Knowledge Sharing (KS), Organizational Learning and Competitive Advantage in a Scandinavian Hotel Company.

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Abstract

How knowledge sharing may be connected with organizational learning and competitive advantage is of fundamental significance to organizations. If an organization can share its knowledge and enhance its learning, it should become more effective and competitive. This paper tackles these issues in the context of case study research in one of largest hotel companies in Scandanavia, a sector in which there has not been a significant amount of KS research.

This paper begins with a critical discussion of current literature about KS and organizational learning, and how they may be connected with competitive advantage of organizations. This literature review establishes a context for understanding the other contributions of the paper.

The methodology was an in-depth case study in one of the largest hotel companies in Scandanavia. Questionnaire data was obtained from 60 employees in the areas of learning orientation, market orientation, trust in KS and sharing using information systems. On the basis of this internal survey 5 in-depth interviews were carried out to explore the KS issues in further detail.

The findings from the research suggest that learning is important to organizations and that the three elements: knowledge sharing, organisational learning and competitiveness are all related and are mutually reinforcing. For example sharing, especially through conversation, leads to learning and when people learn they tend to share more. This research also suggests that sharing knowledge or experience face-to-face is most valued and the most clearly supported valued *means* of sharing. The picture about sharing through electronic means is more confused and needs more research. Learning and sharing knowledge are linked to the organization's competitiveness but other factors (e.g. awareness of competitor activities) are also significant to how competitive the organisation is.

1. Introduction

Many argue that knowledge is a lasting resource of competitive advantage for organizations (e.g. Grant, 1996; Sharif *et al.*, 2005; Nonaka cited in Cooper, 2006) and research in the field of knowledge management (KM) is important because it helps organizations to think through how they can compete effectively in a knowledge-based economy (Stewart, 2002).

The knowledge-based economy is characterised by a number of driving forces which include: globalization of trade, increase in consumer choices, fierce business competition, increased foreign direct investment and relentless turbulence (Pizam, 2007). Within this environment it is important to work out how to improve the performance of an organization. One aspect of KM which helps make an organization competitive is its ability to capture and process its collective expertise and intelligence

to develop and encourage learning and innovation, which can be strategically very significant (Winter, 1987).

How this can be done in organizations has been researched in many industries over the last 20 years but an exception to this is the hospitality industry in which there seems to have been relatively little KM research (Bouncken, 2002; Cooper, 2006; Ruhanen and Cooper, 2004 as cited in Hallin and Marnburg, 2008). According to Pizam (2007) the hospitality industry possesses characteristics of a knowledge-based industry but many hospitality companies suffer from a systematic lack of transfer of knowledge and a failure to apply KM thinking to their organizations.

This paper presents KM research in the field of hospitality. Case study research was conducted at a Scandinavian hotel company called Scandic to gain an understanding of KM and how it affects such a company's competitive advantage. This was done with a view to helping Scandic improve its performance and to gather insights and make recommendations that could be helpful for the wider KM community.

2. Literature Review
This literature review provides a context from literature for the research both in practical and theoretical terms and underpins the methodology.

2.1 Definition of Knowledge and Types of Knowledge
There are many different definitions of knowledge and research has been conducted to categorise and use them for KM in organizations (Sharp, 2003; Sharp, 2008). The outcome of this research was that there are a number of characteristics that employees commonly refer to when they think of knowledge that are significant:

- it is human-based and particularly refers to the use of skills learnt through experience;
- is bound up with its organisational context and valuable when tailored to it;
- improves the effectiveness, value and/or competitive edge of organisations;
- is particularly valued when it is *applied* in its organisational context and;
- is also valued when it is possible to share it (Sharp, 2008).

One definition that encompasses these characteristics is as follows:
> "A fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms" (Davenport and Prusak, 1998, p.5)

As this definition encompasses the characteristics employees value about knowledge both at an individual and corporate level, this definition is used for this paper.

Empson (2001) says that knowledge-intensive firms are ones that are primarily concerned with the application of specialist knowledge to the creation of customized solutions to clients' needs. The hospitality industry can therefore be categorized as knowledge-intensive (Khale, 2002; Bowen and Makens, 1999 as cited in Hallin and Marnburg, 2008).

Knowledge intensive organizations use different types of knowledge. Much discussed in literature is the difference between explicit and tacit knowledge which has been described metaphorically as an iceberg (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 - The 'Iceberg' Metaphor describing Explicit and Tacit Knowledge (adapted from Cognitive Design Solutions 2010)
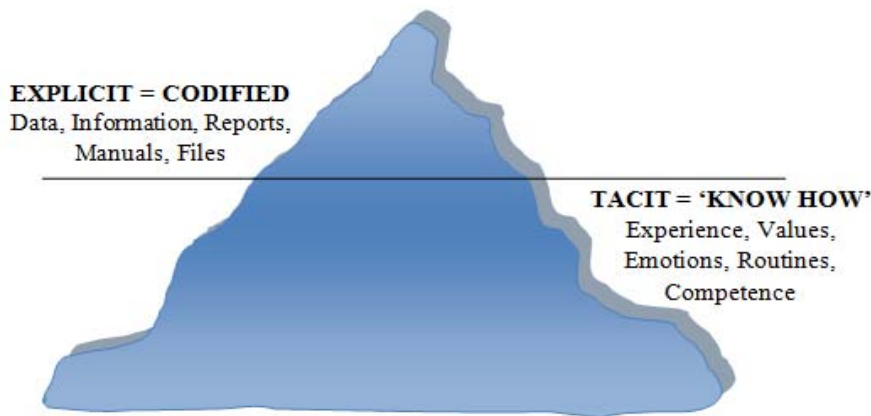
One significant issue this metaphor highlights is that tacit knowledge, although it is hard to describe or articulate and capture (Polanyi, 2009), is nevertheless arguably the most valuable. Nonaka (1991) takes the view that tacit knowledge or 'know how' is residing in the individual's mind and is deeply rooted in the values, emotions, routines and ideals of the individual making it difficult to formalize. Meanwhile, explicit knowledge can be easily codified, shared and stored in the form of data, reports, books or manuals in a formal and systematic language (Nonaka *et al.*, 2006).

There are others who choose to use the terms 'hard' and 'soft' knowledge (Hildreth and Kimble, 2002) and include social aspects in soft knowledge. Eisenhardt and Santos (2002) argue that knowledge is socially constructed and meaning is created through ongoing social interaction and that operational value occurs when the outcome is grounded in working practices. Therefore, although there is tacit knowledge that individuals possess and the individual's role should not be underestimated, it is appreciated when it is shared and used within an organizational context for organization's purposes (Ichijo and Nonaka, 2007; Egan, 2003; Senge, 1990; and Enz and Siguaw, 2003 as cited in Hallin and Marnburg, 2008).

