

KNOWLEDGE SHARING BY ENABLERS IN GRAUBUENDEN/SWITZERLAND

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe a research design to investigate the network of the Enablers in Graubünden, Switzerland. The Enablers are 44 representatives of organisations, inhabitants, opinion leaders and key persons of Graubünden who intend to create a shared knowledge pool to foster future innovations and to develop a sustainable tourism economy in the region. The study's main aims are (1) to collect, document, organise and represent the shared knowledge of the 44 Enablers to make it intelligible and usable for the public in general as well as for managers in the Graubünden tourism industry, and (2) to develop a framework of the generation of everyday knowledge analysing the Enablers' network structure.

Keywords: knowledge organisation, qualitative methods, social networks, tourism, strategy development.

Knowledge Sharing by Enablers in Graubuenden/Switzerland

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe a research design to investigate the network of the Enablers in Graubuenden, Switzerland. The Enablers are 44 representatives of organisations, inhabitants, opinion leaders and key persons of Graubuenden who intend to create a shared knowledge pool to foster future innovations and to develop a sustainable tourism economy in the region. The study's main aims are (1) to collect, document, organise and represent the shared knowledge of the 44 Enablers to make it intelligible and usable for the public in general as well as for managers in the Graubuenden tourism industry, and (2) to develop a framework of the generation of everyday knowledge analysing the Enablers' network structure.

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Suggested track: E

1 Introduction

In this research theoretically relevant aspects of everyday knowledge and an application study about knowledge sharing in the Graubuenden region in Switzerland are discussed. The aim of the study is to develop an empirically based concept to support the development of a sustainable tourism economy in Graubuenden. The "Enablers", a network of 44 representatives of a variety of non-profit organizations with diverse core businesses (e.g. landscape and environmental protection, culture groups, architecture) play a vital role for the knowledge conservation and further advancement of knowledge of this region.

Knowledge is the basis for all human behaviour in general and for strategic planning as well as activities in particular. The definition of knowledge in the context of this research is crucial since it is knowledge that the Enablers provide and transfer within their network and discourses. Hence, to cover the wide range of different perspectives and practical applications (themes, approaches, methods, levels of generalizability), knowledge is defined here as actively processed networks of cognitive maps based on experiences and intrinsic capacities of the individual as well as social/cultural standards, patterns and schemes organising perceptive information about environmental effects and regulating individual behaviour within social systems (Oeser and Seitelberger, 1995, 203-206; Shore, 1996, 311-315).

Following Schreyögg and Geiger (2003, 12-13), the kind of knowledge dealt with here is characterised by three factors: Firstly, knowledge is propositional, i.e. it is directly bound to communication and needs to be negotiated in discourses. Secondly, every proposition explicitly or implicitly claims for validity. This means that knowledge demands for reasons. Thirdly, however, it is not sufficient to mention reasons to qualify propositions as knowledge. It has to be examined whether these reasons are recognised within a specific context researched. Thus, knowledge in this context refers to all sorts of conceptual knowledge, i.e. knowledge properties accessible to verbal expression and available as text. This is a prerequisite to organise and manage verbal data, i.e. propositional knowledge, in order to make it applicable and to use it within the researched social network of the Enablers and to develop a strategy for the region.

The outcome of the study will be a knowledge data base of the Enablers which will be the starting point for developing a strategy for the Graubünden region. In addition, the processes of decision making and communication among the members of the Enabler group and their relations to the public will be identified and documented. These patterns will be the anchor to develop a framework for understanding the generation of everyday knowledge.

2 Aims of the Research

The study's main aims are (1) to collect, document, organise and represent the shared knowledge of the 44 Enablers to make it intelligible and usable for the public in general as well as for managers in the Graubünden tourism industry, and (2) to develop a framework of the generation of everyday knowledge analysing the Enablers' network structure.

