literature that contribute to the understanding of the essence of the concept of absorptive capacity. Following the theoretical foundation, the parameters of the model are worked out.

According to the central question of this research, each dimension of the organizational culture is then argued with regard to its impact on each of the capabilities of absorptive capacity.

The next chapter provides a comprehensive empirical analysis, followed by factor, correlation and regression analyses. The well-founded exclusion of structural equation models and the preferential treatment of the above-mentioned analyses emphasize the foreseeable high quality of the data collected. In the context of regression analysis, the central hypotheses of this research are reviewed, discussed, and finally turned into design recommendations for theory and management practice.

Dorothee Zerwas accepted the post of an assistant to my chair and lecturer in my research group two and a half years prior to publishing this book. The fact that she managed to do this in less than three years shows the intensity and perseverance with which she has pursued her doctoral studies while maintaining a high level of quality. It is particularly noteworthy that she was sustainably incorporated into the department administration, self-administration of the faculty, and teaching in my research group. Add to that the co-organization of the workshop “Entrepreneurship with a Migration Background” (approximately 100 participants) in the spring of 2012, and the primary organization of the largest entrepreneurship conference in Germany, the 17th Annual Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Conference (G-Forum 2013) in Koblenz, which had in excess of 300 participants. Dorothee Zerwas was also involved in the application of several projects of the European Union, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The impressive number and the high level of her publications should also be highlighted.

I am convinced that this book offers considerable value and new insights to students, researchers, and practitioners.

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The Meaning for SMEs

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