2.2 Knowledge Sharing –Value and Codification
Another strand that is significant is the degree to which individual knowledge is shared within an organization (Senge, 1990; Shieh-Cheih *et al.*, 2005) and applied to processes within the organization (Fahey and Prusak, 1998). Some researchers emphasise the need to have knowledge available in an appropriate form wherever and whenever it is needed in the organization (Alavi and Leidner, 1999; Becerra-Fernandez and Sabherwal, 2003). Others argue that when it is shared new ideas and knowledge is created (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995 and Nonaka *et al.*, 2006).

One aspect of the sharing process is codification and sharing of information and knowledge using information technology (IT). The hospitality industry relies heavily on IT as a means of connecting people and for distributing reusable codified information (Sheldon 1997, as cited in Hallin and Marnburg, 2008). Three common IT applications in KM are; coding and sharing of best practices, creation of corporate knowledge

directories (mapping internal expertise) and the creation of knowledge networks (online interactive forums). Other technology used for knowledge sharing include groupware, intranet, e-mail, discussion forums, and e-bulletin boards (Alavi and Leidner, 2001; Bender and Fish, 2000). Moreover, e-learning can also work as a training tool for improving knowledge sharing behaviour (Wild *et al.*, 2002; Center for Workforce Development, 1998). However, these authors emphasise connecting people with what is codified rather than human face-to-face interaction. This may be cause problems in the industry as this approach ignores the complex dynamics of face-to-face interaction that can bring so much value to organizations and bring competitive advantages (e.g. Nonaka 1991; Cooper 2006; Hendrik, 2001; Polanyi 2009).

2.3 Individual and Organizational Learning
One key aspect of seeking a competitive advantage is how organizations learn to work more effectively in their field.

There are a number of aspects to learning that are important for organizations to consider. One of these is the difference between formal learning (involving a higher degree of organizational control) and informal learning (Efimova & Swaak, 2002). Informal learning is to a larger extent self-directed and incidental and it represents up to 70% of job related learning (Center for Workforce Development, 1998). Another area is the degree to which organizations show their commitment to learning by seeking a full understanding of the different stakeholders and emerging technologies in their business (Calantone *et al.*, 2002).

Organizations need to consider individual and corporate learning. Logically, an individual's learning is bound to have an impact on the organization but it is arguably very hard to differentiate what is learnt as an individual as distinct from the organization at a collective level (Gheradi *et al.*, 1998). However, the organization needs to consider how it invests in the learning of its employees so that it is envisaged as an investment and not an expense (Sveiby, 1990).

Organizational learning is the way firms build, supplement, and organize knowledge and routines around their activities and cultures, adapting and developing organizational efficiency by improving the use of the broad skills of their workforces (Dodgson, 1993). Broadly Argyris and Schön (1996) subscribe to this view but describe the organizational learning process in terms of single- and double-loop learning. Single-learning takes strategies, goals and values for granted and they remain fixed in a reflective learning cycle, whereas double-loop learning entails reflection on and possibly the modification of, baseline assumptions that underpin the strategies, goals, and values (Argyris and Schön, 1978, 1996). Arguably it is important to determine whether one or both of these take place in an organization to gauge how effectively it is learning in its environment. Kharabsheh (2007) proposes that there is a positive relation between learning orientation, market orientation, absorptive capacity and knowledge sharing an organization that makes it competitive.

2.4 Need for KM Research in Hospitality Industry
Hallin and Marnburg (2008) conducted a review on empirical research of KM in the hospitality industry and they identified that, overall, the research on knowledge processes in the sector is scarce and weak.

The literature on the topics of knowledge sharing, organizational learning and competitive advantage clearly suggest that this area is a ripe subject for research in the

hospitality industry in which knowledge intensive organizations exist. So this research examines how knowledge sharing, organizational learning and competitive advantage in this sector may be linked. The rest of this paper explains an in-depth case study that steps in to this research area.

3. Case Study Context
This research focuses on Scandic, a Nordic hotel chain, and its operations in Norway.

Scandic is one of the Nordic region's leading hotel chains with more than 151 hotels in ten countries. The chain has a total of 6600 team members. Over the next few years the aim is to open more hotels in Europe reaching over 200 hotels within 2013 (Scandic, 2010). Scandic's vision is *"Creating value by being the place and inspiration for conscious people in a better world"* (Scandic, 2010, p.2). With the rapid expansion plans and the fierce competition in the hotel industry in Norway (NHO, 2009) the need for a sustainable competitive advantage is vital for the continued success of Scandic.

In 2007 Scandic was bought by a Swedish private equity firm, EQT for €880 million from Hilton Hotel Corporation (Scandic, 2010). With the change in ownership, Scandic went through a major organizational transformation from being perceived as *'Boring'* to an aim of being perceived as *'Unpretentious, Innovative, Conscious and Dedicated' or 'Smart'* (Ulleberg, 2009). This was the start of a new brand platform at Scandic.

Scandic further developed its online Knowledge Portal (KP) which is an attempt to locate most of the organization's information in one place. Within this portal is information about development and training, various programmes and courses, and team members' performance reviews (Scandic, 2010). The aim of the portal was to ensure that all team members have access to information necessary for them to grow in their working knowledge (Ulleberg, 2010).

As a part of the new focus, Scandic Business School (SBS) was further developed to encourage employees within Scandic to share knowledge and continue to learn and develop personally (Scandic, 2010). As part of this drive, every new team member in Scandic has to complete a compulsory welcome programme called 'Get On Board', which is an online e-learning system (Scandic, 2010). It provides the new team member with an understanding of what Scandic stands for. New employees are taught Scandic's goals regarding the environment, safety and security, service and sales.

Scandic's culture is characterized as open and informal with a flat structure (Ulleberg, 2010) and people are expected to help each other whenever needed. Scandic do not have a Knowledge Manager. However the Human Resources (HR) Department acts as a facilitator and supporter for all the hotels and within this department knowledge sharing was a focus for discussion in meetings. However, Scandic had not integrated KM into the corporate strategy when the research was conducted.

This research was particularly focused on how the company practised KM and how it could become more sophisticated in supporting knowledge sharing within the company. It also sought to investigate how different KM factors may be related to it's competitiveness in an unstable business environment. The case study research provided many insights but this paper focuses on how knowledge sharing, organizational learning and competitive advantage in this sector may be related to each other.

4. Methodology

The methodology involved a combination of approaches and included the collection of primary data that was both quantitative and qualitative. Based on the literature review work a research design structure was set up based on the four key areas that may have an impact on knowledge sharing and competitive advantage. Four hypotheses within the four key areas formed the basis for primary research investigation.

The four hypotheses were as follows:

a. Learning Orientation

"A higher level of learning orientation in Scandic will result in a higher level of knowledge sharing".

b. Market Orientation

"A higher level of market orientation in Scandic will lead to a higher level of knowledge sharing".

c. Trust and Strong Relational Ties

"A higher the level of trust and strong relational ties amongst team members in Scandic will lead to a higher level of knowledge sharing".

d. Effective Information Technology

"The existence of an effective information technology platform in Scandic will result in a higher level of knowledge sharing".