The following questions are examples for guiding the data collection process:

- (1) What are typical stories about the Graubunden region (culture, businesses, tourism, history, etc.), its organisations (national, international), its people (diversity, natives)?
- (2) Which strengths, advantages and positive characteristics are attributed to the Graubunden region?
- (3) Which problems, weaknesses and disadvantages are connected to the Graubunden region?
- (4) What are the strategic goals for the region from the Enablers' point of view (positioning, image, mission etc.)?
- (5) What are the preferred target groups for tourism marketing?
- (6) How should values of the Graubunden region be communicated and preserved respectively by adapting to changes in society?
- (7) What should foreigners and natives in any case know about the Graubunden area?
- (8) How does sharing of knowledge work among the Enablers?
- (9) How does this network function and how can its structure be described?
- (10) How do Enablers perceive their cultural and historical heritage of Graubunden?
- (11) How and with what kind of methods can knowledge be captured, organized and shared among group members?

2.1 Knowledge about the region

In Graubunden, an alpine region in Switzerland which is the largest and one of the most diverse cantons, 60 % of the population are directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry (Branchenplattform Graubunden Ferien 2003, online). The region combines a language kaleidoscope, consisting of several German, Romanic, and Italian dialects. In 2000, representatives of the tourism industry started the attempt to integrate this diversity in the development of a new brand for Graubunden. The reason was the lack of common institutions that communicate Graubunden to other regions within Switzerland and abroad. In addition, the area did not establish a shared identity and brand strategy that could capture the cultural and regional variety (Regio Plus Plattform 2004, online).

The main aims of the new brand “Graubuenden” are to encounter global challenges by successfully bundling the strengths of this small-structured, heterogeneous, and federalistic region, to increase the publicity and to use marketing synergies of the institutions involved. Therefore, a regional brand suitable for a sustainable commercialization for the future of Graubuenden’s tourism and other products and services of the region was developed.

A new logo was launched as a trademark to serve for a variety of applications. The vision of the region is to react anticipatory, to meet the challenges of changing environments and to present ideal conditions for a healthy work environment, active recreation and regeneration. The mission strives for a long-term added value instead of short profit maximization and it fosters an attractive living and working environment, a source of well-being and inspiration for inhabitant and guests (Regionenportal Graubuenden 2003, online).

The brand name “Graubuenden” should be understood as an ongoing process with continuous improvements. The brand is organized into “Segments” and “Enablers”. The “Segments” are commerce, vacation and leisure, products, transport, culture, education and research. The aim is to coordinate communities of interest to enhance collective communication and shared actions towards other market participants.

During the discussion on branding, the “Enablers”, a network of 44 representatives of mountain farmers, language and cultural organizations, opinion leaders and key persons of Graubuenden was established. They were invited to participate, share experiences and jointly develop ideas. Because of their special task for landscape and mountain conversation and their specific knowledge about the culture and the languages varieties, they were identified as a key success factor for the brand “Graubuenden”, even though they are working in the background and mostly unrecognized by the public.

2.2 Knowledge about the network structure of the Enablers

Within three months after the start of the Enabler formation in the fourth quarter of 2002, four meetings were held. In the first meeting, new key persons were accepted in the network. The purpose of the second meeting was the constitution of a working group to organize further meetings and a permanent representation in the market council requested. During the third meeting, the goals of the network were discussed: Advancement of the general awareness of landscape, culture, and language diversity. Furthermore, the Enablers want to act as an advisor and mediator for the brand

development. The last get-together was dedicated to a special topic, namely “water”. At this time, the network was broadened to 44 members. However, only 9 of them actually went to this gathering.

Contemporary activities of the Enablers comprise of bilateral talks with persons from “Graubuenden Ferien; Graubuenden Vacation”. The results are several coordinated brand appearances, such as the wood sector.

Even though several meetings with members of this network were held on a regular basis, a group identity could not be established yet. However, the group members stand out for their knowledge on both, the network structure itself, that is who is meeting whom to talk about what kind of problem, and the historical-cultural knowledge of this region. This means, if somebody leaves the organization or group, the specific individual knowledge is lost for the group and the region.

Keupp (1987, 11f.) emphasizes on the appealing concept of network, because of its plainness. In his definition, a network is a linkage of humans which presents a pictographic possibility for demonstration. Humans are presented as knots. Connection lines unite these humans with other humans, which are again symbolized as knots. The reconstruction of social linkages creates a picture of a network. However, the attempt to capture the meaning of or to understand network phenomena is a compound process, because it is hard to capture. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of networks leads to a constant change of their structure, formation, or consistency. Burmeister and Canzler (1994:16) describe networks as “multifaceted, diffuse, and complex”. They further see a connection between change processes within societies as a whole and the search of new social forms of action. The development of networks could be read as a sign for society changes. One of the reasons for the establishment of the Enablers was the change in branding the region “Graubuenden”. Historically, the region had no mutual appearance in public. It was a heterogeneous picture with competing strong brands such as “St. Moritz”.

