

Knowledge Management in Fashion and Clothing Context: the Purchasing Process of an Industry as an Object of Verification

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Abstract: *Knowledge is used in contemporary organizations as a competitive differential. Fashion and clothing industries with specific characteristics need strategies to solve issues concerning the short production cycle. In this sense, the purchasing sector is fundamental for meeting deadlines and avoiding productive constraints. Considering the purchasing process of a fashion and clothing industry, the purpose of this research is assessing the activities related to knowledge management (KM) elements that are implemented by such an industry, in addition to indicating those suitable to the purchasing process activities in this type of industry. This is a qualitative exploratory descriptive research that used a case study to ascertain the problem. It was seen that certain activities developed by the purchasing area are similar to the KM elements described in the literature. The elements identified can be applied or exploited in other industries of the sector in order to implement a systematics of knowledge use in the purchasing area in this type of industry.*

Keywords: fashion and clothes industries, production cycle, purchasing process, knowledge management

1. Introduction

Knowledge Management (KM) has been used as a strategic factor in contemporary organizations. Creating and using new knowledge is seen as a resource capable of generating value, which contributes to business sustainability and permanence in the market [1]. The literature shows that knowledge, considering its initial mode, is in the 'mind' of individuals, and this knowledge might be either used or improved; however, a systematized process is necessary to obtain results. Therefore, KM is a process comprised of activities or processes that will provide support for a given knowledge to be used by a greater number of individuals [1, 2]

It is estimated that different types of organizations can benefit from what is proposed by KM. An effective KM process is the one in which the organization identifies, captures, acquires, manages and diffuses the benefits of existing knowledge, and this resource can be incorporated into other competitive strategies [1]. In this sense, [3] suggest that knowledge transfer is one of the elements capable of improving the organization of creative productive processes in creative fashion and clothing industries. [4] showed that KM is a strategy factor to be used by fashion and clothing industries.

The productive structure composition of a fashion and clothing industry is complex, fragmented and difficult to be identified. Different processes or steps comprise the product development process from research to sales. Considering the existing processes, the acquisition of materials is among the most dynamic ones and deserves attention in the clothing productive chain. Due to the need that most companies have in acquiring resources they are not able to generate, such as products and services, it is necessary to establish partnerships for these acquisitions, and this is performed by the

purchasing area [5]. Therefore, assessing the purchasing process in fashion and clothing industries is the purpose of the present study.

The purchasing process management is part of an operational procedure that is notoriously gaining importance within organizations, besides being part of the logistic process and responsible for all the supply chain management. This is the process responsible for negotiations with different suppliers and it comprises actions that meet the reduction of costs related to acquisition, maintenance of inventory levels, monitoring of delivery deadline, verification of the materials to be achieved, among others [6]. This activity also involves research and observation, such as new supply sources, analysis of the company's financial situation, verification of the suppliers' productive capacity, market evaluation [7, 5, 8, 9].

Despite being a sector linked to business strategy, with the potential of creating competitiveness, the purchasing process is little discussed in the literature in what concerns the perspectives on fashion and clothing. Based on a scientific survey carried out in journals published by Capes, Scielo and Elsevier, it is seen that most of the publications on purchasing related to the fashion and clothing sector are about the final purchase of the products. Therefore, there is a gap on the purchasing process in this type of industry. When assessing the publications on KM in fashion and clothing context it is seen that the purposes delimited in these publications are in agreement with the application of knowledge, strategy and knowledge, and innovation and knowledge. There is a strong tendency to explore the creative aspect of these industries and their relationship with knowledge.

This study aimed at assessing the purchasing process of a fashion and clothing industry considering its activities related

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to KM elements, in addition to indicating the ones suitable for this type of industry.

2. Knowledge Management and its Elements

Knowledge has been used in the organizational environment as a means to create value, mainly through innovation, which makes the organizations more competitive. Several theoretical efforts were made to understand the role of knowledge on the individual, society and work organization. These efforts were made based on: religion and philosophy by understanding the role and nature of knowledge, thus, enabling individuals to think by themselves; psychology by understanding the role of knowledge concerning human behavior; and economics and social sciences by understanding the role of knowledge in society and business theory, work and its organization [10].