This framework provided a structure within which questions were framed in questionnaires and interviews that drilled down in to these areas that themselves may be related. Within this framework and the primary data that was obtained the three elements, knowledge sharing, organizational learning and competitive advantage are focused on this paper. Although the framework has its limitations, it does provide a suitable basis for obtaining and analysing primary data in an in-depth case that can be triangulated. It provides a firm basis for the drawing conclusions that address the research topic. Also, the mixture of approaches within the framework provides scope for exploratory findings.

In the case company, an in-depth internal survey to attitudes was conducted and in-depth interviews were conducted to explore relationships that may exist between the factors identified in the literature review.

The survey included 31 questions which were divided into sub-sections, each corresponding to the hypotheses in order to create a logical order of the questions. Table 1 provides an overview of the types of questions presented to the respondents.

Table 1 – Overview Survey Questions

Sections of Online Survey	The Respondents are asked;	Justification
A) **Background Information**	- about their age - about their employment time - which department they work - in which hotel they work - at what level they are employed - about their understanding of knowledge management and knowledge sharing	- To provide some general background information about the respondents. - It is important to understand what the respondents believe KM and KS to be and what it means within the context of Scandic. To see if a common ground of KM is present (Nonaka, 1991).
B) **Learning Orientation** *Commitment to learning, Shared vision, Open-mindedness, Intraorganizational, knowledge sharing.*	- about commitment to learning - about shared vision - about open-mindedness - about intra-organizational learning - about Scandic facilitating learning	To identify whether the learning culture in Scandic enables the company to share knowledge in a more sophisticated and effective way leading to a competitive advantage (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).
C) **Market Orientation** *Customers, Competitors,*	- about Scandic's competitors and customers - about how information is obtained and shared	To see if there is a focus on the market throughout the company as generating market intelligence and share this can lead to competitive advantage "(Kohli and Jaworski 1990).
D) **Trust & Positive Interaction**	- about trust in order to share knowledge - about incentives and rewards - about the importance of trust and interaction	Argote, McEvily, & Reagans (2003) argue that the level of trust affects the extent of knowledge disclosure, screening, and sharing between two parties and the author wants to identify whether it's the case in Scandic.
E) **Information Systems**	- about quality of the IT system - about the frequency of use of the various IT systems - about formal and informal knowledge sharing	The author seeks to find out whether the current IT system is supporting knowledge sharing.
F) **General**	about what can be done in order to improve knowledge management and knowledge sharing.	To see what the team members would prefer.

The questionnaire was sent out electronically to 120 Scandic employees who work in Norway using survey monkey software. A judgement or purposive sampling method was applied in order to select the respondents that will best help to answer the research question and the set objectives (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). The front of house employees were chosen as they are regarded as knowledge workers (Hallin and Marnburg, 2008), and therefore most suitable for this research.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with 5 employees selected based on their abilities to contribute with information surrounding the research topic. They were representative of the employees in Norway by virtue of different lengths of time of employment, their level of seniority and location. The interview questions also followed the main themes addressed in the questionnaire and reflected on the research question. The plan was to record the interviews and transcribe them before analysing the data. The interviews provided a means to explore in more depth issues surrounding these themes and analyse them in light of the primary data obtained from the internal survey.

5. Presentation and Analysis of Primary Data
Of the 120 team members in Scandic to whom the questionnaire was sent, 60 completed it and 11 partially did so. Of those that did respond, 34 were aged between 24 and 34 and none were over 54. The in-depth interviews were conducted with 5 senior staff including hotel and room managers.

A considerable amount of quantitative and qualitative primary data was collected from questionnaire survey and the interviews. This section will present summaries of the primary data followed by analysis of it. First this will be done for the survey starting

with the quantitative data and followed by the qualitative data. Then a summary and analysis of primary data from the interviews will be provided. The presentation and analysis is based on the hypotheses posited and the research topic, with a particular emphasis on the focus of the topic – whether there is a relationship between knowledge sharing, organisational learning and an organization's competitiveness.

**5.1 Summary Presentation and Analysis of Quantitative Data from Survey**
There were a number of questions in the survey that required 'yes/no' or likert'-scale responses, which provide some context for understanding other primary data and reveal some trends relevant to the research topic focus.

For each of the hypothesis areas the summary data is presented below.

a. Learning Orientation
A summary of likert responses relating to learning orientation are shown in Figure 2.
Figure 2 - Summary of Likert responses to Question 9
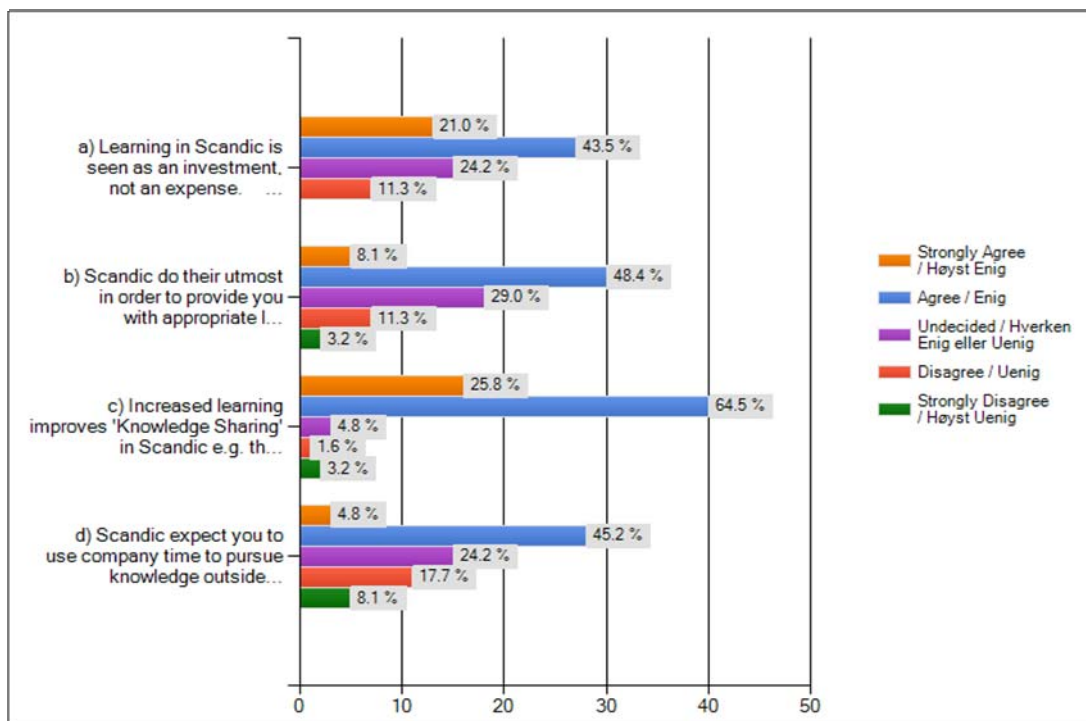
These results show that the majority of respondents saw learning as an investment rather than an expense and that Scandic did their utmost to provide appropriate learning to do their job. Also, over 85% believed that increased learning improved knowledge sharing in the organization (i.e. the more you know the more you share).