Burmeister and Canzler (1994, 25ff.) propose a typology of networks. They differ between nine types of networks (social, themes- and action centered, institutional, technical, scientific, women, organizations, technology- and evaluation of technology effects, cultural). For the purpose of this research, the basic assumption underlying is that the network of the Enablers can be understood as a “social and a themes- and action centered network” that produces a joint knowledge structure based on the individually contributed everyday knowledge. A social network is “a specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons, with the additional property that the

characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret the social behaviour of the persons involved” (Mitchell, 1969:2). It can further be stated that the basis of the research on networks are the hidden, unsolicited, and informal relations between the members of group. These relations are not accomplished by norms (law, moral, religion), organisations (companies, administrations) and institutions (family) (Mitchell 1969, 36ff.). Kardorff (1995, 405) argues that the integration of humans in social networks is an important mediation construct. Additionally, Dean and Lin (1977, cited after Kardorff 1995, 405) maintain that social networks have the function to be stress releasing and buffering. Harny (1994, 31f.) claims that the power of social networks lies in the exchange of benefits, favors, and information. It is based on the non-substitution of the personal. He further argues that networks have the function to balance deficits of our society, such as information or operationalization gaps. Social networks function as a support of the weaker entities for mutual support and communication. Themes- and action centered networks engage in relatively narrow factual issues (Burmeister and Canzler, 1994, 25). Figure 1 shows a conceptual network structure of the Enablers. All members (A-K) of the network are connected to each other. However, some of the persons involved (e.g. B, J, etc.) have more or closer relations to other members (e.g. H, K, I, etc.) of this network. The cohesion of the network is still a loose connection of social relations.

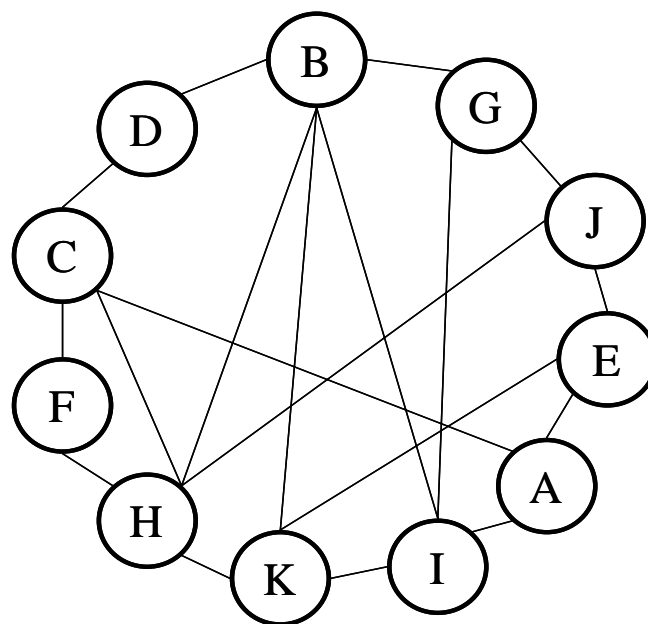


Fig. 1: Conceptual structure of the Enablers’ network

To understand how the Enabler network functions, the first step will be to gather information about the group structure and the behavior of individuals in the group of the Enablers. Battegay (1976, 16) defines group as a “highly organized social entity, which consists of a small number of reciprocal relations and together it consists of a whole of individuals with defined functions, who play a crucial role for the function of the collectivity”. Tuckmann (1965, 384ff.) identifies four and later five (Tuckmann and Jensen 1977, 419ff.) phases in the development of groups:¹

- (1) *Forming*: is the phase to get a first orientation and to know each other, to look for similarities or differences. Group members try to find security rather than controversy.
- (2) *Storming*: This phase is characterized by competition and conflict and the members emphasize on the differences and claim for power. This is a critical stage of group development, which often result in a breakdown.
- (3) *Norming*: In this phase, the strive for conformity and who is playing what kind of role in the group is important. Once the group gets this far, personal relations are characterized as being open and information is shared among the members.
- (4) *Performing*: The group is concentrating on defined goals; interactions are already routine. Personal relations are deep and the group members are unite and interdependent.
- (5) *Adjourning*: In this stage, the group will go apart (e.g. because the project for which the group was formed ended).