Ever since, studies on knowledge dimensions evolved and, after World War II, knowledge began to be used as a fundamental element to create value for organizations [11]. During that period there was an economy transition, which was previously focused on both, assets and services, and knowledge economy with a new and strategic role given to information that contributed to make information and knowledge increasingly important for organizations [12].

Considering the contemporary context, economy is based on information and communication technologies, thus, information management and knowledge construction are directly linked to productivity and innovation [13]. [11] showed evidence of the need of the organizations to use knowledge, in addition to the value given to individuals who had greater skills in the work environment.

Even whether individuals superficially know what knowledge is, it is not an easy task to assign a single definition to it. Considering the organizations scope, knowledge should be part of a set of practices and actions with short, medium and long term purposes. Knowledge is neither data nor information, although these terms are often confused; knowledge is something broader than data (record of something) or information (data within an environment and with meanings), since knowledge changes the system and

relationships, and it is the result of a complex evaluation and validation of information applied to a context [14].

Leaders and managers became interested in sharing knowledge, since it is an intangible or non-material asset that is not exhaustible or deteriorable; its disposal does not leave physical residues and its consumption does not eliminate it [15]. The interest given to both, the use of knowledge and evolution of the studies on the subject have provided the development of a systematized method that enables to identify and improve knowledge inside and among organizations [1, 10, 16]. A KM system allows the organizational processes of creating, storing, sharing, using and applying knowledge to be mainly employed in corporate organizations, that is, at workplace [16].

The ability of managing knowledge is decisive in knowledge economy. This process has the purpose of creating competitiveness through its creation and diffusion, and high-tech products are clear examples that represent this idea [12,1]). The management process analyzes the individual competencies of a group, or the personal ability of individuals within an organization [17]. The need of creating means to systematize knowledge is based on the principle that knowledge is part of something individual, and communication is the process used to share it. It is considered that individuals might not know the real extent of their ability to know and, thus, it lacks the appropriate means or language to inform what they know [2].

Therefore, KM is a mean to be used for creating possibilities that enable knowledge to be managed effectively and systematically, supporting companies in making decisions and improving their products and processes. It is an activity that predicts the use of people, technology, environment and processes existing in the organizational environment [17,1,18].

In order to better explain what KM is, Table 1 shows some definitions found in the literature, first by authors widely well known for their studies on the subject, who are fundamental references to the theme [17, 10, 19, 20, 1] and, then, the other authors used in this research.

Table 1: KM definitions found in the literature.

	Author	Definition
Basic Literature	[17]	KM is to understand, focus on, and manage systematic, explicit, and deliberate knowledge building, renewal, and application - that is, manage effective knowledge processes (p.2).
	[10]	Definition of KM is broad and embraces related approaches and activities throughout the organization. From this view, KM is partly practical, basic, and directly aimed at supporting the enterprise's ultimate objective (p.4).
	[19]	It is a field that can be easily described as having two perspectives: on the one hand the focus on knowledge sharing and on the other the idea of knowledge creation (p.23).
	[20]	The process of creating knowledge, disseminating it through the organization and incorporating it in products, services, technologies and systems, promoting changes in the organization (translation from p.9)
	[1]	Knowledge management is the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization's people, technology, processes, and organizational structure in order to add value through reuse and innovation. (p.4).
Other	[21]	Knowledge management is a framework within which the organization views all its processes as knowledge processes. The key point of knowledge management is to harvest the tacit knowledge residing in individuals and make it a firm asset, rather than to only leave it in the heads of the particular individuals (p.216).
	[22]	KM is the explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge and its associated processes of creating, gathering, organizing, diffusion, use and exploitation" (p. 932).

[23]	KM) consists of the systematic processes for acquiring, organizing, sustaining, applying, sharing, and renewing all forms of knowledge, to enhance the organizational performance and create value (p.85).
[24]	Enables individuals, teams and entire organizations as well as networks, regions and nations to collectively and systematically create, share and apply knowledge to achieve their strategic and operational objectives. (p.211).