So the majority of employees see the cost of learning as an investment and when more is learnt more is shared.

b. Market Orientation
There were several questions that were posed that referred to the employees knowledge of the vision of the company, unity behind that vision and whether the employees believed that a 'shared vision and unified Scandic will lead to sustained competitive advantage.' Virtually every respondent knew the vision of the company in terms of the hotel chain: that it was seeking to create value by 'being the place and inspiration for conscious [conscientious] people in a better world.' Also, over 84% of the respondents

agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that a shared vision and unified Scandic will lead to sustained competitive advantage.

So, the majority of the employees believe that a shared vision and unified organization is more competitive.

c. Trust and Strong Relational Ties

A summary of likert responses relating to trust and relational ties linked to informal knowledge sharing are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Summary of Likert responses to Question 23
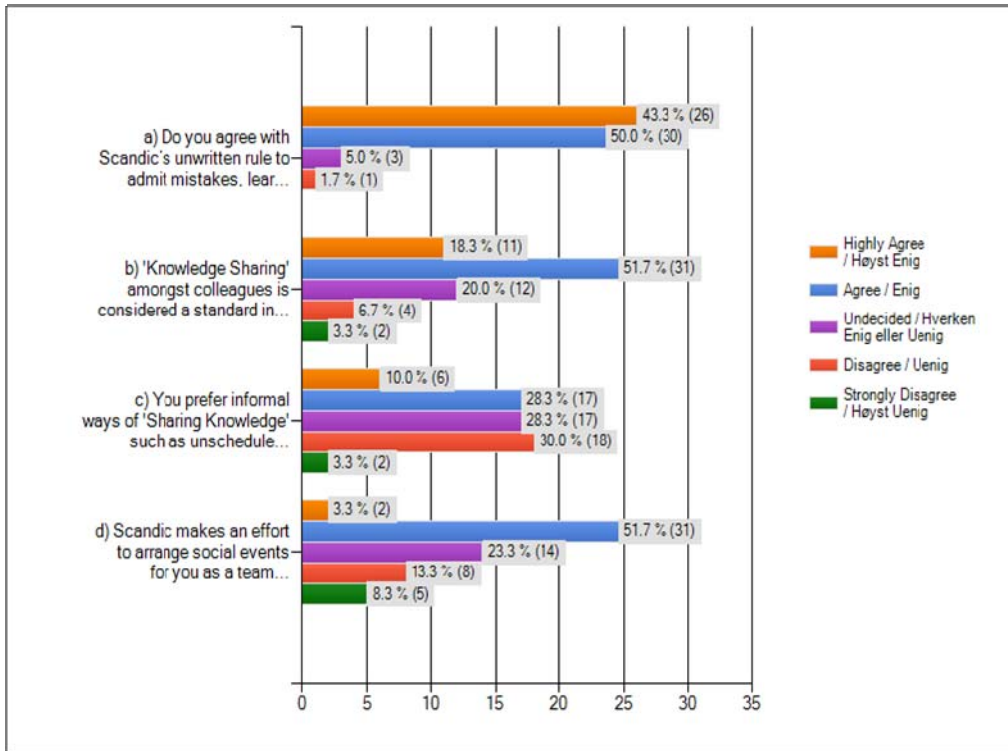
These results show that the virtually all the respondents (over 93%) agreed in the 'unwritten rule' of admitting mistakes and learning from them. A large majority (approximately 70%) agreed that knowledge sharing is considered normal in the company. However, more than 55% disagreed with the view that prefers informal ways of sharing knowledge.

A summary of likert responses relating to trust and incentives and environmental factors that may effect knowledge sharing are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 - Summary of Likert responses to Question 24
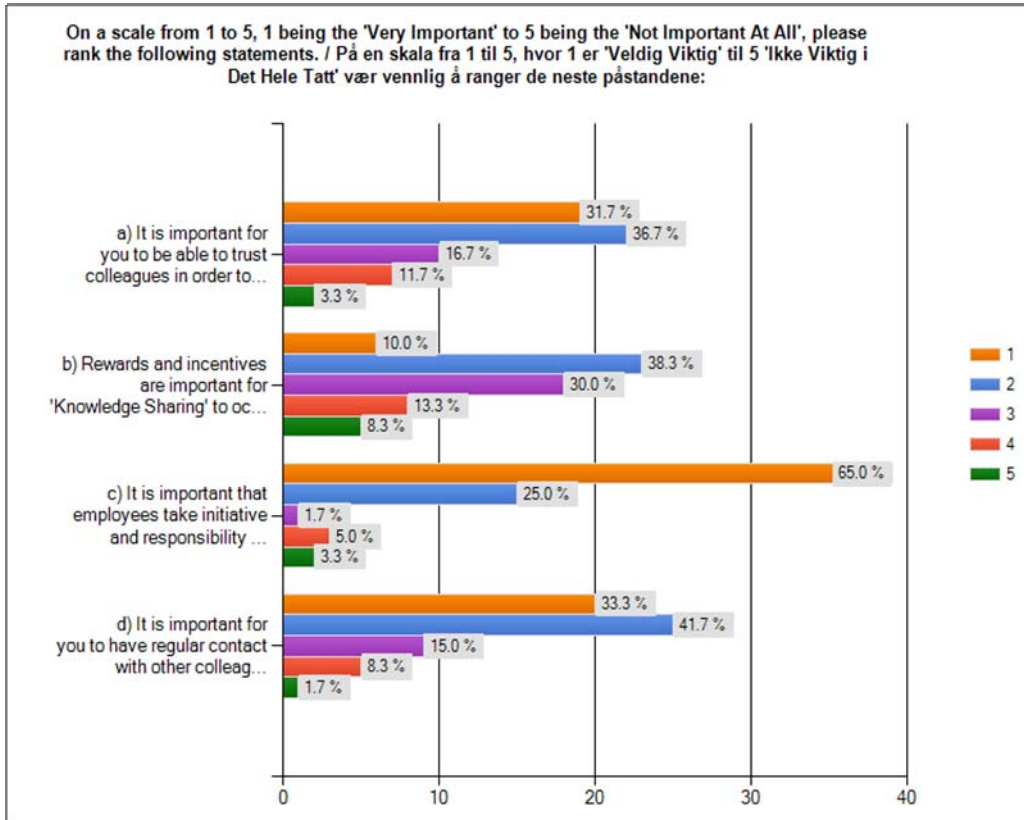
These results show that a solid majority of respondents (over 65%) agreed that it is important to be able to trust colleagues to share knowledge. However, most respondents (over 50%) did not agree or were undecided about whether rewards and incentives are important for knowledge sharing. Most respondents (90%) did believe it is important for employees to be proactive (take initiative and responsibility for their actions) and the majority agreed that it is important to have regular contact with colleagues in the same position in other departments or hotels.