Fundamental for all phases of group formation is when new persons join the group. This circumstance could result in a fall back of the group into the storming phase.

With the Enabler network, the actual stage of affair (March 2004) is still the forming phase, where they attempt to develop shared vision and goals, as well as to find their network identity. One task of the research process will be to observe whether or not the group will reach the next phases. The vision of the Enablers is not defined yet and also the interest on the network is not very strong, because bilateral negotiations with the partner brand “Graubuenden Vacation” is preferred. Since the second quarter of 2003, the working group of the Enablers did not get active again, and other Enablers will not make a request for another meeting to them. For the cooperation of the Enablers

¹ For a critical view on traditional models of group development see e.g. Gersick (1988)

among themselves, the brand council and Graubuenden Vacation exist no concept so far which includes declared goals, tasks, procedures and arrangements for the application of resources and key success factors. Battegay (1976, 33) argues that “a basic precondition for the formation of groups is the reciprocative communication of the persons involved”. For a successful communication and a basis for sharing knowledge, the group members need to have some sort of common interests and values. The group entity is dynamic and involves responses and reactions of activities of other members. Especially, “the communication between two persons involved always has consequences for the other members of the group” (Battegay 1976:34). For the Enablers, only bilateral talks are taking place at the moment. However, the group members do not know who is meeting whom, when, where and for what purpose. There is only little communication and transfer of knowledge within the group (see Figure 2). Some members of the network (A, G, H, I, J) interact with persons (X, Y, Z) from “Graubuenden Vacation (GV)”.

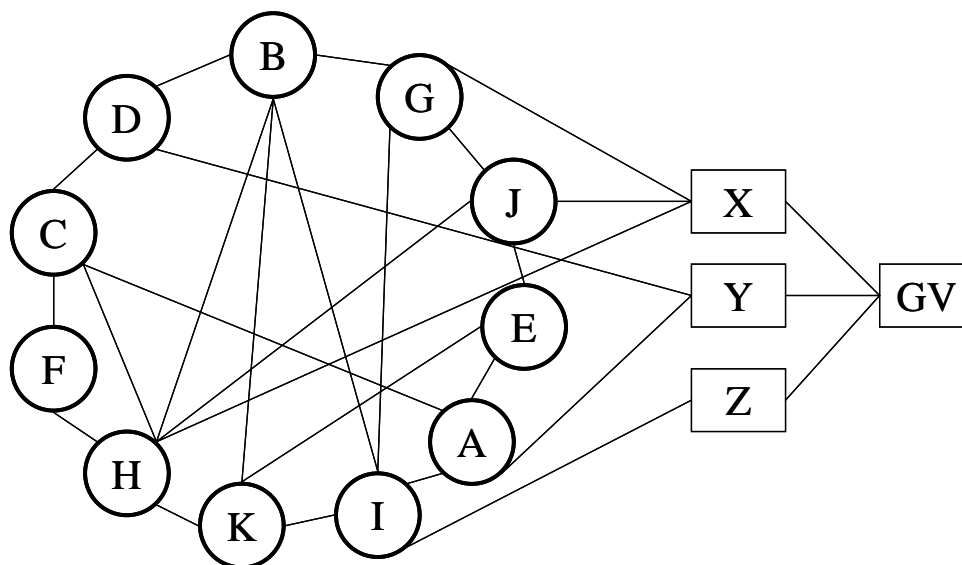


Fig. 2: Interactions of the members of the Enablers’ network with “Graubuenden Vacation” (GV)

In this framework it is possible to understand the problems involved in forming the “artificial” social networks such as the Enablers. The network’s main aim is to create a shared knowledge pool to foster future innovations and to build a sustainable tourism economy in the region. Central to the activities of the Enablers are the preservation of their culture for future purposes and the usage of already existing knowledge for the

canton. In contrast to scientific knowledge and formalized forms of knowledge, for that study everyday knowledge is defined practically as cultural knowledge which serves as a basis of social interaction and communication in everyday life (Oerter, 1988, 333; Oeser and Seitelberger, 1995, 203ff.; Shore, 1996, 311ff.).