In view of the above shown in Table 1, it is possible to state that KM is a developing field, which is susceptible to distinct definitions and that does not have a unique perspective or theoretical line. In general, it is a process that aims at managing and systematizing existing knowledge in order to enable the organization as a whole or in parts to benefit by sharing information that will change into individual or explicit knowledge.

The systematization proposed by KM consists of elements or activities with specific necessary functions for achieving purposes. Among these elements, it is possible to highlight KM cycles, models, practices and tools. The KM cycle is responsible for ordering the knowledge evolution process in an arrangement that predicts the beginning, middle, end and restart; it is generally recognized by organizational processes related to creating, sharing, storing and distributing knowledge, including its use and disposal [25, 16].

KM models support the existence of the steps or processes contained in the cycle. KM model is structured considering the relationship between the environment and the organization individuals; this relationship is the main factor for creating and using knowledge [26]. The structure of a model includes the facilitators for developing organizational knowledge, and these facilitators shall assist in how knowledge is going to be applied. A model can define which other KM elements shall be needed to meet the purposes expected [1, 26].

The tools use validations that include, for example, technological capital and equipment, which enable KM activities to be directed towards continuous process improvement, and such activities must be linked to the environment they will be made available for knowledge development [1, 27]. KM tools are usually developed to solve tasks and can be adaptive; if they do not achieve the results expected, they can be eliminated, replaced or revised [2]. The practices are related to actions carried out that promote knowledge construction, and even the use of tools can be an action. KM practices also analyze how the evolution of knowledge is related to different environments (internal and external to organizations) [24].

Finally, it is understood that knowledge is seen in most organizations, and in specific sectors there is the occurrence of both, knowledge inherent to work activities and that incorporated by the acquisition of other sources, such as the suppliers. Considering this, an analysis on the purchasing process in fashion and clothing industries is shown below.

2.1 The purchasing process in clothing context

Despite the ability of the companies to flexibilize their business strategies, they are hardly able to generate all the resources, such as the products and services they need. In this sense, the role of the purchasing area is essential, which is

responsible for establishing partnerships among companies by having acquisition as their purpose [5, 8]. The purchasing area is part of the supply chain management or administration, which brings with it the function of integrating this chain, a factor that in the contemporary scenario becomes crucial for the sustainability of operations [6].

The purchasing team should perform its work independently by making it flexible, since the activities performed there are determined not only by internal factors, but also by suppliers and external events. Regarding the organization of the purchasing team, the authors show the existence of two organizational structures: the centralized purchase and the decentralized purchase. The centralized purchase is performed by only one team, and the decentralized one is dismembered into different plants and teams so that each team can buy a particular type of product or work with specific suppliers [7].

Several enterprises have been integrating the purchasing strategies with other business strategies, since the material supply has emerged in a lot of organizations as a potential factor for facing the global market, improving costs, and aligning the supply chain. This integration allowed the purchasing area to change its organizational structure, creating a greater openness to decision making in conjunction with other areas. This has made the supply chain lean and organized [28, 29, 30, 8].

Identifying the scenario of this research is necessary, in addition to showing that fashion has a broad concept strongly related to clothing, footwear, jewellery, and cosmetics industries, and any other products that have an ephemeral style, in order to heal the search for creating an individual or collective identity, providing a sense of belonging to a particular group, mainly through the way of dressing [31,32]. Since the present study considers both, clothing production as one of the productive processes of these industries and its close relationship with clothing, the term fashion and clothing industries is used herein.

According to some authors, such as [33, 31, 34, 4, 35, 8, 41], these industries have fragmented structure and processes; they act in a context of uncertainty, unpredictable demand in a highly competitive market that is measured by considering time. Therefore, the purchasing area shows itself as important and strategic in product development logic.

