

Foreword

The shipbuilding industry is a field which has been subject to little research by management experts even though today it is still economically significant. The shipbuilding market is characterized by intense competition and most of all by competition from Asian shipbuilding companies, all coming from the region in which the sector focus has shifted. The German shipbuilding industry is ranked 4th in the world with approximately 5 billion Euros turnover and 22,000 employees. The shipyards of the industrialized countries, while trying to differentiate themselves from their Asian competitors which have significant cost advantages, often pursue the following strategy: they focus on a niche market, try to differentiate themselves based on high quality, technology and technical services for every aspect concerning the building of ships. Exactly with this economic field, Christopher Sauerhoff's thesis deals with.

The present study has two objectives: analyzing (1) the accumulation of service competence at shipyards and (2) the effects of this service competence on the competitiveness and commissions of the shipyards and the customer benefits in this industrial field. The service engineering and accumulation of service competence in the field of shipbuilding and their effects on success have been devoted little research so far. The current study therewith contributes to closing this research gap. The above-mentioned objectives of the dissertation are highly relevant not only for the scientific research but also for the corporate practice. In the scope of the latter, shipyards are faced with serious competition from abroad (e.g. China, South Korea, Turkey, Poland), which have significant cost advantages.

Christopher Sauerhoff develops two explanatory models for the generation of service competence (influence of market expertise, practical experience, cooperation and information exchange within the shipyard and with external partners) and the effects of service competence (on the competitiveness and commissions of the shipyard and the generation of customer benefits), which he later validates both qualitatively and quantitatively. Mr. Sauerhoff's study is methodologically rigorous and very complex: management theory (resource-based view / market-based view) is combined with qualitative research (expert interviews) as well as quantitative research. The author altogether creates a very complex research design. The explanations are well-founded, based on broad literature analysis and logically structured. The approach of gathering and sampling the information is very precisely described.

Christopher Sauerhoff achieves very interesting and innovative results: companies from industrialized nations perceive services differently and assign them a different kind of importance compared to shipyards from emerging markets. For the former, offering (value-added) services is a vital necessity and not so much an opportunity to make profits. Also interesting is the formation and identification of a 3rd group within the shipbuilding industry (Turkey, Poland), which are following the European shipyards because they cannot match cost structures of the low-cost competitors from Asia. The study also uncovers interesting questions for future research: the role of service providers and complex technical services in preserving the locations of shipbuilding offers much research potential. One task for future research could focus on applying Christopher Sauerhoff's results, which currently focus on the shipbuilding industry and its service offers, to other industrial branches (e.g. mechanical and plant engineering). In many different economic fields there arise questions regarding the engineering of service competence and their effects on a company's success.

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