The main thought is to develop a knowledge data base including the Enablers' knowledge about relevant themes for the region of Graubünden. This knowledge data base should be the basis for strategy development for the future alignment of Graubünden's tourism industry. The research deals with the question of how to make usable knowledge properties (such as concepts, ideas, opinions and suggestions) for specific tasks and groups of users. Kiel and Rost (2003) define this as main task for any research design in knowledge organization. The core idea of knowledge organization is to ease access to knowledge and to make intelligible complex knowledge properties (Wille 1999a; 1999b). In a first step, the Enablers' knowledge will be documented and stored in the data base. In a second step, this knowledge will be organized in order to use it systematically (Gadner/Buber/Richards 2003).

3 Research Design and Methods

To implement the study's main aims, i.e. the collection, documentation, organization and representation of the Enablers' shared knowledge as well as the development of a framework of the generation of everyday knowledge, it is necessary to organize the knowledge of the Enablers' network (see Figure 3).

3.1 Knowledge Organisation and Understanding

When dealing with knowledge, the concept of "understanding" is crucial. Qualitative research and qualitative methods for knowledge organisation are used where there is a need for new understanding of a situation (Gadner and Ohnesorge 2003, 68ff.). To achieve understanding of complex situations, the challenge for any researcher is to manage that complexity. As Lyn Richards (2004:93) puts it: "All qualitative research requires knowledge organisation. Managing the overwhelming detail of data and seeing it in context requires sophisticated storage and access methods which can assist a project of any size to achieve a better, more rigorous outcome. Software for that purpose is useful in qualitative research of any scale. And a toolkit for qualitative analysis is also a toolkit for organising many sorts of knowledge – what is known a priori and what is discovered during the enquiry, as well as the knowledge derived from

search and scrutiny. The researcher and the manager share the task of bringing these together for understanding a situation, an issue or a problem.”

Structuring and organizing conceptual knowledge using qualitative techniques reduces redundant and multifaceted information making understanding of complex social and cultural situations easier. The network-trees of categories provided by NVivo (Morse and Richards, 2002) provide contexts for concepts and conceptual knowledge properties that facilitate understanding according to the theoretical framework developed above. To understand conceptual knowledge systems they need to be organized in order to perceive a holistic overview.

Following Gadamer’s (1993; 1997) hermeneutical approach, narrative interviews and interviews using the story-telling approach (Churchill and Iacobucci 2003, 278) will be conducted with the 44 representatives of the organisations involved (Enablers) to gather their expert and everyday knowledge. Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes. This allows for bringing out the interviewees’ very personal opinions, ideas, experiences and suggestions.

Text files are imported into the indexing system of the software NVivo.

3.2 Knowledge Organisation by NVivo

The textual data will be organised and systematised using the qualitative software NVivo (Morse and Richards, 2002). The computer supported textual analysis will lead to a hierarchically categorised knowledge network and will be done according to a coding scheme which will be developed in accordance with the requirements of those involved (Kelle, 2000, 493ff.). A hermeneutically based open coding strategy that develops out of the analysed text provides the most useful organisation of the individual knowledge properties into a meaningful structure of categories (Schröer 1997).

NVivo provides different ways of organising and managing complex knowledge properties and concepts as well as complex documents or texts (Richards, 2004, 100). Sets of either documents or nodes can be made for managing and storing the Enablers’ knowledge. This knowledge data base then can be used to search specific sets and to show patterns of differences between these sets of data or ideas. Sets and node systems are complementary methods of shaping data.