The supply chain of these industries is extensive and involves different production steps - in the case of fabrics, the main raw material used, production starts by producing fibers, followed by weaving and finishing processes [34]. The presentation of the textile material for stylists and fashion designers after submitted to all the improvement processes must occur at least 18 months before the product is released for sale. This is due to the fact that in fashion and clothing

industries there is an extensive and meticulous work for creating products, a process that begins by searching a new trend and ends by delivering the product to the consumer. The acquisition of materials months in advance is due to the duration of a collection (at about 50 days), when the textile products will become clothing products [36, 34].

Regarding the majority of cases, the purchasing area acquires materials without real numbers for the acquisitions by considering the projections or sales expectations. This is a feature and necessity of the sector [37]. An investigation on the total production time of a clothing collection has found that this occurs according to the type of commercialization for the industries engaged in sales upon orders - production after sale - the development period from research to production is 40 weeks or 10 months [33]; considering the companies that produce for sale, the deadline is 20 weeks or four months [34]. There are those industries that acquire materials and produce a certain quantity of products based on sales expectations, and, thus, they adjust the purchases or the quantity to be produced from them [37].

However, what does this have to do with the purchasing area? [38] shows that there are certain factors that differentiate fashion and clothing business from others, since the influence of fashion itself is one of the factors linked to seasonal sales, that is, changes in economy that might affect the consumers' purchasing power, the difficulty in delineating sales histories and obtaining certain data, in addition to the extensive supply of products that can generate unnecessary stocks.

[39] point out that due to fashion interferences, the products will hardly be basic and this has a direct relation to the quantity of raw material to be acquired. [31] showed that these industries are delineated by different and complex geographic supply networks, since the supply chain tends to be global, which increases the risk of unnecessary purchase of items in face of the challenge of the demand unpredictability. The localization of the suppliers directly impacts the transportation time and, thus, it has direct consequences on the cost of the products. Therefore, checking the transport time of certain materials and markets is necessary [40].

Considering this context, [9], in a specific publication on the professional fashion purchase for retailing chains, showed that the professional connected to purchases should constantly be in contact with different people and enterprises in order to obtain essential information for executing their work. The authors suggest that such information should be acquired from diverse sources, such as: sales teams, fabric sales representatives, purchasers from other companies, potential suppliers, designers, and others involved in the process that somehow might without some kind of information that shall contribute to the purchasing activity.

This information shall be essential in order to assist the productive flow. Regardless of the type of marketing, these industries are looking for ways to make the production steps agile, since sewing time is the greatest one in the process due to the fact that fashion products have a specific market period

of time. Therefore, adaptations to the logistics of acquisition, delivery and distribution are fundamental for the permanence of these enterprises in the market [41]. As a strategy, in order to fit the sales schedules, several companies tend to produce a certain amount of products as a safety stock. Considering all the production logics, that is, sales orders, sales production or the fusion of both of them, it is perceived that time is a prominent factor and the anticipated acquisition of materials is a demand for this type of industries [37, 4, 35]

In this context, the purchasing area becomes one of the means used to guarantee the quality and delivery of materials, reduction of idle inventories and reduction of the production costs and production stoppages due to lack of materials. The fast decision-making through information and knowledge (acquired and shared) enables the purchasing area to contribute with the competitiveness of these enterprises in the market [32].

Based on this narrative it is possible to perceive that the purchasing sector plays a significant role in the productive structure of the fashion and clothing industries. Some factors, such as integration among sectors, exchange of information and knowledge, which are highlighted by literature, indicate the possibility of applying KM elements with the purpose of improving the activities already carried out.

3. Methodological Procedures

When drawing the methodological procedures to be used in the present research, the environment to be investigated was first considered. Since the fashion and clothing industries are characterized as being difficult in the sense of identifying processes, and the purchasing sector proves to be fundamental in this structure, the case study is appropriate as a research strategy, which enables to better ascertain the issues related to the purpose herein proposed.

This is an empirical research that investigates the existence of a certain phenomenon, that is, the existence of KM elements in the purchasing process in a fashion and clothing industry in a real context. This is also a qualitative study because it is based on theoretical aspects and uses collection instruments for validation, which do not result in statistical indices. This is an exploratory research that has a descriptive approach, which enables to make the problem more evident through its relation with the case studied.