So, in short, the majority of employees accept that they should admit mistakes and learn from them, suggesting a high level of trust in the organisation. The majority also believed knowledge sharing is normal and that this is linked to high levels of trust between colleagues.

d. Effective Information Technology (IT)

Scandic had a number of knowledge sharing IT platforms in place. Quantitative data relating to awareness and effectiveness of these platforms was collected. In answer to the question 'Do Scandic have any formal methods/systems for knowledge sharing?' over 71% of the respondents answered 'yes'.

Of these respondents a breakdown of quantitative data about frequency of use of the different IT platforms for knowledge sharing is shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 - Summary of Frequency of Use of Different IT systems
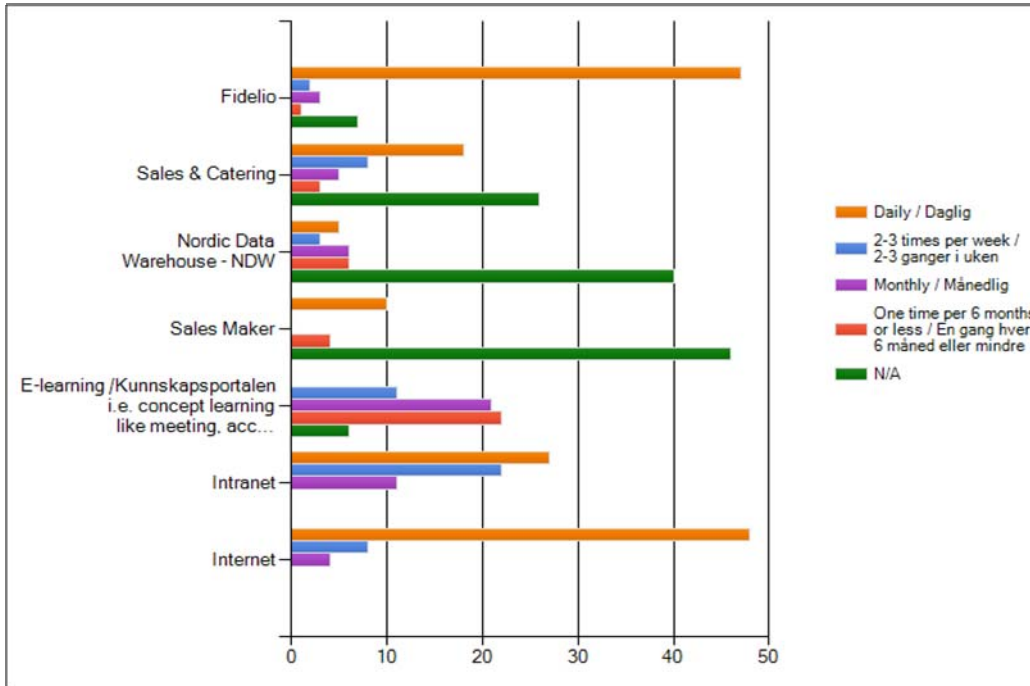
The data indicates that of the respondents who were aware of IT systems available to help share knowledge, the Knowledge Portal (e-learning), Fidelio (enterprise information system), internet and intranet were the most frequently used IT platforms.

The same respondents were asked to indicate how effective they believed the IT systems to be in terms of finding and sharing information on a scale ranging from 'extremely poor' to 'excellent'. The results from the respondents are summarised below in Figure 6.

Figure 6 - Summary of Views on Effectiveness of IT platforms for Sharing Knowledge
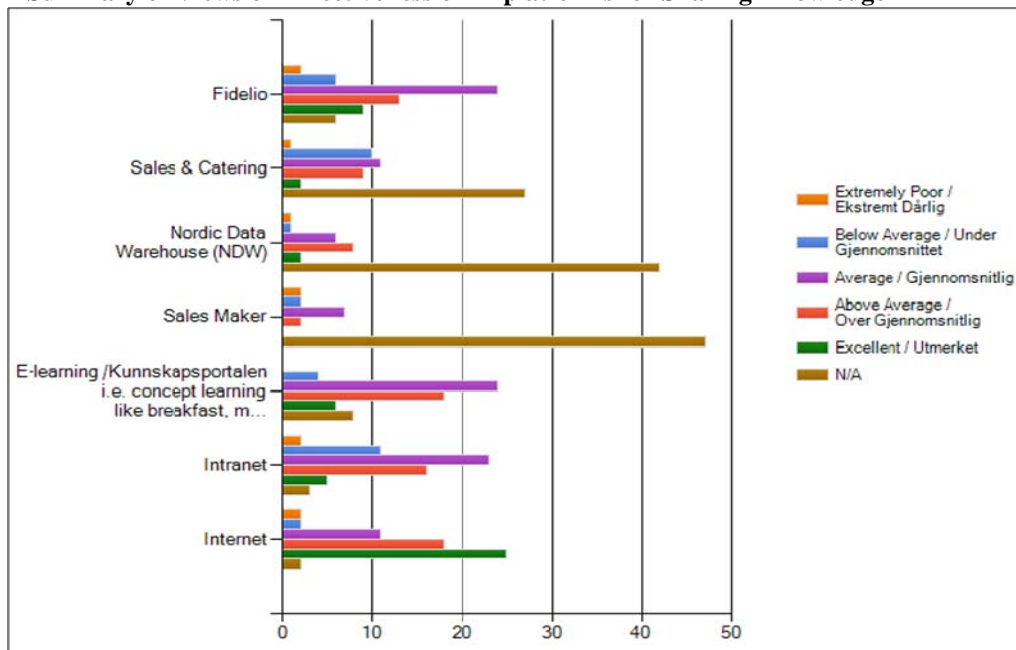
Broadly this data is a lukewarm endorsement of the specialised IT systems as an effective means of sharing knowledge with the internet being the only IT system that received a majority endorsement of 'above average' or 'excellent'.

Finally, quantitative data was obtained about the preferred ways of sharing knowledge about guests and competitors (see Figure 7). This shows that IT, e-mail, and face-to-face meetings obtain a high preference rating with the majority of respondents ranking them at the top end of the 'most preferred' scale numbering these options as either 1, 2 or 3.

Put together with data shown in Figure 6 this presents a confusing picture about specialised IT systems. This is because on the one hand employees suggest that specialised IT systems are a preferred means of sharing knowledge along with e-mail and face-to-face meetings, but the precise data about the particular specialist IT systems (shown in Figure 6) suggests otherwise. However, it is clear that face-to-face meetings in a number of different forms (morning or weekly and 'key' specialised department meetings) are endorsed as good means for sharing knowledge.