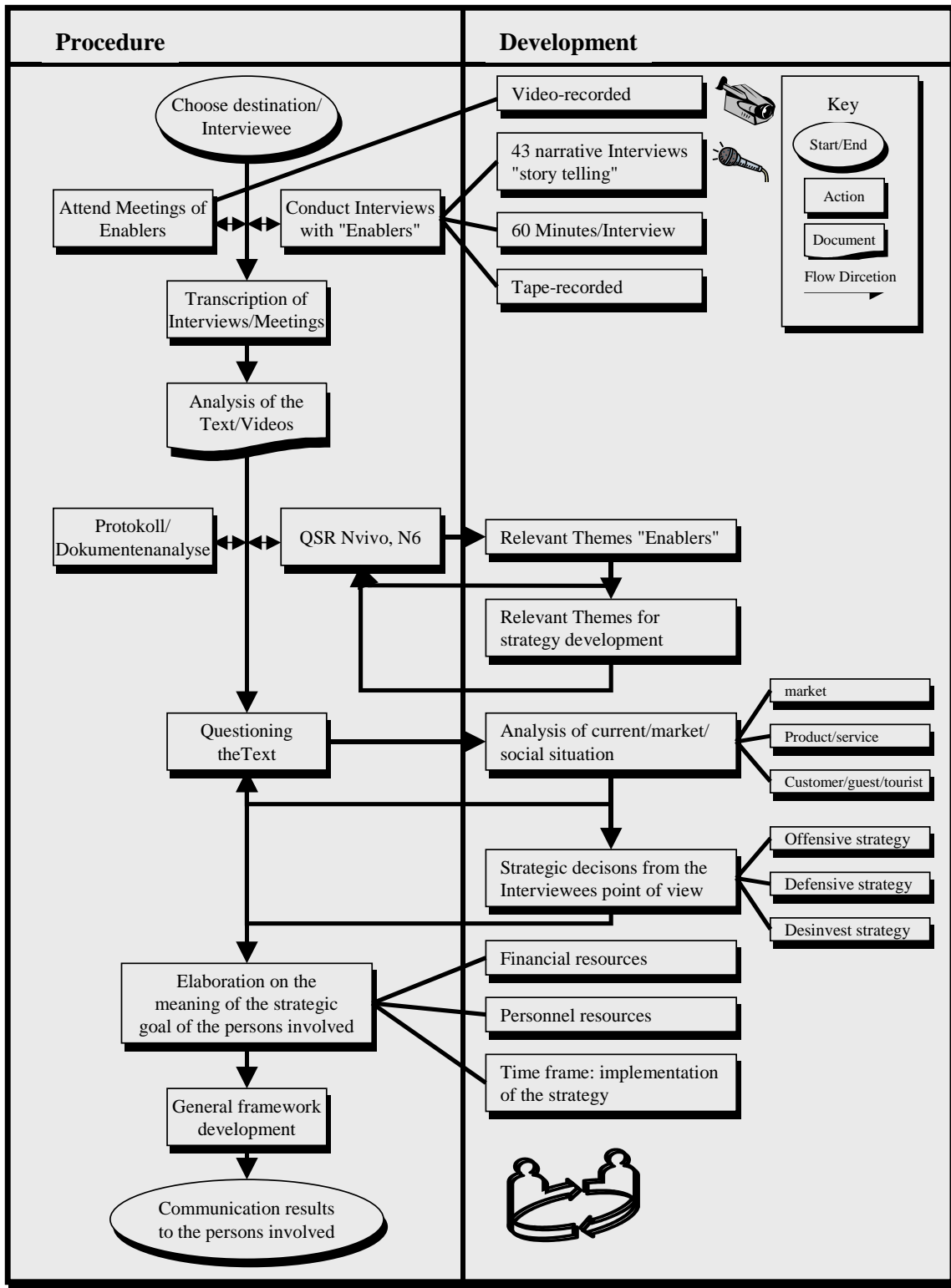


Fig. 3: shows the research process in detail. It focuses on the process of strategy development (modified from Hinterhuber and Krauthammer, 2002, 88f.).

Documents or nodes can be put in any number of sets, (an alias is placed there) but a node has usually one logical place in an index tree. Sets may be temporary and tentative serving data housekeeping processes. However, this is a large part of knowledge storing and complexity management. Or placing documents in sets may be a route to explanation, showing shapes or patterns in the data. Placing nodes in sets may assist in identifying groups of concepts that are recurring together, or taking a first step in sorting out the big story from the confusion.

For this study, the following steps of data analysis are conducted:

- Coding

Coding is the most central task and first task on the way to structuring the data and to make use of it (Richards, 2004, 96f.). "It can help to eliminate redundant information and reduce the complexity of the text, thus making it more accessible to the researcher" (Ohnesorge, 2004:125).

- Systematization of verbal data

The documents, i.e. the textual knowledge, are processed into meaningful and consistent groups of relevant themes. Since individual Enablers perceive different aspects of the situation, their arguments are structured into thematic problem fields and focal points according to these research-relevant key concepts.