The research was structured as it follows: i) delimitation of the problem and purposes, ii) literature review, iii) reading and selection of the sources to be used, iv) delimitation of the methodological procedures, v) validation of the instruments; (vi) application of the instruments and data codification, (vii) data interpretation and presentation of the results. Three instruments were used: i) a questionnaire, (ii) non-participating observation, and, iii) an interview.

4. Results

The case study was carried out in a large industry located in the Northwest Region of Paraná state, which produces five

collections a year (according to literature the collection average is three) and introduce about 1,200 new products every 55 days. In order to adapt this structure to the sales calendar, the development period starts approximately 12 months before launching the product for sale. In terms of purchasing raw materials, it was seen that most of them are acquired at the beginning of this cycle, and some only when the collection is approved - on average 45 days before being launched. Such deadlines are in accordance with the ones shown in the literature [33, 34]. It is worth mentioning that the industry works with safety stocks by acquiring and producing them even before the real sales numbers.

Regarding the fragmentation and distancing of the supply chain shown by literature [31, 40, 4, 37], it was seen that this is real, since there are products bought both from the national market - from several regions of the country - and the international market - mainly from China.

After the arrival of the materials, in addition to the development and approval of the products, an anticipated production begins approximately 40 days before being launched; guaranteeing the fulfillment of the delivery deadlines is the purpose. After starting the sales, it is confirmed whether what is purchased shall actually be used, whether there is a need to complement it, whether there is a need to cancel the sale of any product due to lack of raw material, and whether the projections are close to what is expected, which generate data for the next collections.

Regarding the present case study, production and commercialization are carried out based on the sales expectation, that is, a minimum quantity expected to be sold from each product is designed (safety stock), and this start being produced approximately 40 days before launching it. After starting the sales, it is confirmed whether or not the expectations shall be achieved. This case study confirmed what is described in the literature about the production logics by [37], and it showed that in this case the industry uses the sale projections and confirmation of what was projected.

The purchasing team embraces approximately 15 people; nine of them participated in the survey. This is a decentralized team, since each person buys a particular type of product or attends to a specific supplier. The approach on decentralized teams was shown by [7]. The proximity of the purchasing sector with the creation sector is another feature that is related to work flexibility; this has been a differential in the sense of improving and organizing the supply chain. The greater proximity among buyers and stylists allows the evaluation of suppliers and materials to be acquired.

The demand planning (DP) and production planning and control (PPC) are also close sectors. Although in theory the purchases are subordinated to DP and PPC, in practice there was a relation of partnership and independence of the sectors, since they work together to create productive demands, which in turn generate purchasing demands, in addition to organizing the productive process. The independence relationship of the purchasing sector is also shown by [7, 37]; however, this study does not suggest that purchases are disengaged from PPC, but that there should be a hierarchization of the processes and that the sectors should make decisions in different ways towards the same purpose.

In view of this relation of partnership and flexibility, a less automatic configuration is perceived on the role of the purchasing area for fashion and clothing industries in the sense of buying only what is designated. It was seen that buyers analyze several factors, such as the type of material to be acquired, the characteristics of the supplier, delivery deadlines in relation to the production schedule, quality of the materials and so on. This view, which shows that the purchasing sector should have a less automatic stance when negotiating, is shown by [28, 29, 30, 5, 42].

In order to identify the work activities and to establish similarities in the KM elements, a questionnaire was developed by considering the categories for analysis. Table 2 shows how these categories were separated, the aspects seen, and the theoretical relation for elaborating the questions.