Figure 7 - Summary of Likert scale feedback of Preferred methods for sharing Work Knowledge about Guests and Competitors
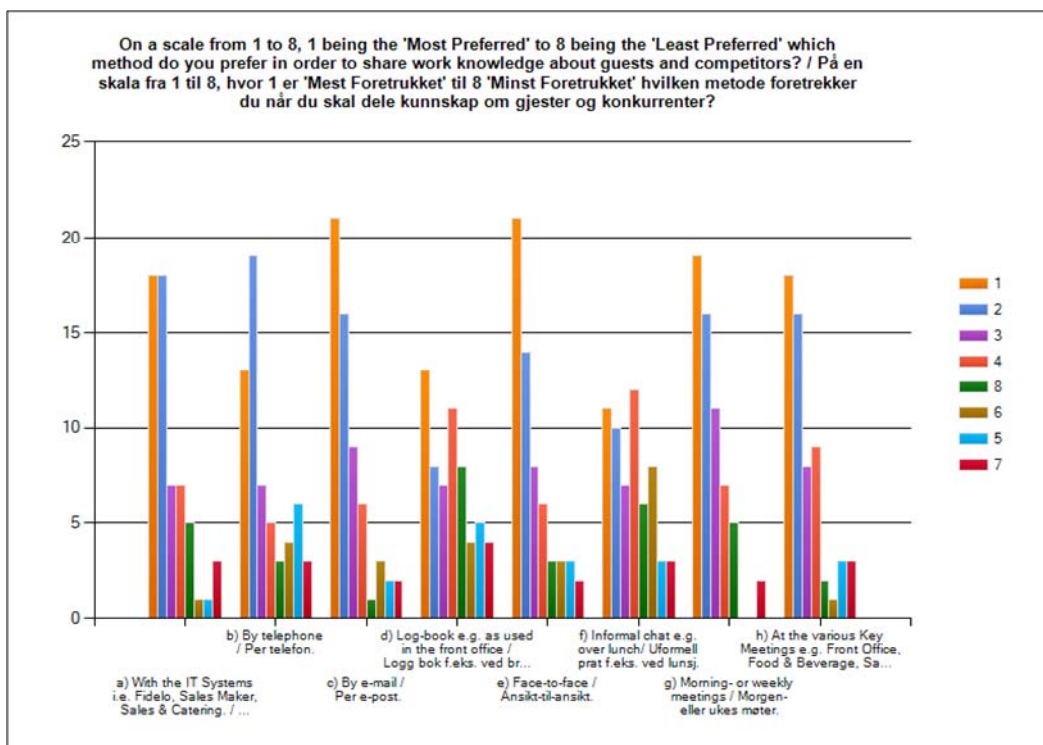
So there is a confused picture about specialist IT systems, but the majority of employees believe that knowledge is preferably shared using e-mail (technology employees may be more familiar with) and face-to-face meetings in the morning, weekly and departmental variety.

5.2 Summary Presentation and Analysis of Qualitative Data from Survey

There were a number of questions in the survey that required answers requiring opinions expressed in words. The research focus is how knowledge sharing may be connected with organizational learning and competitive advantage. Qualitative data is analysed here in terms of the patterns of connection of these three factors with each other and the level of support of this proposition from responses to two selected

questions from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1). These two questions are selected because the first (number 7) relates to how employees learn and how far it may be linked to knowledge sharing. The second (number 19) relates to competitive advantage and answers may indicate how employees see Scandic obtaining it.

Of the sixty-one responses to question 7, only 2 did not link learning (or acquiring knowledge) and sharing. Virtually everyone learnt through sharing and sought to do so but the means used to share varied considerably. The majority referred only to face-to-face forms of communication (49), others referred only to use electronic media (e.g. e-mail, internet, intranet or knowledge portal) (1) and others used both (11). This suggests that the employees at Scandic learnt mainly *through* sharing and learning is best learnt through sharing through conversations and meetings.

In response to question 19, over 81% (49 of the 60 respondents), said they did use information about Scandic's competitors in order to suggest improvements about the product and service of Scandic. Of the 49 who said how and why they did this, virtually all of them referred to providing a better service than their competitors and a suitable price to maintain or increase market share.

5.5 Summary Presentation and Analysis of Data from Interviews
The Interview Question guide and a summary of the primary data obtained from the interviews are given in Appendix 2.

This paper focuses particularly on how knowledge sharing may be connected with organizational learning and competitive advantage, so the qualitative data is analysed in terms of the patterns relating to these three factors and the level of support for the proposition of linkage from the responses. Therefore this summary and analysis focuses particularly on the answers provided for Questions 3 a) to 3 d), 4 e) and 7 a) to c) (see Appendix 2).

In summary, all the interviewees confirmed that they think learning is seen as important at Scandic for various reasons, and four out of five respondents referred to electronic media (intranet, knowledge portal and e-learning) as 'routines …Scandic has for learning' but three referred to the need to improve follow-up to Get Smart, and one bemoaned the lack of meetings and lack of conversation. There were mixed responses to whether learning and knowledge sharing were formal or informal and which is preferred. Generally a mixture was endorsed by the interviewees. In terms of learning impacting competitive advantage, the interviewees generally answered this with a 'yes' for different reasons. However, three referred to learning in terms of bringing team unity and / or giving staff a good start.

The responses to the question about how Scandic can sustain competitive advantage (4 e) provided a variety of suggestions including:
- building better brands;
- the need to serve clients better and know more about the competition;
- share information better and discuss commercial strategy more;
- make strategy line up with market orientation (2 respondents) and;
- increase the number of tools to provide the market better.

To improve knowledge sharing (7 a) a variety of suggestions were made including: emphasise it more, better sharing systems, more formal training/meetings and sharing

experience (3 respondents) , an increase in level of access to intranet, make new good manuals, and have a 'proper Scandic standard'.

Finally, questions about knowledge sharing and sustaining competitive advantage (7 b) and other comments (7 c) led to various comments. Broadly, 2 interviewees referred to the need for managers to see their staff and spend time with them, 2 referred to sharing better in practise what they know, and 2 referred to the need to improve by being more outward looking. One referred to improving IT systems explicitly.

5.6 Triangulation Analysis of Data from Survey and Interviews from Case Study

The conclusions from each component of this primary data can be put together through a lens of the research focus (i.e. whether there is a relationship between knowledge sharing, organisational learning and an organisation's competitiveness) the trends from the employees viewpoint in Scandic suggest the following:

Survey Quantitative
- Learning is valued
- Increased learning improves knowledge sharing
- Shared vision and a unified organisation makes it more competitive
- When trust levels are high more knowledge is shared
- Face-to-face meetings (morning or weekly, and departmental) help share knowledge along with e-mails
- It is unclear whether or not specialist IT systems are a preferred means for sharing knowledge

Survey Qualitative
- Most people learn through sharing in face-to-face conversation
- Awareness of competitors' activities is used to improve services

Interview Data
- Learning is important and electronic media (intranet, knowledge portal and e-learning) is used to share this, and perhaps more of it should be done in meetings
- A mixture of means of sharing knowledge and learning are supported
- Learning impacts competitive advantage and brings unity
- Improvement in competitive advantage requires an outward market focused view
- Knowledge sharing is improved *inter alia* with more formal meetings sharing experience especially with managers

Learning is important. When a lot is learnt more is shared and primarily through face-to-face interaction. Ironically most learning seems to happen through face-to-face meetings. Learning and knowledge does improve competitive advantage but to do so the organisation needs to be in touch with what competitors are doing to be competitive. The picture about the role and of what electronic media is preferable for sharing knowledge is not clear.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The three elements: knowledge sharing, organisational learning and competitiveness are all related and seem to be mutually reinforcing. For example sharing, especially through conversation, leads to learning and when people learn they tend to share more. From this research the value of face-to-face sharing of knowledge / experience is the most clearly supported means of sharing. The picture about electronic means of sharing is more confused and needs more research. Learning and sharing knowledge are linked to the organization's competitiveness but this research suggests that other factors (e.g. awareness of competitor activities) are also significant to how competitive the organisation is.