- Clustering of text groups

The texts are organized in provisional text groups, i.e. clusters of texts, according to their thematic content. These clusters can be used to identify similarities and differences in Enablers' arguments and opinions.

- Structuring of categories and content

Structures and contents of Enablers' arguments are analysed in order to make explicit deep-layered motivations, attitudes and estimations regarding the situation in Graubuenden.

- Pattern analysis

The verbal data is analyzed according to criteria of specific patterns. It is attempted to identify and make explicit patterns of argumentation leading to assumptions about specific patterns of Enablers' knowledge.

3.3 Zieglers approach

In addition, during a period of one year, the meetings of the Enablers will be attended and the meetings will be video-recorded. The data will be transcribed and analyzed following Ziegler's (1984, 435) transaction approach. The network will be analyzed as a system of transactions, in which resources are exchanged, information transmitted, influence and authority applied, support mobilized, coalitions formed, activities coordinated, confidence established. The possible questions are posed to the structure of the network:

- Who contacts (talks to) whom?
- How often do the Enablers communicate among each other (network density)?
- Are there zones of aggregations, cliques, bridges, centers, peripheral or isolated actors?
- What kind of relationships do they show?
- Are sub-structures overlapping?
- How can the process of transferring knowledge be described?
- Which communication and decision making patterns can be identified?
- How is "new" knowledge generated in the group of the Enablers?

4 Strategy Development

"Nowadays, strategy is viewed more as a dynamic, continuous organizational process than as a one-time event; the focus is on continuous update, refinement, and enhancement" (Guttman and Hawkes 2004:34). Both authors emphasize on the importance to include persons "closest to the market action" (ibid.). The strategy will be developed following the procedure by Hinterhuber and Krauthammer (2002, 86ff.; see Figure 3). They see the concept of strategy as a "shared logic of action" and define it as the way getting from the organization's core competencies to its core mission. Core competencies are the bundled capabilities, knowledge, and strengths of the organization and its stakeholders to fulfill the core mission. The main goal of strategy development is to satisfy the customers faster, better, or different than the competitors and to be the number one in every market segment in which the organization operates (Hinterhuber, 2000, 1f.). For the development, gathering information about the current market and social situations, as well as the identification of the Stakeholders

(customers, partners, suppliers, financial community, etc.) are the first step. The following questions need to be answered (Hinterhuber and Krauthammer, 2002, 92ff.):

(1) In what markets are we operating in? Is it a local or global market; are we mainly operating in urban or rural regions? Markets, products, and customers are interactively bound and they cannot be developed separately.

(2) What are our products or services? The major tasks are to identify and concentrate on the core competencies of the organization and support a continuous development of new products and services.

(3) Who are our customers or customer groups? Customer satisfaction and loyalty are preconditions for future developments of organizations. The main aim is to inspire customers in such a way, that they will become “active employees”.

After analyzing the market situation, the attempt to develop a strategy from the interviewees point of view can be initiated. This procedure allows for the inclusion of the persons involved and could result in a widely accepted strategy concept.

5 Conclusion

Several meetings of the Enablers and representatives of the tourist industry already took place. The main thoughts represented in the protocols of the meetings give an overview of the generated basic ideas and perspectives: “Some basic service should be centralised. Also the knowledge about Graubünden. The communication overflow of all actors makes it difficult to perceive single messages. The ‘Buendner’ (inhabitant of Graubünden) has a very strong connection to his region. [However], the outward appearance cannot be understood, because it is not filled with content yet. The ‘Buendner’ is the only person, who is homesick at home. [...] The connection to his home country is very strong”.

The statements show that the content of the discussions is hard to grasp. There is no systematisation and it is doubtful that these protocols will be of great use for the purposes of the network. The research aims are to collect, organise and improve the usage of both, expert and everyday knowledge of the Enablers and to establish a network of shared knowledge in an organised structure of categories. This will form the basis for a more systematic use of the individuals’ shared knowledge. Special emphasis will be given to implications and strategy development for the tourism industry. The results are expected to give deeper insights into what kind of areas Graubünden’s tourism industry should use this knowledge for to become more

sustainable and successful, and to recognize, preserve and advance the uniqueness of this region.

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