Table 2: Categories of analysis included in the questionnaire

<i>Categories of Analysis</i>	<i>Aspects seen</i>	<i>Theoretical relation</i>
Profile	Period of time acting in the purchasing sector and the changes occurred in the work process.	-
Process structure and the existing sectors considering the use of information for the purchasing sector.	Relationship of the sectors that comprise the product development structure	-
Construction/Creation	How construction/creation of new knowledge occurs.	[1, 23, 25,43]
Storage	How the created or existing knowledge is maintained.	[1, 23, 25,43]
Distribution/ Sharing	How knowledge is distributed/shared among the purchasing team and the other sectors.	[1, 23, 25,43]
Application	How knowledge is and can be applied both in the purchasing process and in the activities related to the product development.	[1, 23, 25,43]
Use of tools or practices that make the existence of a cycle feasible.	Practices and tools used by the purchasing team that supports the existence of steps of a KM cycle.	[44,45,24]

The first analysis in relation to KM elements is carried out in order to ascertain the steps of a cycle. When assessing the contents of Table 2, the following steps were found: i) construction/creation of knowledge; this is mainly

constituted by the relationships among the team members and other sectors, in addition to using personal and co-workers experiences, and formal or informal conversations, as well as

by applying what they learn in improving work processes; ii) application of knowledge; this is mainly through the assistance among those involved to deal with certain situations; iii) storage of knowledge; what is known is very personal or not so efficient means, such as the use of e-mail storage, and some information inserted in the purchasing software or network files, shared with some sectors; the lack of work systematization deserves attention; iv) distribution/sharing; it practically occurs based on the development of a method or new work process or a lesson learned, shared by electronic means (use of e-mail) or by conversations in a mentoring system.

As it can be seen, there is a strong appeal to the use of individual knowledge, a fact that supports the approach by [41], which shows that enterprise knowledge related to fashion and clothing tends to be tacit. Some authors, such as [3, 13] argue that the existing knowledge in fashion and clothing industries provides the improvement of processes

and generates innovation. The fact of improving the processes or activities in relation to existing knowledge was a factor indicated by the participants of the present research, since they stated that they had already created a working method due to the knowledge they had.

After identifying the existence of the organizational processes, that is, construction/creation, application, storage, and distribution/sharing, the (main) activities performed in the purchasing sector were seen, which, thus, provided these processes. Since the activities performed by industries generally meet their organizational purposes, the findings of the present case were related to KM practices and tools, described in the literature.

Table 3 shows the activities developed in the purchasing sector and relates them with the KM practices and tools described in the literature.

Table 3: Main activities that resemble KM tools and practices.

<i>Activities found in the purchasing process</i>	<i>Practices found according to KM literature</i>
Use of personal and co-workers' experiences	Peer Assist Mentoring
Collection planning	Communities of practice Storytelling
Meetings with managers	Communities of practice Storytelling
	<i>Tools found according to KM literature</i>
Use of shared e-mail	Lessons learned database
Information on the purchases via a system with access by the DP sector	Lessons learned database. Document management systems Content management
Information on the raw material available among DP/Purchase/Production	Lessons learned database. Document management systems Content management
Information on new development and new materials among Creation/Design/Purchases	Lessons learned database. Document management systems Content management

Regarding the activities found and shown in Table 3, it is understood that they are specific to the case analyzed; however, this research does not intend to discuss or further develop the specificities of the case. The discussion emphasis is on the analysis of the practices and tools listed in Table 3 by showing that they can be important and possible to be applied, as well as assisting in the activities related to the purchasing process in these industries.

Peer assist consists of the assistance given by an individual with experience (knowledge) on a subject or on the instruction of a new employee in order to improve learning and share knowledge. Based on the teaching-learning relationship, this practice can also be called mentoring [45, 24]. Considering the purchasing environment, this practice is favorable since people with more time of work can quickly identify problems, such as reliability of suppliers, who to report on certain types of problems, and so on. During the interview the purchasing team coordinator mentioned that she believed that the assistance of a more experienced person provides confidence to those who are learning.

Communities of practice have the potential to add meaning to group discussions. Communities of practice should involve different individuals from different areas so that the discussions create different perspectives based on the participants' knowledge [45]. Meetings, group discussions, in the sense of a community of practice should have clear

purposes for discussions, providing added value to human capital and benefits in relation to knowledge generated so far. Considering that several sectors comprise the productive structure of a fashion and clothing industry, which makes the industry fragmented, the implementation of Communities of practice aims at contributing to the approximation between the sectors and the hierarchical processes organization [31].