Appendix 1
Questions for Qualitative Data in Questionnaire for Internal Survey
7. How do you learn from Scandic and how do you share this knowledge with others in the company?

19. Do you use information about Scandic's competitors in order to suggest improvements about the product and service at Scandic? [Yes/No response followed by further explanation for those who answered 'Yes'].

Appendix 2
Interview Questions and Summary of Primary Data from Interviews

Appendix 6: Interview Guide

Part	Questions
Prior to the Interview	• Presentation of the researcher, the research itself and practical information. • Time allocated for the interview. • Explain that the aim of the interview is to discover elements which influence knowledge sharing in Scandic and its competitive advantage. • Underline the importance of the interviewee's contribution to the research (create confidence). • Explain the recorder and the reason for recording the interview. • Explain that the interviewee's answers will be kept anonymous.
PART 1) **Introduction**	• How long have you been employed in Scandic? • In which department do you work? • In which hotel do you work? • At what level are you employed?
PART 2) **Introduction to Knowledge Management**	2a) In which situations is knowledge shared and used? *(What do you consider to be knowledge management?)* *(What do you consider to be knowledge sharing?)*

PART 3)
 Learning Orientation
 Commitment to learning,
 Shared vision,
 Open-mindedness,
 Intra-organizational
 knowledge sharing.
	3 a) Is learning seen as important in Scandic?
	   - *If yes – why?*
	   - *If no – why?*
	
	 3 b) What routines does Scandic have for learning?
	   - *If none – what are the effects of little learning?*
	   - *If yes – what are the effects of this learning?*
	
	 3c) Do you prefer formal or informal ways of leaning and knowledge sharing and why?
	
	 3 d) Would you say learning has an impact on Scandic's competitive advantage?
	   - *If yes – why?*
	   - *If no – why?*
	
	 3e) Is intra-organizational knowledge sharing common in Scandic?
	   - *Intra-departmental*
	   - *Is it easy to share knowledge?*
	   - *Is it easy to obtain knowledge?*
	
	 3 f) What are the barriers for knowledge sharing in Scandic?
	
	 3g) How do you share your knowledge and why?

PART 4) **Market Orientation** *Customers,* *Competitors,*	4a) Are there any methods or systems for collecting guest/customer information? - How is this information shared? 4b) How is information about customers/guests used in order to gain

Part	Questions
	competitive advantage?
	4c) Are there any methods or systems for collecting competitor information?
	- How is this information shared?
	4d) How is information about competitors used in order to gain competitive advantage?
	4e) How can Scandic sustain its competitive advantage with a market orientation (customers/competitors)?
	4f) Would you say the your/Scandic's market knowledge helps to increase your competitive advantage?
	- *How?*
PART 5) **Trust & Positive Interaction**	5a) How would you describe the working atmosphere in Scandic? (Trust)
	5b) Would you say there is a high level of tolerance in Scandic?
	- *If yes, why?*
	- *If no, why?*
	5c) How does Scandic arrange for learning and knowledge sharing?
	- *How is the dialog between the management and the team members?*
	- *How are ideas and opinions received by the management?*
	- *How are these ideas followed up?*
	5d) Would you say that the management of Scandic supports knowledge sharing in Scandic?
	- *If yes, why?*
	- *If no, why?*
PART 6) **Information Systems**	6a) Does the current IT system support knowledge sharing?
	- *If yes – how?*
	- *If now – why?*
	6b) Which systems do you think are good for knowledge sharing?
	6c) What are the best ways for sharing knowledge?
	6d) Knowledge Portal – does this tool help to advance the learning and knowledge sharing in Scandic?
PART 7) **General**	7a) What can be done in order to improve knowledge sharing in Scandic?
	- *Have you said this to anyone?*
	7b) Can knowledge sharing help Scandic to sustain their competitive advantage?
	- *Why?*
	7c) Before we end, is there anything else you would like to add for the purpose of this interview?

Interview Summary Table

The following table provides a summary of the main statements of the various interviewees related to each section of the interview guide. Emphasis is given to similarities and differences in the answers of the interviewees to see patterns from the data of consistency or inconsistency.

Part	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E
1	- 11 years and worked in various hotels and dep.	- Close to 7 years worked in various Rooms Division Dep.	- Close to 3 years worked in one hotel as Hotel Manager.	- Close to 4 years worked in Sales.	-Close to 7 years in various hotels and dep.
2 (a)	- Sharing knowledge and putting knowledge into a system and constantly going back and see what we did ok and what do we need to improve. - KM has improved much since her start in 1999. More training and procedures. - Best practice. - Everyone wants to share their knowledge.	- Centrally Scandic she refers to KP and e-learning. - At the hotels they try to make use of the subjects in the KP and adapts it to the daily work to make it more practical. -Making individual standards for dep. - Cross-sharing. -	- At hotel level, daily or weekly through dep. Meetings. - At the chain level, key meetings. - General Manager meetings. - Share knowledge through action plans. - Cross training at dep. Heads level. - Team Members level through KP and intranet. - Scandic Norway is fairly small and easier to share knowledge.	-We weekly phone meetings. -Sales meeting with all sales team. -Emailing and phoning. - Take tests and these don't work as you rush through it due to time.	-Yes, all the time. - Observing and learn from each other in the front office. Feedback from guests. - Get Smart is a good tool as it is individual.
3 (a)	- Learning is important, but you have to ask. If you want to learn something, go after it. - She practice an open door policy, - Managers can participate in SBS.	-Yes it is valuable, and we want it to be a big part of our business today. - Difficult to follow up due to time limits. - Important to encourage to learn more and to develop.	-Learning is crucial, especially when you are new.	-Yes it is important. - Keep track what is happening in the market.	- Yes it is. It improves the quality of the team members, they develop and get better. - It reduces turnover.
(b)	-SBS for managers - Intranet for team members. - Get Smart conversation. - Need to follow up the Get Smart, and set goals.	- Scandic is built on concepts. - No key meetings any more – this is an issue. – People are less likely to speak to each other. - E-learning is valued the most. - SBS -For team members very little training options. - Share knowledge within the hotels	-Bench marking	- Best practice page on the intranet with only access from the HQ.	-Get Smart- - We should get better at follow up. - It varies from hotel to hotel. - Better training programmes. - SBS for managers. - E-learning – not possible to do it from home.