Storytelling, shown herein as a practice, is related to narrative and enables the individuals to expose their ideas or knowledge through a story, provided that there is a context for it [24, 44]. Fashion itself works with creativity, so the narratives and storytelling are appropriate to the context of a creative company. According to what has been seen during the observation and communication with the purchasing team, telling experiences through stories at certain moments shall contribute to make certain subjects less distressing, creating a different kind of reflection. However, storytelling should be used in specific situations and according to the needs of the enterprise.

These are the KM tools that best fit the activities performed in the purchasing sector: lessons learned database, document management systems and content management [1, 45]. Based on the information existing in some types of database (software system, network spreadsheets, network documents) the consultation ends up supporting the decision making or

understanding a certain subject. Managing documents and content is important for determining what shall be shared, to whom and how. The fashion and clothing industries need to create ways to make their knowledge more explicit. Considering the present case, despite the availability of means, this is not systematized yet [41].

It was seen that the resources linked to sharing support the purchasing sector in the sense of making decisions, knowing the products that are being developed, determining factors to classify the suppliers, anticipating the purchase of items already approved or necessary for the production, following the fault indices of the products, enabling the DP and PPC sector to know what materials are available, and so on. This dynamic shows the strategic importance of the purchasing area for the context of fashion and clothing industries.

Given the application of the data collection instruments, the practices and tools described in this research are those that have shown to be meaningful in relation to that contained in the KM literature and that is suggested as possible to be applied in the purchasing sector in fashion and clothing industries. There are others, not less important, similar to the ones found in this research that might add benefits to these industries (considering or not the purchasing area), that is, competence mapping, metadata, knowledge management, cultural change metrics, knowledge mapping and knowledge café [45, 24].

The elements shown herein can be tested or applied to other cases in order to see what their results would be.

5. Conclusions

The literature shows KM both under theoretical and practical perspectives, with the capacity of generating benefits for people, teams and the organization itself. It is a fact that organizational knowledge can be applied for improving processes and products, since each organization produces specific knowledge about these aspects. Fashion and clothing industries, because of their creative and often ephemeral characteristics as any other type of business, should promote the creation of marketable products and find ways to position themselves and be in the market.

This research showed that the shopping area is one of the most important in the context of managing organizations in the contemporary world. Considering the strategies of fashion and clothing industries, purchases are fundamental mainly due to the short productive cycle in this type of business. Based on the fragmentation and extension of the existing processes in these industries, described in the literature, and considering the importance of the purchasing sector for the organizational strategy, the purchasing sector was the object of study and investigation.

Among the main results, the real fragmentation of processes and the distancing of the supply chain - national and international market - were seen; in addition to showing that flexibilization of the purchasing area is necessary based on the relationship among the sectors and suppliers in order to

act for the benefit of the productive system of the fashion and clothing industry. Purchasing activity has proved to be more than an action of simply acquiring products, but an activity that contributes to the prioritization of production time, maintenance of inventory levels and exchange of information and knowledge.

Regarding the activities carried out by this sector, it was seen that they should be adapted to the type of production organization. However, based on the case analyzed, a comparison was made with KM literature to ascertain the existence of elements that could be significant to be implanted or used by the shopping area of fashion and clothing industries. It was found that peer assist and mentoring practices; communities of practice and storytelling are suitable for this, which promote organizational learning and the involvement of individuals from different sectors to the purchasing one.

Concerning the use of tools, it was seen that the fashion and clothing sector still lacks application of technology support in order to contribute to the organizational knowledge processes, in addition to strongly using tacit knowledge. However, the use of any virtual tools (spreadsheets, network folders, software, e-mail) already provides the sharing, storage and use of knowledge in order to create new knowledge, and this meets learning in databases, electronic document management and content management. In this sense it is concluded that there is no ready or specific tool to be indicated, since as described in the literature, these tools can be adaptable, improved or excluded based on the existing structure.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the purchasing sector has several types of information on suppliers, products, market, among others, and the sharing of this information among the sectors shall contribute to organizational learning and the construction of new knowledge, besides the hierarchical systematization of processes.

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