Part	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E
		in Oslo by own initiative. - GET Smart, but it takes a great effort to follow up.			
(c)	- Depends on the situation. Get Smart needs to be formal. - Scandic is very informal – "we are not supposed to be formal".	- In theory it's formal, in practice its informal. - Informal is important so that everyone gets the same knowledge.	-Start with Formal with the KP. - The culture is informal and people are encouraged to 'pick up the phone' and ask others.	- Formal, you have more focus when you have set time off to learn.	- I prefer 50-50.
(d)	- Difficult to say, as now experience with other hotel chains. - SBS is very good. - Talent Programme for potential GM's.	-KP makes a difference – all employees have the same starting point. -Feel a part of a team.	-I think it is, the KP gives a good start for all staff.	- Yes, you are very close at the HQ. - However, are you located outside Oslo it is more difficult.	- Yes, as it secures that the staff knows what to do.
(e)	-Fairly easy as all have the same standards, uniforms, same computer systems. - Key meetings.	- Easier to get knowledge than to share knowledge. - Take initiative your self. - Managers should be better in extracting knowledge out the team members. - Use dep. Meeting to get people to share their know how's.	-We need to ask for information. - No best practice system. - Get information by calling. - Weekly meetings in the hotels.	- It used to be better, when we had key meetings regularly. - Hardly know each other making it more difficult to pick up the phone and call.	- Both yes and no. Some are good at cross sharing, some are not. - The Head Quarter is good at seeing who is good in something and encourage sharing.
(f)	- Time and overload of e-mails.	-Time and cost. - Pride. - Dif. cultures and languages. - Intranet is not user friendly and its messy. - Old IT system.	-Competition; you only get the information after the competition. -People need to have the interest in getting knowledge. - Lack of time and press situations. - Dep. Heads knows where to get information. - Linking it with goals.	- Time, you would learn much more if you sat down for 2 days and focused. Formal learning. - Use people who have the knowledge to teach the others.	- Some are scared of sharing knowledge as they think it threatens the position. - By sharing you secure that people can help out when you need it and also shorten the overtime. - You have to make time and prioritize sharing.
4	- Frequent Guest Programme –	- Centrally in Scandic the	- Customer information is	-Annual reports, news papers,	- GSS – be more critic and use it.

Part	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E
(a)	collect guest data and e-mails. - Sales dep. for the customers. - Guest satisfaction Survey (GSS/SGS/ collected every quarter.	GSS/SGS this is discussed in management meeting, then taken to the dep. level. - Important that people take ownership to the results. - Follow up with guests.	collected by sales. - Intranet provides information about the customer agreements. - Much information via email. - Guest Surveys	asking the clients. - I share information with my colleagues if I think they need it. - By email. - By sales maker.	- Comment cards.
(b)	- Frequent guest programme nights with dinner etc. a good way to get feedback from guests.	- We try to follow up on the survey to provide feedback to the guest	- (same as above)	- By being updated on your clients and top of their mind.	- Follow up is important. - Try an be better than the competitors.
(c)	-Competitive Set for comparison with main competitors.	- Competitive set for comparison. - Good old fashioned stealth.	- (see below)	- We ask the clients. - We use Stealth.	-Revenue Manager goes through the competitive set.
(d)	- From comp. set we get average room rates, RevPar, market share, occupancy etc.	- We see guest needs, and try to fulfil them as well as knowing what our competitors are doing. - Not always easy to make a change due to the strict concepts.	-Share information on weekly meetings, discuss commercial strategy. - Adapt the strategy. - Need to know what is happening, and adapt accordingly.	-You make sure you talk about what makes Scandic special in client meetings.	-Discuss findings in meetings and send information to the HQ.
(e)	- Last year Building Brands. - Dialogue meetings to build brand. – People got excited to know more about the company they work for. - She was trained in Stockholm to become a trainer in Brand.	-(Same as above)	- We link it to our strategy.	- Be more market oriented and be more client focused. - Scandic is most learning focused.	- We are market oriented, but we need more tools so we can get better.
5 (a)	- Trust is important.	-In general very good. - Joy is important its based in Scandic's values.	-In general very good environment, also very informal.	- It is not that good. - Things can be used against you.	- Very relaxed, like a family.
(b)	-Yes in a good way. People have the possibility to make decision	- Yes its good – we see each individual.	-We do encourage people.	- No high tolerance in my dep. - At the hotels,	-Some hotels have higher tolerance than others.

Part	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E
	and are sure that they are not punished by taking a poor decision.			yes.	
(c)	-A good dialogue between the various levels. - Identify important relations in the Business Plan.	-Get Smart dialogue, -Dialogue meetings,	-Dep. Meetings to share ideas. - SBS where we meet and the social aspect is important.	- If you have an idea they don't get back to you on what has been done with it.	-SBS - e-learning
(d)	Yes, it is better now than before. - Dialogue meetings, effective way of sharing knowledge.	- More informal, even though Scandic might claim it to be formal.		-They have focus on it, but little structure. - Should be more formal, and make time for it. - To many emails- overload of info.	- Yes I think they do, but the stopped the key meetings after the financial crisis.
6 (a)	- It could be better. -The intranet is getting better. - Guest Programme is quite good to get information.	- No, but in theory yes. -Poor structure in the intranet makes it difficult to access information. - Everyone have access to the KP at the work, but for some it is challenging to make the effort.	- To an extent. - We are not really sharing information, a best practice systems should be put in place. - Allot of emailing or direct meetings are the common ways.	-Sales Maker for sales. - Intranet is a good tool, but the hotels don't use it. - NDW for customer statistics is good.	- No really, the systems are old - Intranet system is good and bad, information is not updated. - More training manuals at the intranet related to each dep.
(b)			- The intranet system is really poor structures, but it is an excellent tool for sharing.	- The knowledge portal is very poor. -Learn from external people.	
(c/d)		-The KP is important, and informal learning. But formal is important to ensure that all have the same basic knowledge.		- Formal meetings.	- Good training manuals and programs. - Important to have a mentor.
7 (a)	- To emphasise it more. - If we want to employ good people we need to have a good system for knowledge sharing and learning.	- More formal training. - Sharing experience in a formal setting. - To put it into a system.	- Informal is not quality assured, so some knows the message, others don't. - Everybody have access to the intranet with updated and good information, user-friendly.	- Formal meetings.	- Spend time to make new and good manuals. - More specific training programs for each dept. - Have a proper Scandic Standard.

Part	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E
(b/c)	- If we have a company that 'sees' its employees and acknowledge their work we have an comp. advantage.	- When training is informal, people tend to forget it. - We need to be better at sharing, we are good in theory, but not in practice.	- Managers have dep. meetings, emails etc. - tries to encourage team members to pick up the phone and ask other hotels.	- Managers need more knowledge and training on learning to be a manager. - Make it more formal. - Need to be in top of our competitors and clients. - Improve IT systems. - Take focus away from internal knowledge sharing and look externally.	- Yes, the more the staff knows the more they bring. - Important to spend time on staff, especially in down times. - Should introduce the mystery guest.

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